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Fostering Peace: The Impact of a Nonprofit Community-Based Organization on Young Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills

Carrie Alpert
Loyola Marymount University

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Carrie Alpert
Loyola Marymount University, chickbowler@yahoo.com

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Fostering Peace: The Impact of a Nonprofit Community-Based Organization on

Young Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills

By

Carrie Alpert

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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Fostering Peace: The Impact of a Nonprofit, Community-Based Organization on

Young Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills

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by

Carrie Alpert

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Carrie Alpert, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date

Dissertation Committee
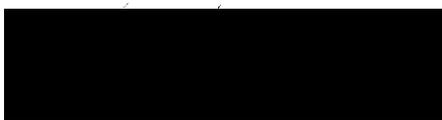
Leslie Ponciano, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Karen Huchting, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jill Bickett, Ed.D., Committee Member

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DEDICATION

For foster parents,

foster children,

and those who advocate on their behalf.

and

For Amber Lynn Faith-

my heart,

my soul,

my daughter through foster-adoption.

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ABSTRACT

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Young Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills

by

Carrie Alpert

In the United States, approximately 400,000 children reside in foster care, and most have been

exposed to caregiver abuse, neglect, or abandonment. A majority of foster children suffer the

effects of damaging circumstances including poverty, violence, inferior health care, and

substandard housing. Consequently, young foster youth frequently struggle to accomplish

developmental tasks such as establishing secure attachment relationships, cultivating pre-

academic skills, and acquiring social-emotional competence. The purpose of this research was to

determine the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization, on young foster

youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. Data collected from parents,

teachers, and administrators during semi-structured interviews documented children's

experiences as they attended the organization's Saturday Core Program. Participants noted that

as foster children participated in a variety of curricular and co-curricular experiences at

Peace4Kids, their social, emotional, and academic development were positively impacted.

Parents, teachers, and administrators reported that the organization's culture of consistency, trust,

and accountability promoted secure attachment relationships among foster youth, staff members,

and peers at the Saturday Core Program. Participants iterated that secure relationships provided

a foundation for foster children to subsequently acquire social and emotional capacities, including persistence, conflict resolution, self-regulation, and autonomy. As youth in foster care developed social-emotional competencies, pre-academic skills such as literacy and numeracy emerged. This study's findings indicate that a comprehensive approach is necessary to address the unique needs of foster children who have experienced prior trauma. Additionally, this research study contributes to a growing body of work that explores the role of attachment relationships in group and organizational settings.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In 1985, 276,000 children resided in foster care in the United States. Twenty-seven years later, in 2012, that number rose to include approximately 397,000 children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). The rapid growth of the foster care population coincided with a targeted national campaign to cut government spending and to minimize child protective services and programs (Crandall, 2010; Mecca, 2010; Saenz-Belden, 2010). In Los Angeles, budgetary concerns left social workers feeling "understaffed and overwhelmed" by extensive caseloads and frustrated by copious amounts of paperwork (KCBS-Los Angeles, 2013). Additionally, $120 million dollars in state and federal funds for child protective services were abolished as a result of recent budget crises (Saenz-Belden, 2010). Consequently, thousands of foster youth were forced to subsist without valuable services and programs, such as medical care and mental health treatment (Crandall, 2010).

The preservation of the safety and welfare of children has historically been the primary goal of the foster care system (Casey Family Programs, 2007), but existing budgetary concerns have made this primary goal difficult to achieve. Services and programs once available through child protective services have been diminished or eliminated (Crandall, 2010; Mecca, 2010) and some of the services and programs that remain have been absorbed by organizations not affiliated with child protective service agencies (Crandall, 2010; Saenz-Belden, 2010). These organizations and programs provided a myriad of services, such as assessment, support groups, advocacy, and tutoring (Coholic, Lebreton, & Lougheed, 2009; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm,

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2004). In lieu of programs traditionally provided by child protective services, such as educational support, pregnancy disincentive groups, and gang prevention support (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011), nonprofit community-based organizations have become a valuable resource for foster youth, providing services such as assessment, advocacy, and tutoring (Marts, Othelia Lee, McRoy, & McCroskey, 2008).

However, the effectiveness of these services has not consistently established by rigorous, empirical research (Timmer, Urquiza, & Zebell, 2006). Few studies have been conducted to determine if nonprofit community-based organizations and programs provided appropriate interventions for foster youth (Coholic et al., 2009). As the number of young people in foster care continued to rise, and as budgetary concerns continued to plague local and national governments and child protective service agencies, it has become increasingly important to verify the effectiveness of programs and services provided by nonprofit community-based organizations. Kerker and Dore (2006) discussed the issue of inadequate scholarship and recommended that "innovative, empirically supported programs should be widely implemented, and more research must be conducted to increase the number of programs that we have confidence in to address foster children's . . . needs (p. 144)."

Problem Statement

The majority of young children placed into foster care have suffered physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect at the hands of their caregivers (Casey Family Programs, 2007). In addition to maltreatment by caregivers, foster youth have often been forced to confront additional harmful issues such as poverty, violence, and substandard medical care (Rycraft & Dettlaff, 2009). As a result, many foster youth have experienced complex, pervasive,

and enduring problems that impeded their development and reduced their capacity to express

their needs, thoughts, and emotions (Young, 1990).

Scholars have acknowledged that repeated stays in foster care compromised the ability of

youth to complete developmental tasks during childhood (Shin, 2004). Promoting secure

attachment relationships (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001), cultivating pre-academic skills

(Espinosa & Burns, 2003), and developing social-emotional competence (Gauthier, Fortin, &

Jeliu, 2004; Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001) were three tasks with which foster youth struggled.

However, there was a dearth of scholarship that discussed the social-emotional development and

pre-academic skills of youth in the foster care population and their connection to attachment

relationships. Recognizing the interdependence of these variables—social-emotional

development, pre-academic skills, and attachment—may provide a foundation for understanding

how young foster children attain developmental milestones. These variables are discussed at

length in the Literature Review.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, attachment theory presented a framework to explore the research question:

What are the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a

nonprofit community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development

and pre-academic skills?

British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1951) first articulated the importance of children's

interactions with their caregivers in the mid-twentieth century. His research on orphaned and

institutionalized children in post-war Europe included many of the concepts that serve as the

foundation for attachment theory. Subsequent research studies expanded Bowlby's original

ideas about caregiver-child relationships to include other dyads, such as teachers-students (Lewis, 2008). Contemporary attachment theory provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of children's prior caregiving experiences on their current relationships with caregivers and for evaluating children's cognitive, social, and emotional domains of functioning (Slater, 2007).

Four fundamental components of attachment theory informed this research study. First, scholars have found that children establish unique and independent relationships with their each of their caregivers (Cassidy, 1999). Second, researchers in school settings have determined that as children learn, they use teachers and staff members as secure bases from which they can explore, discover, and understand their environments (Riley, 2011). Third, studies have established that positive relationships with caregivers may act as curative measures and may assist children in surmounting episodes of maltreatment, such as abuse and neglect (Bowlby, 1988; van den Dries, Juffer, van Ijzendoorn, & Bakersman-Karnenburg, 2009). Finally, researchers have found that attachment to a group may predict positive social-emotional outcomes for members (Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999).

In sum, attachment theory provided a framework to comprehensively assess risk and security as mitigating factors in children's social and emotional development (Zeanah, 1996) and to examine the influence of the child-teacher relationship (Kesner, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to conduct a program evaluation of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization that serves foster youth. This study coincided with the organization's effort to, as Springer (2010) stated, "understand programs [and] also to arrive at

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judgments about their impact and worth" (p. 479). In order to achieve these goals, Peace4Kids'

Board of Directors conducted a comprehensive analysis of the programs and services it provides

for young children in foster care. This analysis, delineated in the organization's logic model

(See Appendix A.), produced two important findings. First, the analysis identified five core

assumptions that provided the foundation for Peace4Kids' goals and objectives. These

assumptions supposed that: (a) social-emotional development is necessary for academic

achievement; (b) young foster youth do not have access to quality early educational experiences;

(c) auxiliary support systems do not appropriately meet foster children's social-emotional or

academic needs; (d) foster children are more likely to create a bond of trust with a group than

with individuals; and (e) youth in foster care want to be members of the organization. Second,

the analysis identified and described Peace4Kids' goals and objectives as inputs, outputs, and

short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes. The inputs, outputs, and outcomes

established the anticipated progression of foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-

academic skills as they participated in the organization. The beliefs, goals, and objectives

identified and delineated in the logic model reflected Peace4Kids' foundation in attachment

theory, and its belief that reliable, accessible caregiving experiences may provide corrective

experiences for children who have been maltreated (Bowlby, 1988).

  Utilizing the logic model as a guide, and using the definitions of social-emotional

development and pre-academic skills noted in the Definitions of Terms, this study examined the

perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators regarding the influence of Peace4Kids on

foster children's social-emotional development and pre-academic skills.

Significance of the Study

Because there are few examples of empirical studies that examine organizations serving foster youth (McWey, 2004), the results of this research study made several significant contributions to the literature. First, the study conveyed the methods and approaches used by Peace4Kids to meet the unique needs of foster children, and these findings may help to establish innovative best practices (Eisner, 1991) for other organizations serving foster youth. Second, the results captured the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators, and the data may convey practical information to lawmakers, politicians, and advocates (Springer, 2010) that promote the well being of children in foster care. This information may be used to support and enact local and national laws and policies that provide monetary public support for youth in foster care. Third, this research study investigated foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills, and the findings may assist clinicians, social workers, and educators in more effectively meeting the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of children in foster care (Bruhn, Duval, & Louderman, 2008; Pecora, Jensen, Romanelli, Jackson, & Ortiz, 2009).

As a program evaluation, this research study benefitted Peace4Kids because it documented the techniques and approaches utilized by the organization's parents, teachers, and administrators. In this way, the results authenticated the distinct experiences of the individual members of the organization (Stevenson, 2004). This study also assessed the extent to which Peace4Kids generated the inputs, outputs, and outcomes articulated in their logic model (See Appendix A.). As such, the study's data established the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the organization and provided an impetus for necessary changes to policies, programs, and activities (Spath & Pine, 2004). In addition, Peace4Kids may utilize the results of this study to write

grants and generate proposals for prospective donors and benefactors, and to replicate its program in different settings (Seeley, 1998).

Finally, the research study's significance extended into fields unrelated to foster care and the child protective system. In a broader educational context, this early childhood study augmented a small but increasing number of qualitative inquiries that explored preschool and elementary settings (Browning & Hatch, 1995). From a social justice perspective, this research study illuminated the strengths and challenges of a marginalized and underserved population— foster children—and promoted change within the particular context of the child protective system (Bell, 2007).

Research Design

The design of this research study mirrored the transformative approach as discussed by Creswell (2009). In the transformative design, the theoretical framework informed a research question that investigated a problem facing a marginalized group. During data collection, the researcher recognized that injustices have oppressed the marginalized group, and he/she advocated for social change to eradicate the injustices as the data was analyzed. The transformative approach was appropriate for this research study because it sought to understand the experience of a marginalized population: foster youth. Data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of findings provided the foundation for promoting change within Peace4Kids specifically and within the child protection system, generally.

Attachment theory, the theoretical framework of the study, guided the research question that explored the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and

pre-academic skills. It was important to acknowledge that this study does not measure

attachment in foster youth because numerous scholars and empirical research have already

established this area of study (See Chapter Two). Instead, attachment theory provided a

foundation for understanding the significance of any changes in the social-emotional

development and pre-academic skills of young foster youth within Peace4Kids.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative methods provided the researcher with the

ability to understand the meanings that participants attached to various phenomena within a

specific context. The decision to conduct a qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to closely

examine the perceptions of the circumstances, behaviors, and events that effected parents,

teachers, and administrators at Peace4Kids (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, the goal of this study was

not to generalize its findings beyond the nonprofit community-based organization being

investigated; rather, this study strived for what Greene and Caracelli (1997) termed

"particularity." The results of this particular qualitative inquiry were valid only for the parent,

teacher, and administrator participants within the specific context of Peace4Kids.

In this research study, the researcher gathered information that "provides careful

description and analysis of social phenomena in particular contexts" (Hatch, 2002). This

investigation also incorporated multiple perspectives to generate a more complete picture of the

phenomena under examination (Creswell, 2009). Data was collected through interviews and

field notes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, and

administrators to organize and understand their experiences and perspectives (Hatch, 2002) in

the context of Peace4Kids. Additionally, field notes were written throughout the data collection

process and they were analyzed and coded to discover patterns, relationships, and explanations (Hatch, 2002).

The decision to interview parents, teachers, and administrators was supported by recent qualitative and mixed-methods inquiries that studied foster youth. For example, in a 2007 mixed methods investigation, surveys were used to collect pre-intervention and post-intervention data from foster parents (Pears, Fisher, & Bronz, 2007). Other researchers employed structured interviews to gather descriptive data about the utility of techniques and skills taught in a workshop for foster parents (McNeil, Herschell, Gurwitch, & Clemens-Mowrer, 2005). Teacher perspectives have also been validated in the literature. Coholic, Lebreton, and Lougheed (2009) and Geenen and Powers (2006) garnered self-report data from educators by using surveys and interviews.

The decision to gather data about the impact of Peace4Kids on young foster youths' social-emotional competence and pre-academic skills has been substantiated in the literature about child development. For example, Hughes and Leece (2010) categorized preschool and Kindergarten as periods of rapid social, emotional, and cognitive growth; therefore, progress and regress in these three domains of functioning was likely visible to caregivers, including parents, teachers, and administrators. They also noted that young children's social-emotional competence grows exponentially at this time, and that children typically relied upon their caregivers to provide advice, guidance, and modeling in their interactions with peers. Additionally, throughout the preschool and Kindergarten years, young children acquired basic interpersonal skills, such as self-regulation and conflict resolution, and they formed a basis for classroom readiness (Clarke-Stewart & Althusen, 2005). Lastly, during early childhood

education, young children's abilities to produce oral and written language increased drastically (Espinosa & Burns, 2003).

The importance of including multiple viewpoints was acknowledged in this research study. By interviewing parents, teachers, and administrators, a more complete representation of foster youths' behaviors in different settings and with different individuals was obtained. The possibility that the study did not reflect "the full picture" of foster children's experiences was limited by the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

Limitations

This study was impacted by two limitations. First, I conducted the study as a licensed foster parent and as a parent of a child that was adopted through the foster care system. My extensive background with the child protective system reflected my bias and positionality and certainly impacted data collection and data analysis. Secondly, I am a middle-class Caucasian woman who conducted a study of a predominantly African-American, low socioeconomic population. The degree to which I was accepted into the Peace4Kids community and provided access likely impacted which data was collected and how the data was interpreted.

Delimitations

This research study was influenced by two delimitations that may impact the generalizability of the findings. First, the scope of this study was narrow; it investigated the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators in one organization in one community in South Los Angeles comprised of mostly African-American people in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to nonprofit community-based organizations in other locations. Secondly, I acknowledged that the foster care population was

often transitory, and as a consequence, the participants had various levels of experience with the organization. Some participants offered detailed descriptions and insights about Peace4Kids, while others presented limited descriptions and insight. The participants' varying levels of experience with the organization most likely skewed the data.

Organization of the Study

The goal of this study was to identify the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. Each phase of the research process is disseminated in the form of a traditional five-chapter dissertation, and each chapter is briefly explained below.

This study begins with a broad discussion of the challenges facing child protective agencies in America and a description of children's experiences within the United States foster care system. The significance and purpose of the study and research question are identified, and data collection methods are briefly examined. Chapter Two contains a review of the literature that explores the history of the foster care system, describes types of child maltreatment, and details attachment theory, the theoretical framework of the study. In addition, Chapter Two discusses foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills and reviews organizations and programs that serve foster children. In Chapter Three, the research study's design and methodology are presented. Detailed descriptions of the study's context, participant sample, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques are included in this chapter and issues of bias, validity, confidentiality, reflexivity, and reactivity are addressed. Chapter Four contains the data obtained from parents, teachers, and administrators through exploration of the

study's research question. Lastly, Chapter Five offers a comprehensive analysis of the data utilizing the study's theoretical framework, attachment theory, and includes recommendations for future research.

Definitions of Terms

Ambivalent-resistant attachment: "An attachment type in which a child does not actively explore the environment but appears to be preoccupied and clingy toward the caregiver" (Cain, 2006, p. 185).

Attachment: "An intense emotional bonding with another human being" (Cain, 2006, p.186).

Attachment behavior: "[Actions that] bring an individual into closer proximity, or maintain proximity with his or her attachment figure" (Prior & Glaser, 2006, p. 17).

Attachment figure: "The person who takes primary responsibility for attending to a child's physiological needs such as diapering, feeding, and comforting" (Cain, 2006, p. 186).

Attachment relationship: "A special type of relationship that develops when one person experiences security and comfort from another" (Golding, 2008, p. 229).

Avoidant attachment: "An attachment type in which a child actively avoids and ignores the caregiver by moving away or turning away" (Cain, 2006, p. 186).

Caregiver: "The person who provides the primary physical, emotional, and psychological care of a child" (Cain, 2006, p. 187).

Community: "A place or a group of people having common characteristics that transcend place and are identified by a history of established neighborhood designations, coalescence around common goals, and/or cultural and other elements of identity, which transcend formal boundaries" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Community-based organization: "An organization that is representative of a community and is engaged in meeting human, educational, environmental, or public safety needs" (National Network of Libraries and Medicine, 2013).

Consistency: "To take action that is always the same, suitable, and predictable" (Cain, 2006, p. 188).

Cocurricular program: "A program that includes classes and activities, such as music and dance that are not part of a standard academic curriculum" (U.S. Legal, 2013).

Curricular program: "The lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program" (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

Disorganized attachment: "An attachment type in which a child seems to have difficulty organizing behavior, which results in a mixture of conflicting behaviors in response to stressful situations" (Cain, 2006, p. 188).

Family: "The number of adults and children related by blood, marriage, or adoption who comprise the household in which the child lives; may also be defined as parents, adults fulfilling the parental role, guardians, children and others related by ancestry or marriage" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Foster care: "A system of providing care for children who have been abandoned or mistreated by their family of origin. In this system, a child is placed in either another home or an institution" (Cain, 2006, p. 190).

Foster child/youth: "Person under 18 years of age who is being provided care and supervision by someone other than a parent/legal guardian in a location other than his or her own home" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Group attachment: "Internal representations of groups based on our group/family experiences that generally govern our expectations about a new or previously unknown type of group" (Marmarosh & Markin, 2007, p. 155).

Inconclusive referral: "A report of maltreatment in which the findings are inconclusive and there is insufficient evidence to determine whether child abuse or neglect occurred" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Insecure attachment: "An unhealthy attachment style that may fall into a subcategory of ambivalent-resistant or avoidant" (Cain, 2006, p. 191).

Internal Working Model (IWM): "The influence of relationships upon each other, including an individual's relationships with (1) the self, (2) the other, and (3) the self and the other, that provides a means for organizing behavioral actions systemically" (Cain, 2006, p. 191).

Kinship Care: "In the context of out-of-home placement with a relative; care provided by that relative" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Literacy: "The emergent pre-academic skill that includes listening, spoken language, reading, and writing" (Espinosa & Burns, 2003, p. 48).

Nonprofit organization: "An organization that offers material provisions and/or social services at no cost to traditionally marginalized and underserved groups of people" (Kosny & Eakin, 2008, p. 149).

Persistence: "The ability to stay with a task that is just challenging enough, but not overwhelming, for a reasonable period of time" (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013).

Pre-academic Skills: "A set of competencies that includes listening, oral language, reading, and writing" (Espinosa & Burns, 2003, p. 48-50).

Program benefits: "Interventions or services delivered by an organization that seek to achieve some particular outcomes in response to a perceived educational, social, or commercial problem" (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011, p. 8).

Proximity: "Remaining in physical contact with (a caregiver), especially in (times of) fear, fatigue, or illness" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 371).

Reciprocity: "The sharing interaction of give and take with a child" (Cain, 2006, p.194).

Resilience: "The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress" (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Responsiveness: "The extent to which (a caregiver) monitors a child's needs and attends to these predictably and consistently" (Golding, 2008, p. 34).

Scaffolding: "The practice of adjusting instructional methods and tasks so that children can develop new skills" (Bos & Vaughn, 2006, p. 25).

Secure attachment: "An attachment type in which a [child] uses a caregiver as a secure base to explore the environment, providing an important foundation for psychological development later in life" (Cain, 2006, p. 195).

Secure base: "A caregiver that is consistently available to a child and encourages a child to explore his/her environment" (Schofield & Beek, 2005, p. 4).

Self-efficacy: "The belief that a person can behave in certain ways to produce particular outcomes; it may impact an individual's choice of behavior, quality of task performance, and/or persistence" (Bandura, 1977, pp. 193-194).

Social-emotional competence: "Effectiveness in interaction, the result of organized behavior that meets short- and long-term developmental needs that contribute to a child's sustained positive engagement with peers, marked by positive, regulated emotions" (Denham, 2006, p. 61).

Social-emotional development: "The developmentally and culturally appropriate ability to manage emotions, relate to adults, relate to peers, and feel good about self" (Brault, 2009, p. 6).

Unfounded referral: "A report which is deemed to be false or improbable, to involve an accidental injury, or not to constitute either child abuse or neglect by the child protective services investigator who conducted the investigation" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

Wraparound: "An approach to service planning and delivery that is family-centered, strengths-based, and needs-driven" (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to reveal the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit, community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills.

Organization of the Chapter

In order to fully understand the participants' perceptions, it is important to situate the experiences of foster children in proper historical, cultural, social, and educational contexts. This review of literature begins by tracing the history of foster care in the United States. It continues with a description of the types of caregiver maltreatment often encountered by foster youth, and identifies the damaging effects of abuse, neglect, and multiple placements on foster children's social, emotional, and cognitive domains. A comprehensive explanation of attachment theory, the theoretical framework of the study, follows and provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of the primary caregiver-foster youth dyad. Next, I explore social-emotional development and pre-academic skills in the context of the primary classroom, and discuss the unique contributions of the teacher-student dyad. The impact of foster care on social-emotional development and pre-academic skills is emphasized. The Literature Review highlights selected programs and interventions that address the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of foster youth. In conclusion, I describe Peace4Kids, a nonprofit, community-based organization that assists young foster youth and serves as the context for this research study.

History of Foster Care

Foster care, defined as "the informal and formal custodial care of children outside of their own biological family home when their parents are unable, unwilling, or prohibited from caring for them" (Curran**,** 2004, p. 1), includes an extensive history in the United States.

American foster care originated in the colonial period. Local government officials were granted authority to remove children from poor families in an effort to provide economic support for indigent households (Hacsi, 1995). After separating from their families, children were sent to live with a master or apprentice who taught them a skill and provided sustenance in exchange for labor. This practice, also known as indentureship, fell out of favor in the early-mid 19th century as masters began to exploit children in their care (Curran, 2004).

In response to the decline of indentureship in the mid-late 19th century, institutionalized care emerged. Religious orders and charitable groups began to promote the structure and controlled life of orphan asylums (later called orphanages) as the answer to poverty and related social problems, such as disease and violence (Curran, 2004). Additionally, institutionalized care was endorsed as an appropriate response to urban plight. Child welfare workers romanticized rural living and demonized immigrants, Catholics, and ethnic minorities who lived in cities (Hacsi, 1995). Often, child welfare workers acted impulsively, removing children from their homes and placing them in institutions without due cause (Hacsi, 1995). Consequently, the number of orphanages tripled in the latter half of the 19th century (Curran, 2004).

During the Progressive Era of the early 1900s, legislators and child welfare workers advocated for reform measures and supported the renovation of existing orphanages and institutions (Curran, 2004). Although reforms assisted dependent children by improving housing

conditions, it overlooked the openly discriminatory practices that denied services to immigrant children and African-American youth (Curran, 2004).

In the years following World War II, the United States government further improved the lives of dependent youth by subsidizing orphanages and institutions that cared for children. Federal mandates reduced discriminatory practices, and resources became available for county and local agencies to support their own dependent care systems (Curran, 2004). These directives and funds led to the creation of the modern day foster care system, and in 1950, for the first time in American history, more youths were living in foster homes than orphanages (Hacsi, 1995).

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a rise in the number of children placed in foster care. This increase happened after the publication of the groundbreaking article, "The Battered Child Syndrome" (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962). Shortly after, *The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974* was enacted, establishing the National Center for Neglected and Abused Children. The number of child abuse reports grew exponentially, and as a result, more children were placed in foster care (Curran, 2004).

The foster care system was ill-equipped to manage the influx of children, and concerns began to emerge. Foster care drift, a syndrome that occurs when children experience numerous foster care placements, was addressed in *The Child Welfare Act of 1980*. This legislation required child welfare workers to make a "reasonable effort" before removing a child from his/her home, and placed a renewed emphasis on family reunification (Curran, 2004). This legislation also encouraged kinship care, which permitted children to live with biological relatives (Curran, 2004).

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In the late 20th century, worries about family reunification efforts were voiced, and The *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* was passed. Legislators "sought to reduce the foster care population and [promote] permanency for children by stressing adoption over family preservation efforts" (Curran, 2004, p. 3). Foster care workers were directed to enact concurrent planning, a method that simultaneously seeks family reunification and adoption. In addition, individual states were granted financial incentives for encouraging adoption programs which procured families for "hard to place" youths such as older children, youths with mental or physical disabilities, and children of color (Curran, 2004).

Today, child protective systems throughout the United States serve more than 500,000 children in out-of-home care (Geenen & Powers, 2006). While recent legislation has improved outcomes for many foster youth, children of color continue to suffer the effects of discriminatory child protective practices implemented during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Bilchick, 2008).

Disproportionality

Disproportionality, the condition wherein a specific ethnic/racial group of children is represented in the child protective system at a higher rate than other ethnic/racial groups (Marts, et al., 2008), has plagued African-American foster youth for generations. In Los Angeles County, for instance, African-American children comprised approximately 8% of the general population; however, African-American children accounted for about 29% of children sent into foster care (Baeder, 2013). Additionally, once African-American youth were placed into the child protective system, they remained in foster care longer than children of other races and ethnicities (Baeder, 2013).

The disproportionate number of African-American youth in child protective systems was rooted in a variety of social problems, including poverty, unemployment, and school failure (Bilchick, 2008). Because African-American families were disproportionately affected by these problems, they were often connected to other community services providers (Price, 2005). Therefore, they were more visible to human services systems through programs such as Medicaid, Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Miller & Ward, 2008). Additionally, families often lived in neighborhoods with significant law enforcement activity (Rycraft & Detlaff, 2009), and an increased police presence further heightened the families' visibility to community service providers.

Maltreatment

Most foster youth suffered maltreatment at the hands of their caregivers, prompting their placement in the child protection system (Casey Family Programs, 2007). Episodes of maltreatment were frequently characterized by physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and abandonment; often, foster children experienced more than one of these episodes simultaneously (van den Dries et al., 2009).

It is beneficial to categorize episodes of maltreatment by the type of abuse perpetrated and by the subsequent internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Extensive research has defined types of maltreatment as acts of commission or acts of omission and has described some of the accompanying social-emotional and cognitive consequences children suffer as a result of abuse and neglect (Howe & Fearnley, 2003). Stovall and Dozier (1998) indicated that the effects of maltreatment are significant and affect both cognitive and affective domains of functioning in foster youth.

Acts of Commission—Physical Abuse

Acts of commission, the most common type of maltreatment, included episodes of physical abuse (Finzi, Ram, Har-Even, Shnit, & Weizman, 2001). According to the Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009), the following included examples of physical abuse: (a) the presence or the threat of deliberate physical injury caused by a child's parent or guardian; (b) a child under five years of age that experienced physical abuse by a person acquainted with a parent or guardian; (c) a youth's parent or guardian abused or neglected another child resulting in his/her death; (d) a parent or guardian perpetrated solitary or repeated acts of cruelty upon a child; and (e) a parent or guardian did not sufficiently shield a child from a singular act or multiple acts of cruelty.

Foster children who lived in a home where physical abuse was observed may externalize behaviors such as aggression, lying, stealing, cheating, sneaking, and coercion (Kaplan, Pelcovitz & Labruna, 1999; Prather & Golden, 2009). As a result of witnessing corporal abuse, foster youth may display internalizing behaviors such as chronic depression, low self-esteem, and uncontrolled anxiety (Gauthier et al., 2004; NICHCY, 2010). Additionally, children who were physically abused may experience cognitive and academic impairment, including an underproduction of expressive language and a diagnosis of reading disabilities (McWey, 2004; Stock & Fisher, 2006).

Acts of Commission—Emotional Abuse

Acts of commission also included emotional abuse. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2009) defined emotional abuse with the following examples: (a) significant emotional impairment; (b) a threat of significant emotional impairment, such as acute anxiety, depression,

isolation, or unprovoked violent actions against self or others; and (c) a child who did not have a competent parent or guardian that provided suitable care.

Youth in foster care who were subject to emotional maltreatment exhibited externalizing behaviors, such as participating in high-risk sexual encounters or abusing drugs and alcohol (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009), and internalized negative feelings such as shame and self-loathing (Kaplan et al., 1999). Children who have been emotionally abused also encountered academic difficulties, including inattention and low task engagement (Dupree & Stephens, 2002; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Additionally, permanent psychological damage resulted from emotional abuse (Kaplan et al., 1999).

Acts of Commission—Sexual Abuse

Additionally, acts of commission consisted of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse, as defined by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2009), included the following: (a) child molestation, incest, rape, sodomy, or lewd acts upon a minor; (b) employing a minor to perform sexual acts, including prostitution; (c) using photographs, movies, illustrations, or other media to portray an adolescent engaged in sexual acts; and (d) copying or exchanging photographs, movies, illustrations, or other media that depicted a child participating in an obscene act.

A study conducted by Pears, Kim, and Fisher (2008) noted that foster children who have suffered sexual abuse demonstrated externalizing behaviors, such as physical aggression toward others, and exhibited an array of internalizing difficulties, such as depression and anxiety. Additionally, scholars found that sexually abused foster youth made inadequate academic progress (Dupree & Stephens, 2002) and were often diagnosed with language delays (Stock & Fisher, 2006).

Acts of Omission—Neglect

Acts of omission included episodes of neglect by caregivers (Finzi et al., 2001). According to the Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009), examples of neglect encompassed: (a) the incapacity of a parent or guardian to appropriately supervise or protect a child; (b) the deliberate failure of a parent or guardian to appropriately supervise or protect a child from another custodial adult; (c) the inability of a parent or guardian to procure sufficient clothes, shelter, food, or medical intervention for a child; and (d) the incapacity of a parent or guardian due to drug or alcohol addiction, mental illness, or other disability.

Foster children who lived in a home where neglect occurred developed a fear of proximity and intimacy, especially with adults (Lanyado, 2003). Neglect also had a profound effect on the cognitive abilities of youth in foster care. Neglected children had lower IQs and delayed language development, and they interacted less with peers (Dupree & Stephens, 2002).

Acts of Omission—Abandonment

Acts of omission also included abandonment. According to the Child Welfare Information Getaway (2009), abandonment consisted of the following: (a) a child was left without a viable means of support; (b) a parent or guardian was jailed or institutionalized and cannot care of the child; and (c) a relative or other adult custodian with whom the child resided or was left was unwilling or unable to provide care or support for the child, the whereabouts of the parent were unknown, and reasonable efforts to locate the parent were unsuccessful.

Price and Glad (2003) contended that foster children who have been abandoned struggled with internalizing behaviors, including poor self-efficacy, mistrust of others, and negative

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attribution bias. In addition, they posited that learning difficulties categorized by inadequate language and cognitive delays often plagued abandoned foster youth.

Multiple Placement Changes

In addition to physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and abandonment, foster children often negotiated multiple placement changes. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study (Pecora et al., 2005) provided evidence of multiple placement change in foster care systems across the United States from 1966-1998. According to the study, 56% of foster youth across the United States experienced seven or more placement changes during their time in child protective custody. Additionally, the study found that 3% of children changed placements twenty or more times while they were in foster care.

The consequences of multiple placements on young people in foster care have been characterized as complex, pervasive, and correlated with negative outcomes (Stovall & Dozier, 1998). Penzerro and Lein (1995) noted that the social development of foster children was negatively impacted by placement changes and that conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Conduct Disorder were common among youth in foster care. As young foster children aged, the effects of multiple placement manifested in problems such as failure to graduate from high school, unplanned pregnancy, and unemployment (Penzerro & Lein, 1995).

In addition, foster youth that experienced placement changes were apt to demonstrate emotional and behavioral difficulties in their relationships with their caregivers. As children moved from placement to placement, their ability to establish trusting and reciprocal relationships was compromised (Stovall & Dozier, 1998). Foster youth were often unable to

provide or accept support from their caregivers, and these relationships became tenuous and

strained (Penzerro & Lein, 1998). Because children in foster care frequently confronted

placement instability, they were likely to replicate instability in their relationships with primary

caregivers and others (Penzerro & Lein, 1995; Stovall & Dozier, 1998).

When children experienced maltreatment or placement changes, the dynamics of the

primary caregiver-child relationship changed. Attachment theory, developed in the latter half of

the twentieth century, acknowledged the intricacies of this relationship and constituted a

significant achievement in the comprehension of young people, their interactions with their

caregivers, and the negative effects of maltreatment and placement changes (Mennen &

O'Keefe, 2005).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, conceived by John Bowlby, was one of the most comprehensive

theories addressing interpersonal relationships (Hrdy, 2009). It represented a radical departure

from previously held notions about caregiver-child relationships (Slater, 2007). The assertion

that attachment performed an organic and beneficial function for children was in stark contrast to

previously held notions of avoidance and dependency (Bowlby, 1969). Incorporating principles

from other science disciplines, attachment theory changed the way that mental health

professionals, practitioners, educators, and child protection workers understood caregiver-child

attachment relationships (Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005).

John Bowlby

John Bowlby (1907-1990) formulated attachment theory and articulated his ideas in his

influential trilogy *Attachment* (1969), *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (1973), and *Loss: Sadness*

and Depression (1980). His theory of attachment hypothesized that children utilized certain behaviors to construct positive relationships with their caregivers when four criteria were met: proximity, consistency, responsiveness, and reciprocity. Additionally, Bowlby (1969) identified the Internal Working Model as a foundation for understanding children's expectations of and interactions with caregivers.

Proximity. Bowlby (1969) defined proximity as closeness to or contact with a preferred caregiver who met the physical or emotional needs of a child. He acknowledged that children engaged in specific attachment behaviors as they interacted with their caregivers. These attachment behaviors served a dual function—to keep children physically close to their preferred caregivers, and to protect children from perceived or actual harm (Bowlby, 1982a). Behaviors such as crying and yelling alerted caregivers that children were experiencing some type of social, emotional, or physical distress. In response, sensitive caregivers initiated physical closeness and contact with children so that feelings of distress were replaced by feelings of comfort, safety, and protection (Golding, 2008). When children experienced security as a result of proximity, they understood that caregivers were available, responsive and reliable (Bowlby, 1982a). Bowlby (1982a) believed that feelings of security developed as children and caregivers valued and continued their emergent relationship.

Consistency. Bowlby (1951) posited that consistency, the continuous and reliable care that promotes secure and intimate relationships and encourages social and emotional development, was a necessary component of the security that children felt as they interacted with reliable and sensitive caregivers. Bowlby (1951) understood that in order for children to develop social and emotional competence, they must "experience a warm, intimate, and continuous

relationship with [their caregivers] in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (p. 13). When children were unable to rely on their caregivers for consistent care, or when children experienced a succession of substitute caregivers, their social and emotional development were compromised. Bowlby (1960) noted that these children were often unable to establish intimate relationships with peers and adults.

Responsiveness and reciprocity. Responsiveness, a caregiver's physiological and emotional availability to a child, and reciprocity, the mutual dependence and influence of caregivers and children and the changes that result from their interactions, promoted intimacy in relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Intimacy that included responsiveness and reciprocity provided a variety of advantages for children such as self-esteem, comfort, and trust (Bowlby, 1973). On the contrary, children who did not experience responsiveness and reciprocity in their caregiver relationships developed a poor self-concept and were unable to understand their own behavior and the behavior of others (Golding, 2008). In sum, Bowlby (1973) acknowledged the importance of continuity and appropriate responsiveness in caregiver-child interactions and regarded them as crucial to environment and upbringing.

Internal working models. According to Bowlby (1973), children developed "expectations of the accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures" based upon their interactions with their caregivers (p. 238). These expectations, known as Internal Working Models (IWMs), included feelings and memories that shaped children's assumptions about caregivers: their identification, their accessibility, and their responses in times of distress (Bowlby, 1969). IWMs also reinforced children's beliefs that they were worthy or unworthy of

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warm, intimate, and continuous care (Bowlby, 1973). IWMs, therefore, incorporated expectations of the availability and sensitivity of attachment figures (van den Dries et al., 2009).

Internal Working Models recognized that attachment was a malleable and dynamic construct. Bowlby (1969) posited that children's IWMs changed when they recalled feelings and memories related to prior attachment relationships. According to Bowlby, a child was then able to extract meaning from the previous attachment relationship and apply it to a current attachment relationship. For example, if caregivers offered help and comfort when needed, children likely cultivated working models of caregivers as responsive and of themselves as deserving of consideration and support (Bowlby, 1973). As children formed positive IWMs, they reflected their experiences with secure and accessible caregiving (Bowlby, 1980).

When children were exposed to maltreatment such as abuse, neglect, and abandonment, they often developed negative IWMs of caregivers as frightening, controlling, or unreliable (Golding, 2008). However, Bowlby (1980) believed that negative IWMs were not permanent. He believed that IWMs were changeable, and proposed that safe, compassionate, and consistent caregiving could disconfirm children's previous negative IWMs (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby (1988) also hypothesized that positive relationships with caregivers acted as corrective measures and assisted children in compensating for maltreatment and detrimental early experiences.

Mary Ainsworth

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999), a psychologist who studied the effects of maternal separation on child development, further cultivated ideas about attachment. Ainsworth published several significant articles in prominent journals during the 1950s and 1960s, and wrote a seminal text, *Patterns of Attachment*, in 1978. She made two major contributions to attachment

theory-she developed the concept of the secure base and identified three distinct patterns of attachment.

Secure base phenomenon. First, Ainsworth, then known as Mary Salter (1939), categorized caregivers as a secure base from which children could discover the world. She posited that young children must cultivate a reliable and consistent dependence on their caregivers before they explore unknown situations. In developing the concept of the secure base, Ainsworth focused attention on the importance of the non-verbal signals that infants sent to their caregivers. When children received empathetic and compassionate signals from their caregivers, they developed a sense of security and subsequently engaged in discovery, play, and learning (Bowlby, 1953d).

Patterns of attachment. Secondly, Ainsworth and Bell (1970) created and developed a controlled laboratory procedure, the Strange Situation, which identified an infant's attachment style. The Strange Situation was comprised of eight three-minute episodes and provided an opportunity for an infant to interact with his/her primary caregiver and with a designated stranger (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). As separations and reunions with the primary caregiver and stranger took place, a researcher carefully observed the infant's reactions (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Observations conducted during the Strange Situation allowed researchers to recognize differences among children and to identify three distinct patterns of child attachment behavior: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent-resistant (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Secure attachment. Securely attached children believed that their caregivers would satisfy their physical and emotional needs (van den Dries et al., 2009). These children were confident that caregivers would meet their needs sensitively, appropriately, and consistently

(Golding, 2008). Securely attached children developed trust in their caregivers, and utilized their caregivers as secure bases from which to explore (Prather & Golden, 2009). When children experienced responsive caregiving, they had positive expectations about relationships and they began to trust others (Golding, 2008). As a result, children with secure attachment organizations developed IWMs that generally viewed caregivers as available, reactive, and supportive (Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005). Therefore, securely attached children were easily reassured, exhibited cooperation in relationships, and enthusiastically investigated new situations (Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005).

When young people securely attached to a caregiver, they built social-emotional capacity (Howe, 2006). This capacity liberated them to explore their environment freely and to react appropriately to unpleasant or unfamiliar situations (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Gauthier et al., 2004). Children recognized as securely attached enjoyed many emotional and cognitive advantages, including resilience and self-efficacy (Howe, 2006). Additionally, research demonstrated that secure attachment helped children to more effectively interact with and communicate with both adults and peers (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001). Lastly, a secure attachment style positively affected children's development and fostered qualities that contributed to social-emotional competence such as trust, confidence, autonomy, and problem-solving abilities in young children (Golding, 2008; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

Insecure/avoidant attachment. An avoidant attachment style was a type of insecure attachment associated with nonresponsive caregiving (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001). Avoidant children experienced caregivers who rejected them, or encountered caregivers who responded to their needs slowly and inappropriately (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce,

2001). Avoidant attached young people often experienced neglect, and subsequently recognized that their caregivers did not respond to their needs (Whelan, 2003). These children acknowledged that love, care, and security were only available conditionally, and they learned to avoid close relationships and to suppress their emotions as a result (Golding, 2008; Howe, 2006).

Children with avoidant attachment styles employed a variety of strategies to avert interaction with their caregivers. They displayed indifference toward others in response to their prior caregiving experiences (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Golding (2008) categorized avoidant children as passive, withdrawn, and compliant in their relationships, while Bergin and Bergin (2009) characterized these children as "emotionally disconnected" (p. 146). Children with avoidant attachment organizations wanted to distance themselves from people and emotions, and were distrustful of peers and caregivers who attempted to establish intimacy (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005). Avoidant children sometimes assumed the role of caregiver themselves, providing necessary material and emotional support for parents and other adults that failed to care for them in the past (Golding, 2008).

Insecure/ambivalent-resistant attachment. A second type of insecure attachment was ambivalent-resistant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Children who experienced acts of omission such as neglect were likely to display ambivalent-resistant attachment styles (McWey, 2004). As a result of inconsistent or unreliable caregiver responses, ambivalent children viewed their caregivers as unpredictable (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001; Whelan, 2003). Frequently, caregivers were unavailable to ambivalent-resistant children (Golding, 2008). As a result, they did not rely on their caregivers for safety and security; rather, ambivalent children viewed their caregivers as insensitive (Golding, 2008).

Children with ambivalent-resistant attachment organizations often utilized coercion in an effort to solicit appropriate responses from their caregivers (Golding, 2008). At times, children displayed exaggerated emotional outbursts such as tantrums, anger, threats, and pouting to engage meaningfully with their caregivers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). At other times, ambivalent children appeared anxious, helpless, clingy, and preoccupied with their caregivers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). According to Mennen and O'Keefe (2005), when ambivalent-resistant children were frustrated with their caregivers, they employed a combination of these behaviors. For example, children cried for their caregivers to hold them, but struggled to climb down once they were picked up. These children were frequently difficult to soothe and comfort, and they remained distressed regardless of their caregivers' responses (Golding, 2008).

Disorganized attachment. Periodically, children's behaviors observed in the Strange Situation failed to meet the criteria for any one of the three attachment styles delineated by Ainsworth (Main & Solomon, 1990). Mary Main, a researcher at the University of California, and her colleague, Judith Solomon, noticed this phenomenon in their work. Main and Solomon (1990) labeled these observed behaviors disorganized because they represented the lack of a consistent pattern of child-caregiver interaction. A disorganized pattern of attachment was developed when caregivers responded to children's needs in confusing and frightening ways, thereby eliciting fear in them (Main & Hesse, 1990). Golding (2008) summarized the plight of disorganized children, noting that they were "unable to organize [their] behavior at times of stress to receive emotional support because [caregivers were] both the source of the fear and the potential for safety . . . [They are] left with an irresolvable dilemma" (p. 27).

Disorganized children could not discern which behaviors would solicit appropriate attention from their caregivers, and, therefore, they lacked effective attachment strategies (Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005). Children often used a mixture of insecure and secure responses in an effort to retain control of their relationships with their maltreating caregivers (Carlson, Cicchetti, Barnett, & Braunwald, 1989). Disorganized children, for example, frequently exhibited compliance and assumed the role of caregiver in friendships (Golding, 2008). On the contrary, disorganized children also utilized manipulation to assume control of their relationships, becoming aggressive and engaging in high-risk behavior (Golding, 2008). Because prior caregiving experiences were incongruous and scary, these children were overwhelmed by intense emotions and were unable to understand or distinguish the motivations of subsequent caregivers (Golding, 2008; Whelan, 2006).

Foster Youth and Attachment

The deleterious experiences of many foster children prevented the construction of secure attachments to their caregivers (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001). The transient and unpredictable nature of the foster care system stifled children's abilities to effectively manage their attachment relationships (Stovall & Dozier, 1998). Schofield and Beek (2005) captured the attachment difficulties faced by the majority of children in foster care:

> For most foster children . . . [their] early lives had been pervaded by experiences of loss and inadequate caregiving, which had left them feeling unloved and unlovable. Care and interest shown by previous . . . caregivers had been sporadic, unpredictable, or conditional on particular behavior or responses from the child. (p. 15)

As a result, the attachment organizations of many children in foster care were identified as ambivalent-resistant, avoidant, or disorganized (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001).

For foster youth, separation was an integral component of their attachment relationships (McWey, 2004). Research demonstrated that foster youth who have experienced even one early separation from their primary caregivers might display attachment-related problems later in life (Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 2001). Furthermore, children in foster care who experienced the loss of primary caregivers often demonstrated distress even if their primary caregivers were replaced by other capable caregivers (Bowlby, 1980). In sum, the discontinuity of attachment relationships was traumatic for foster children, and its effects frequently impeded the normative development of the social, psychological, behavioral, and cognitive domains of functioning (Gauthier et al., 2004).

Proximity, consistency, reciprocity, and responsiveness provided a foundation for secure attachment. Secure attachment, in turn, provided a basis for social-emotional competence, one of the foundational aptitudes necessary for foster youth to experience positive school results (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Social-Emotional Development

Social-emotional development was an inclusive term that incorporated a variety of social competencies and behavioral self-regulation strategies (Pears et al., 2007). Social-emotional development represented the ongoing acquisition of interpersonal and emotive skills that provided a foundation for school readiness and positive academic outcomes in young children (Clarke-Stewart & Althusen, 2005). Indeed, Vygotsky (1978) identified the social and emotional domains of functioning as necessary for children to interact appropriately with their environment

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and to learn. Children who displayed normative social-emotional development integrated skills across various domains of functioning and were more likely to experience behavioral and academic success (Rogoff, 1990).

Social-Emotional Development in the Early Childhood Classroom

Social-emotional aptitude allowed young children to function and to flourish in a conventional classroom setting (Bergin & Bergin, 2006). Teachers of socially and emotionally competent children provided stable and consistent classroom environments that allowed for the integration of cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Rogoff, 1990). Children who exhibited social-emotional competence demonstrated a variety of pro-social behaviors such as sharing with others, initiating and sustaining play and conversation with peers, managing their emotions, and problem solving independently and cooperatively (Pears et al., 2007).

In early childhood education, social growth was characterized by an emphasis on language development (Baker, Dilly, & Lacey, 2003). Teachers encouraged language development by establishing a caring, trusting relationship with every child and by valuing the unique contributions of each child (Baker et al., 2003). In response, young children utilized language to function effectively in the classroom. For example, children used words to articulate their needs, to take risks, and to negotiate conflict (Baker et al., 2003; Stock & Fisher, 2006). Language was often used to establish a sense of community in the classroom and to foster pro-social interactions among children and adults (Baker et al., 2003).

Emotional growth was exemplified by stability and support in the early childhood classroom (Baker et al., 2003). Teachers provided a stable environment for children by establishing schedules and expectations that were easily understood and predictable (Ritchie,

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2003). In this environment, children felt valued and respected and they were able to engage in learning tasks such as problem solving and memorizing (Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Pears et al., 2007). Teachers supported emotional growth when they imparted consistent encouragement and honest feedback to their young students (Baker et al., 2003). In the early childhood classroom, teachers purposefully designed experiences that allowed children to practice a variety of social-emotional skills. When children were able to regulate their feelings, establish friendships, interact positively with teachers, and resolve conflicts, they demonstrated social-emotional competence (Baker et al., 2003).

Self-regulation. For most students, the early childhood classroom provides an opportunity for self-regulation, the ability to manage their own feelings, behavior, and learning (Baker et al., 2003). Teachers who provided structure and limits promoted self-regulation (Ritchie, 2003). Teachers clearly articulated expectations for behavior and learning and allowed students to make choices (Ritchie, 2003). In addition, children were encouraged to set goals, to act independently, and to persist through challenging tasks (Baker et al., 2003).

Badrova & Leong (1998) identified language as essential for supporting self-regulation. Baker et al. (2003) concurred, citing children's use of language to manage emotions as evidence of self-regulation. When children were able to self-regulate, they initiated and sustained conversations with adults and peers, cooperated with classmates, and controlled anger and other negative feelings (Pears et al., 2007). As a result, young students were able to pay attention for short periods of time, follow oral multi-step directions, and apply problem-solving strategies (Baker et al., 2003).

Self-regulation was an important skill for young children to practice because it set the foundation for eventual mastery of other social-emotional competencies and pre-academic skills (Baker et al., 2003). Children who successfully regulated their emotions were perceived positively by teachers and peers, and exhibited confidence in the classroom (McDowell, O'Neil, & Parke, 2000). Emotion regulation helped children to learn without feeling worried and anxious about their school performance (Perry, 1997).

Friendships. Learning to interact positively with peers constituted an important social-emotional task for children in the early childhood classroom (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Young children's interactions with each other represented a developing interest in friends and in peer recognition (Bronson, 2000). Interacting and conversing with peers built upon children's self-regulatory abilities and allowed them to practice emergent verbal skills with another child (Stock & Fisher, 2006). While engaging in conversation with peers, young students learned other social-emotional skills such as waiting, taking turns, and responding contingently (Stock & Fisher, 2006).

Teachers directed young students to positively interact with their peers by encouraging a pro-social and supportive classroom environment (Baker et al., 2003). Teachers modeled appropriate peer interaction for their students when they intentionally created an atmosphere of interdependence and community (Baker et al., 2003). In this caring environment, children gave and received regular feedback from their peers that fostered improved communication skills (Stock & Fisher, 2006). Perhaps most importantly, an atmosphere that promoted positive relationships among students established what Howes and Ritchie (2002) termed "a first and necessary condition for learning" (p. 143).

Interactions with teachers. Children's relationships with their teachers were integral

components of an environment that supported learning and promoted pre-academic skills

(Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Teachers deliberately created classrooms that were inclusive, honored

the unique experiences of all children, and functioned as communities (Baker et al., 2003).

Teachers consistently reminded their young students that they were valuable members of the

classroom community (Ritchie, 2003). In this communal environment, students were able to

practice and master developmentally appropriate tasks (Pianta & Walsh, 1998).

Ritchie (2003) wrote extensively about teacher-child relationships, noting that teachers

pay close attention to their students by acknowledging their efforts and by providing specific

encouragement and recognition. In addition, she believed that teachers established clear

expectations for students and provided suitable consequences for students when expectations

were not met. When teachers sought to modify the behaviors of their students, they utilized non-

confrontational means such as redirecting and setting limits (Pears et al., 2007). Teachers

regularly modeled pro-social behavior and encouraged their students to incorporate pro-social

actions in their relationships (Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

As teachers and students engaged in reciprocal and responsive interactions, a variety of

social-emotional benefits were produced (Baker et al., 2003). For example, when teachers

established caring relationships with children, they encouraged resilience (Baker et al., 2003).

Resilient children, consequently, were able to adapt and succeed when faced with difficult

individual, family, or community situations (Luthar & Suchman, 1999). Birch and Ladd (1997)

indicated that nurturing relationships with teachers facilitated the development of children's

social and emotional skills. In turn, social-emotional competence provided a foundation for future academic success for children in elementary school.

Conflict resolution. Children's capacities to resolve conflicts reflected the extent to which they were able to self-regulate and to interact with peers and teachers (Pears et al., 2007). Students in the early childhood classroom applied previously practiced self-regulatory and collaborative skills to settle peer disputes (Pears et al., 2007). Children who resolved conflicts engaged in pro-social behaviors such as sharing supplies and toys, cooperating with peers, and initiating conversations (Pears et al., 2007).

Teachers in the early childhood classroom permitted disagreements to occur, as discord afforded continual opportunities for children to practice conflict resolution (Ritchie, 2003). When disagreements arose, teachers in the early childhood classroom provided explicit instruction in conflict resolution (Baker et al., 2003). They acknowledged the importance of students' emotions and encouraged students to collaborate instead of compete (Baker et al., 2003; Ritchie, 2003). They taught children specific strategies for solving disputes, such as taking responsibility for their own actions, in order to become active and successful participants in the classroom community (Baker et al., 2003).

Social-Emotional Development and Attachment

The social-emotional development of young children was impacted by the security or insecurity of their attachment organizations, and the impact was evident as children interacted with their peers and teachers in classroom settings (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). Research indicated that children with secure attachment styles incorporated pro-social behaviors, demonstrated emotional regulation, and effectively resolved conflicts (Baker et al., 2003; Howes

& Ritchie, 2002; Pears et al., 2007). Conversely, children that did not experience reciprocal, responsive, and reliable care from a sensitive caregiver were less likely to interact positively with classmates and teachers and were less likely to develop emotional regulation abilities (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Golding, 2008).

Secure attachment. Securely attached children were able to practice emergent social and emotional skills as they related to adults and peers in the classroom. Howes and Ritchie (1999), for example, found that teacher-student relationships often correlated positively with young children's social development. Children with secure attachment organizations asked for assistance from others when needed and accepted consolation if they were injured or distressed (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). Securely attached young children were frequently identified as determined, eager to learn, and confident in the early childhood classroom (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999).

Insecure attachment. Children who presented insecure attachment styles were less likely to exhibit social competence as they developed and matured (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In the classroom, teachers described insecurely attached young children as less inquisitive, less compassionate, and less compliant (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Teachers also indicated that insecure young children were more dependent and more easily frustrated than secure children (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Weinfield et al., 1999). Because insecure children were often difficult to engage with, teachers frequently interacted negatively with them (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Additionally, young children with insecure attachment organizations frequently experienced difficulty with peer relationships, and suffered from low self-esteem (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Disorganized attachment. The struggles of disorganized children as they attempted to establish social-emotional competency differed from those of insecure children. Golding (2008) found that young children with disorganized attachment styles often experienced high levels of anxiety and fear at school. Subsequently, these children tried to exercise control in their relationships with teachers and classmates through acts of anger and aggression such as bullying and domination. As a result, Granot and Mayseless (2001) categorized disorganized children as at significant risk for antisocial behavior.

Secure base phenomenon. Salter's (1939) notion of the secure base was an important component of young children's social-emotional development in the early childhood classroom. Riley (2011) indicated that when teachers responded appropriately to children's needs, they were secure bases for students, enabling children "to confront the developmental task of discovering and interacting with the world" (p. 14). Furthermore, Riley acknowledged that when children felt scared, sustained injury, or needed rest, teachers acted as secure bases when they provided comfort and security for their students.

Social-Emotional Development and Foster Youth

Many young children living in foster care did not follow a linear progression of social-emotional development (Shin, 2004). A combination of separation from birth parents and the effects of abuse and neglect often produced barriers to young foster youths' social and emotional well being (Shin, 2004). In addition, the tendency for young children in foster care to experience multiple placement changes negated the establishment of nurturing relationships with primary caregivers that promoted appropriate social and emotional interaction (Antoine & Fisher, 2005; Stahmer, Leslie, Landsverk, Zhang, & Rolls, 2006). As a result, many foster children had

insecure and disorganized attachment styles, further impeding normative social-emotional development (DeMulder, Denham, Schmidt, & Mitchell, 2000). Research has demonstrated that ambivalent-resistant, avoidant, and disorganized children experienced negative long-term effects of their attachment organizations, such as delays in the interpersonal and social domains of functioning (Stahmer et al., 2006).

Young children in foster care who struggle to establish secure attachment relationships with their primary caregivers were likely to have problems interacting with their teachers when they entered school (Riley, 2011). Children that recreated insecure and disorganized attachment relationships with their teachers felt apprehensive and emotionally vulnerable in the classroom (Richters & Waters, 1991). Accordingly, foster youth were unable to engage in pro-social behaviors with their teachers, such as taking risks, regulating emotions, and displaying trust (Baker et al., 2003). Researchers posited that foster children were therefore more likely to experience developmental delays than similar samples of non-foster children (Bruhn et al., 2008). In order to manage developmental delays and other social-emotional needs, it was imperative for foster children to take advantage of appropriate and consistent services and treatment (Stahmer et al., 2006).

Barriers to services and treatment. According to Smith (1994), at least one-third of youth in foster care were at risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties. However, there were three significant obstacles that prevented youth in foster care from accessing the services and treatment that they needed: inadequate assessment, delay or discontinuity of services, and inappropriate treatment (Pecora et al., 2003; Stahmer et al., 2006). First, children in foster care were rarely assessed for social-emotional delays, and when they were assessed, it was usually by

a practitioner with limited knowledge of typical and atypical social-emotional development (Stahmer et al., 2006). The likelihood of an erroneous assessment was significant. Additionally, if assessment results were not delineated to a foster child's caregivers in a timely manner, a change in placement might cause a delay, discontinuity, or cessation of services (Stahmer et al., 2006). Finally, a majority of programs that treated social-emotional delays were not modified to meet the unique needs of foster youth (Antoine & Fisher, 2006; Pears et al., 2007). Therefore, foster youth often accessed services and treatment that were unsuitable or ineffective (Stahmer et al., 2006).

Services, treatment, and legislation. Specialized services and programs were necessary to productively treat children in foster care that were at high risk for atypical social-emotional development (Pecora et al., 2009). Scholars recognized that historically, the child protection system did not provide effective responses to the social-emotional needs of foster youth (Bruhn et al., 2008). However, recent legislation attempted to improve foster children's access to appropriate services and treatment for social-emotional delays (Shin, 2004). *The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* and the *Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999* specifically stated that in addition to safety and stability, the health and development of foster youth was an essential goal of the child protection system (Shin, 2004). Stahmer, et al. (2006) agreed, contending that it must be a priority for the child protection system to connect foster children at risk for abnormal social-emotional development to appropriate early intervention services. Scholars found that children who failed to develop social-emotional competence often struggled to acquire pre-academic skills, a set of competencies that included listening, oral language, reading, and writing (Espinosa & Burns, 2003; Shin, 2004).

Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills

Numerous studies showed that social-emotional competence was a necessary condition for the acquisition of pre-academic skills (Baker et al., 2003). When children cultivated social-emotional aptitude, they exhibited skills that promoted learning and encouraged cognitive development. For instance, social skills allowed children to establish friendships, to communicate effectively, and to collaborate with peers in the early childhood classroom (Hughes & Leece, 2010). Emergent emotional skills complemented social abilities, and children began to express their feelings appropriately, regulate their emotions, and demonstrate compassion and empathy for others (Denham, Zinsser, & Bailey, 2011). Together, these skill sets provided a foundation for children to interact appropriately with teachers and peers in preschool, Kindergarten, and the primary grades (Hughes & Leece, 2010).

Early childhood research established a relationship between children's social-emotional capacities and academic success (Hughes & Leece, 2010). Saarni (2011), for example, stated that children's cognitive development was strongly associated with their prior acquisition of social and emotional skills. Denham et al. (2011) supported this finding, adding that

> [y]oung children's emotional competence—expression of useful emotions,
> knowledge of emotions of self and others, and regulation of their own and others'
> emotional expressiveness and experience when necessary—contributes to their
> social and pre-academic adjustment, both concurrently and across time. (p. 1)

Children who possessed a strong foundation in social and academic skills were likely to experience a variety of positive school outcomes, such as greater initiative, more persistence, and increased standardized test scores, according to Bergin and Bergin (2009).

Pre-Academic Skills

Pre-academic skills such as listening, oral language, reading, and writing, were necessary for children to succeed in the early childhood classroom. Children demonstrated acquisition of pre-academic skills when they displayed enthusiasm for reading, developed oral language, mastered the alphabetic principle, and comprehended various texts (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). Various experiences within early childhood classrooms promoted the acquisition of four important pre-academic skills: persistence, resilience, co-curricular interests, and literacy. These foundational cognitive skills complemented children's emergent social-emotional competencies and encouraged young children to develop constructive attitudes about books, reading, and writing (Espinosa & Burns, 2003).

Pre-Academic Skills in the Early Childhood Classroom

Pre-academic skills were critical for the achievement of young children in a traditional classroom setting (Ritchie, James-Szanton, & Howes, 2003). Teachers cultivated pre-academic skills when they created content-rich environments and utilized varied instructional practices (Baker et al., 2003), and incorporated lessons that purposefully included foundational skills such as following directions, listening, and problem solving (Ritchie et al., 2003). As a result, young children learned aptitudes necessary for academic success, such as expressing curiosity, engaging in independent play, exhibiting appropriate behavior, socializing with peers, communicating effectively, evaluating situations and making decisions, and using classroom materials (Cortazar & Herreros, 2010).

Young children acquired pre-academic skills when they established trusting and caring relationships with their teachers (Baker et al., 2003). According to Espinosa and Burns (2003),

effective teaching began when teachers took time to discover who their students were—their

likes and dislikes, their hobbies, their personal histories, and their feelings about learning. These

discoveries provided the foundation for meaningful teacher-student interactions and emphasized

personal relationships as an instrument for learning (Baker et al., 2003). Bronson (2000)

summarized the importance of these relationships, stating that "[a] warm, supportive

environment fosters positive emotional involvement in learning tasks and provides optimum

support for the integration of cognition, emotion, and behavior necessary for learning academic

material" (p. 9).

Ritchie et al. (2003) noted that trusting and caring relationships were fostered when

teachers were consistent and predictable, and when children understood limits, rules, and

expectations for behavior and interactions. Teachers provided structure in the classroom when

they gave consistent direction, monitoring, and feedback to their young children (Baker et al.,

2003). Classroom structure, in turn, encouraged increased student engagement and participation

in meaningful lessons and maintained a positive learning environment where pre-academic skills

were purposefully taught (Baker et al., 2003).

Competent early childhood teachers acted as facilitators for young children's learning

(Baker et al., 2003). They designed lessons and activities based on children's interests and past

experiences, and built upon children's prior knowledge bases (Baker et al., 2003). Challenging

learning experiences promoted the acquisition of pre-academic skills when teachers supported

individual progress and fostered intrinsic motivation (Baker et al., 2003). Cooperative learning

and student-directed lessons encouraged children's engagement and participation in classroom

activities (Baker et al., 2003). In this environment, teachers and children collaborated to

establish individual and collective goals and values that directed the purpose of the group (Baker et al., 2003).

Stock and Fisher (2006) noted that teachers encouraged pre-academic competence when they provided students with numerous and varied opportunities to practice emergent language skills. When children were able to communicate with their teachers and peers, they engaged completely in the learning process (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). As a result, children developed social-emotional competencies, such as self-regulation and pre-academic skills, such as persistence and resilience (Baker et al., 2003). In providing these opportunities for communication, early childhood teachers demonstrated that language was central to both social and cognitive development (Espinosa & Burns, 2003).

When teachers provided a structured classroom environment that fostered trusting and caring relationships and encouraged the development of language competency, children were able to acquire pre-academic skills such as persistence, resilience, and literacy. Additionally, when children participated in co-curricular programs, they developed a variety of aptitudes that facilitated the attainment of pre-academic skills.

Persistence. Persistence, the ability to stay with a challenging task for a reasonable period of time, was important for children to experience success in the early childhood classroom (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013). In fact, Baker et al. (2003) characterized persistence as one of the critical developmental tasks of childhood. Florez (2011) supported this characterization, indicating that persistence in simple and complex tasks built upon young children's emergent self-regulation skills. She stated that when children regulated their feelings, they replaced negative thought processes and anxiety with affirmations that supported continued

efforts at mastery. Ideas such as "I'm not good at this" were substituted with more encouraging

thoughts such as "This is difficult, but I can do it if I keep trying" (Florez, 2011, p. 47).

Teachers promoted persistence in the classroom when they encouraged children to work

through challenging activities and tasks (Baker et al., 2003; Florez, 2011). When caring teachers

supported learning, children were more likely to practice, accomplish, and master complex

activities and tasks (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Children also displayed persistence when teachers

interacted positively with them and helped them to experience success (Baker et al., 2003). As

children focused their attention appropriately, sought assistance when needed, and persisted in

difficult activities and tasks, they began to accept responsibility and to act independently (Florez,

2011).

Resilience. Resilience was the process by which people achieved adaptive functioning in

the face of individual, family, or community adversity (Luthar & Suchman, 1999). Resilience

was most often fostered in environments where positive adult role models spent quality time with

children and aided in the development of a variety of aptitudes that promoted social and

academic success (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Hass and Graydon (2009) described the

components of resilience as

> [often] conceptualized in two broad categories: personal strengths and
>
> environmental protective factors (Benard, 2004). Personal strengths can be further
>
> divided into four overlapping domains: social competence, problem solving,
>
> autonomy, and sense of purpose. Environmental protective factors are present in
>
> the family, community, or schools and include caring relationships, clear and

positive expectations by family members, educators, and community members for

achievement, and opportunities to participate and contribute. (p. 458)

Teachers promoted resilience in the classroom when they demonstrated concern,

consideration, and respect in their interactions with children (Benard, 2004). As children

received encouragement, support, help, and advice from their teachers, they developed a positive

self-image and began to work independently on classroom tasks (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt,

2005). Resilient children were able to acknowledge their unique qualities, including their own

strengths and resources (Benard, 2004; Hines et al., 2005). Children that were resilient

demonstrated improved self-esteem and were subsequently apt to engage in community and co-

curricular activities, such as volunteering and mentoring (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Cocurricular interests. Cocurricular interests were components of a program that

included classes and activities that were not part of a standard academic curriculum (U.S. Legal,

2013). Children that participated in cocurricular activities experienced a variety of social,

emotional, and cognitive benefits, including intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and a sense of

identity (Shin, 2003). Cocurricular involvement improved children's abilities to persist in

difficult tasks and encouraged resilience (Shin, 2003). Membership in cocurricular groups also

affected children's academic progress and impacted their educational goals. Research showed

that cocurricular involvement was positively correlated with literacy, which was in turn

associated with higher educational objectives (Shin, 2003).

Literacy. Literacy, the emergent pre-academic skill that included listening, spoken

language, reading, and writing, began at infancy (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). Caregivers provided

initial literacy experiences for children when they sang songs, chanted nursery rhymes, and told

stories (Ritchie et al., 2003). As children aged, they learned important lessons about literacy from listening to and participating in interesting and challenging adult-child conversation (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). These early experiences with listening and speaking provided children with basic knowledge about words, their meanings, and their functions (Espinosa & Burns, 2003).

Children gained additional exposure to words when they interacted with books (Ritchie et al., 2003). As adults read orally, children developed the ability to pay attention to words and to extract meaning from texts (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). Through books, children were introduced to the alphabetic principle, and they began to integrate letter-sound correspondence skills (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). When children looked at books, they developed important metacognitive skills that built a foundation for reading and writing (Ritchie et al., 2003).

During the preschool years, children's literacy skills continued to expand (Ritchie et al., 2003). Young children learned to form the letters of the alphabet and discovered how to write their names (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). They understood that small units of sound, also called phonemes, formed words when they are joined (Ritchie et al., 2003). In addition, children began to make connections between books and their own lives (Ritchie et al., 2003).

Pre-Academic Skills and Attachment

The influence of children's attachment organizations on their acquisition of pre-academic skills was significant and enduring. Bergin and Bergin (2009) wrote extensively about this influential relationship, stating that

> [security] of attachment is linked to academic achievement from preschool
> through high school. This link may be the result of attachment's effect on many

dimensions of children's functioning—such as ability to take on academically challenging tasks, work independently, pay attention, tolerate frustration, be happy, contain aggression, be liked by peers, and have high quality friendships— each of which, in turn, is linked to academic achievement. (p. 150)

Secure attachment. Young children who were securely attached to their foster parents and/or teachers were more likely to experience success in the classroom (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Secure attachment predicted the development of pre-reading and reading skills in preschoolers and was linked to positive attitudes toward literacy (Bus, Belsky, van Ijzendoorn, & Crnic, 1997). Additionally, Pianta, et al. (1997) found that reciprocal and responsive teacher-student relationships encouraged gains in language and conceptual knowledge. Over time, research demonstrated that secure attachment was related to higher grades and improved standardized test scores (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Insecure attachment. Young children who were insecurely attached were more likely to have negative experiences at school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Teachers recognized that insecure children frequently struggled to engage consistently with the early childhood curriculum and categorized these children as frustrated, apathetic, intolerant, and lacking confidence (Weinfield et al., 1999). Teachers admitted that they interacted less constructively and experienced difficulty consoling and soothing insecurely attached children (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Insecure children often exhibited defiance and anger to their teachers; this subsequently prompted angry and controlling responses from their teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). As a result, teachers frequently labeled these behaviors as inattentive, impulsive, or hyperactive (Clarke, Ungerer, Chahoud, Johnson & Steifel, 2002).

Children who displayed insecure attachment organizations were unable to use their teachers as secure bases (Riley, 2011). Some insecure children focused their attention on classroom materials and largely ignored their teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). At the beginning of the school year, insecurely attached children spent a significant amount of time anxiously waiting for a reunion with their foster parents (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Additionally, insecure children vied desperately for teachers' attention or demanded constant reassurance that everything was okay (Riley, 2011).

Insecure attachment negatively affected young children's cognitive abilities and academic achievement. Granot and Mayseless (2001) discovered that insecure children were often less inquisitive and less enthusiastic about learning than secure children. Cairns and Stanway (2004) observed that insecure attachment frequently interfered with children's abilities to learn from observing complex processes, such as cause and effect. In addition, Granot and Mayseless (2001) found that children with insecure attachment organizations were likely to exhibit below average verbal, math, and reading comprehension skills.

Children with avoidant attachment organizations presented unique challenges in the early childhood classroom. Because avoidant children lacked self-confidence, they resisted supportive attention and did not actively seek comfort from their teachers (Golding, 2008; Howes & Ritchie, 1999). It was therefore difficult for teachers to establish positive relationships with avoidant children. Bergin and Bergin (2009) found that teachers expressed anger and frustration with these children, and frequently isolated them to minimize potential harm to others. As a result, avoidant children were often preoccupied with classroom supplies and materials and disinterested in teacher and peer actions (Howes & Ritchie, 1999).

Children with avoidant attachment organizations strove for academic achievement as a way to gain approval from their caregivers (Golding, 2008). Subsequently, while avoidant children's cognitive development was often advanced, the integration of their social-emotional and cognitive skills was somewhat limited (Golding, 2008). Research demonstrated that these children were likely to have lower grades, lower standardized test scores, and higher incidence of learning disabilities and attention problems (Bub, et al., 2007).

Ambivalent-resistant children's relationships with their teachers were complex and influenced their learning and academic progress. Ambivalent children often presented as immature and demanding in the classroom, and teachers tended to indulge their juvenile behaviors by treating them as though they were younger than their chronological ages (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Teachers demonstrated tolerance for these children's learning struggles, while providing nurturance and guidance in the classroom (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Ambivalent children in turn responded negatively, expressing impatience and dissatisfaction with their teachers' attempts to respond to them and soothe them (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). Children with ambivalent-resistant organizations became easily irritated and frustrated by challenging learning tasks, and sometimes cried inconsolably (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). Ambivalent children tended to fixate on the relationships with their teachers, and as a result, their cognitive growth was compromised (Golding, 2008).

Teachers as Attachment Figures

In his landmark 1973 text, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger,* John Bowlby recognized the importance of stability and appropriate responsiveness in caregiver-child interactions. Although Bowlby focused primarily on the attachment relationship between the foster parent and the child,

his findings regarding attachment were applicable to teachers and children in the classroom setting. At school, teachers adopted a role similar to that of a parent (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Kesner (2000) wrote about the importance of teachers as attachment figures, stating "there is no other nonfamilial adult that is more significant in a child's life than his or her teacher" (p. 134). Additionally, Riley (2011) acknowledged that teachers could act as a secure base for children, and could foster a variety of qualities that enhanced learning such as conflict resolution, persistence, and resilience.

The teacher-child relationship, while similar to that of foster parent and child, was unique because the teacher-child attachment relationship was foundational to social-emotional development and to academic success (Riley, 2011). Numerous studies demonstrated that children's attachments to their teachers were critical components of student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2005). A 2008 study emphasized the importance of the teacher-child relationship, indicating that it influenced academic skills and social-emotional development more than curriculum, class size, and teacher-student ratio (Mashburn et al., 2008). Rogers (1990) recognized the influence of teacher-student relationships as essential for understanding students' behavior at school and for comprehending how these relationships directly impacted academic progress.

Teachers as secure bases. Bowlby's (1969) Internal Working Model facilitated an understanding of children's relationships with their teachers. Children's early school experiences formed the basis for their internal working model of teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). When children encountered reciprocal and responsive teachers in the preschool and elementary classrooms, they formed a positive working model of teachers (Bergin & Bergin,

2009). Conversely, when children experienced unpleasant and unsupportive interactions in the early childhood classrooms, they formed a negative working model of teachers. According to Bowlby's theory of the IWM (1969), children often behaved in a way that affirmed their working model of teachers. These behaviors created and recreated similar positive or negative interaction patterns with teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Teachers as attachment figures for maltreated children. Teachers that acted as attachment figures for children who had experienced maltreatment provided benefits beyond those identified for typical children. For example, a study by Egeland, Jacobvitz, and Sroufe (1988) found that cultivating a positive relationship with a caring adult fostered resilience and hope in maltreated children. Additionally, Unrau, Seita, and Putney (2008) discovered that the perception of teachers as attachment figures acted as a "protective factor that kept many [maltreated children] from suffering more adverse consequences" (p. 1264).

Teachers as attachment figures for foster children. When teachers assumed the role of attachment figure for children in foster care, the impact was significant. Teachers that established reciprocal and responsive relationships with foster youth portrayed school as a positive alternative to the neglect, abuse, and placement changes that many foster children experienced (Hines et al., 2005). Foster children that were securely attached to their teachers often engaged in meaningful classroom, school, and community activities that compensated for prior negative family experiences (Hines et al., 2005). Perhaps most importantly, a secure teacher-child attachment played a compensatory role for children who were insecurely attached to their foster parent (Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997).

Pre-Academic Skills and Foster Youth

Foster youth acquired pre-academic skills when they experienced positive, reciprocal, and responsive interactions with their caregivers (Lewis & Feinman, 1991). Lewis and Feinman captured the caregiver-child relationship in this way: "Studies . . . indicate that adult-child influences are reciprocal: children influence the ways that adults behave toward them, and adults influence children's learning experiences and opportunities" (p. 53). When foster children were deprived of consistent and loving caregiver relationships due to abuse and neglect, the normative development of social-emotional competencies and pre-academic skills was retarded (Riley, 2011).

Literacy and foster youth. Oral language, a component of literacy, was critical for the acquisition of pre-academic skills. Stock and Fisher (2006) posited that maltreatment often left foster children unable to communicate effectively with teachers and peers and caused oral language delays. They acknowledged that when children were limited by language delays, the frequency and quality of their interactions with their friends were compromised. This became problematic for youth in foster care because peer interactions provided them with opportunities to develop and practice linguistic skills (Stock & Fisher, 2006). As a result, they posited that foster children might be burdened with more pronounced language impediments. The likelihood of being diagnosed with specific learning disabilities in the primary grades increased dramatically when children in foster care exhibited language delays at an early age, and this further compromised their ability to acquire necessary pre-academic skills (Stock & Fisher, 2006).

As a result, foster youth often entered school lacking the skills and competencies to function effectively in the early childhood classroom (Antoine & Fisher, 2005). Bruhn et al., 2008) posited that maltreatment suffered by foster youth prior to entering school prevented the normative development of pre-academic skills. They categorized foster youths' abuse, neglect, and frequent placement changes as "assaults to child development" (p. 537). Researchers Rosenfeld and Richman (2003) found that "out-of-home placement [is] recognized as a risk factor that [warrants] the invocation of extraordinary educational support" (p. 69). For many young children in the foster care system, that level of educational support was lacking (Zetlin et al., 2004).

Attachment, Social-Emotional Development, and Pre-Academic Skills

Attachment theory acknowledged that caregiver-child relationships did not develop in isolation; rather, they occurred within a broad context that included family, group, and community dynamics (Slater, 2007). Hughes and Leece (2010) stated that the relationship between social, emotional, and academic competence were dependent on a variety of external variables, including interpersonal, child, and family factors such as peer status, language expression, and responsive caregiving. Therefore, it was hypothesized that social-emotional development, pre-academic skills, and attachment were interdependent (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Social-emotional competence was necessary for children to acquire pre-academic skills, and secure attachment provided a foundation for social-emotional competence (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Howe, Brandon, Hinings, and Schofield (1999) summarized the importance of children's early caregiving and relationship experiences as "the key . . . that connects children's personal

and social worlds. It is within the dynamic interplay between these two worlds that minds form and personalities grow, behavior evolves, and social competence begins" (p. 9). Golding (2008) expanded on this idea, recognizing that social skills provided the foundation for subsequent emotional and cognitive development. The quality of children's relationships with their caregivers impacted the manner in which children learned about and comprehended the world (Golding, 2008).

The Effects of Trauma

Golding (2008) explained the impact of trauma on children's attachment, social-emotional development, and pre-academic skills. When young children were subjected to trauma such as neglect, abuse, and abandonment at the hands of their caregivers, early affective bonds were compromised. These broken bonds served as models for children's subsequent interactions with their caregivers, including their relationships with teachers and peers. When children lacked the skills to engage in responsive and reciprocal interactions with others, their emotional and social growth was negatively affected. As a result, children's cognitive development was often impeded.

<center>**Treatment for Foster Youth**</center>

Research has demonstrated that the quality of teacher-child relationships impacted social-emotional development and pre-academic skills (Howes & Ritchie, 1999; Mashburn et al., 2008). However, in some circumstances, teachers were unable to construct secure attachment relationships with the foster children in their classrooms (Riley, 2011). When this occurred, caregivers and teachers searched for treatment programs and interventions to further promote social-emotional development and pre-academic skills.

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Intervention by an Education Specialist

In 2004, Zetlin et al. conducted a study that measured the impact of an education specialist (ES) on foster youths' school performance. The role of the ES was to provide children in foster care with an advocate that recognized their academic strengths and weaknesses. Social workers referred foster youth to the ES when they were unable to resolve an education problem, and the ES collaborated with the child protection agency to procure suitable academic programs and adjunct services for individual foster youth.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the ES, the authors collected school performance data from two populations of foster youth—one treatment group that had received a referral for an ES, and one control group that had not received a referral for an ES. The treatment group showed an increase in standardized test scores for math and reading, while the control group experienced a decline in standardized test scores for math and reading. Additionally, the control group included more children designated for special education, and the control group attended school more sporadically than the treatment group. These data suggest that intervention by an ES might be an effective method for meeting the academic needs of children in foster care.

Foster Youth Services

Ayasse (1995) studied a program in California that provided educational services for children living in residential foster homes. The Foster Youth Services (FYS) program included four basic components: school placement, tutoring, counseling, and employment readiness. The FYS staff member's initial contact with the foster youth typically involved tracking and acquisition of necessary papers for school withdrawal and entrance, such as academic transcripts, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) documents, and immunization records. After documents

were located and an appropriate school placement was procured, the FYS staff member scheduled individualized weekly or bi-weekly tutoring appointments with the foster child. During a tutoring session, the FYS staff member provided any of the following services: academic instruction, counseling, or consultation with social workers and/or foster parents. The FYS staff member and the foster youth collaborated to determine which service or services were necessary at a particular tutoring appointment.

Preliminary research demonstrated the effectiveness of the FYS program. The California Department of Education reported that a majority of FYS students gained a minimum of one month of academic growth for every month of tutoring. The average growth rate for FYS students was three months of academic growth for every month of tutoring. In addition, FYS students earned approximately 10 credits more per semester than foster youth who did not have access to the FYS program. These early studies showed that the FYS program contributed to positive school outcomes such as higher grades, lower dropout rates, and successful transition to higher education.

Holistic Integration Techniques

Kirven (2000) profiled a therapeutic intervention for minority children in foster care. Holistic Integration Techniques, or H.I.T., empowered foster youth to communicate their life stories from a strengths-based perspective. H.I.T. was composed of five steps: Using hardships as measures to build positive outcomes; accepting limitations and capabilities; building a spiritual consciousness; using the environment as a classroom to teach self and others; and establishing a collective empowerment way of thinking. During therapy sessions, clinicians carefully listened to foster children tell stories about their lives. After foster youths finished

recounting their stories, clinicians encouraged them to retell their challenging life stories in a more positive way. Clinicians and foster youths worked collaboratively to produce new narratives that focus on the youths' strengths and abilities (Herman, 1998).

Kirven (2000) posited that H.I.T. lessened children's misplaced feelings of guilt and inadequacy resulting from their status as youths living in foster care. Furthermore, Kirven (2000) purposed that H.I.T. also motivated foster children to recognize their assets and their limitations as necessary for a more holistic approach to healing and coping. The author did not include any quantitative research data in his article, but did provide some anecdotal evidence of H.I.T.'s effectiveness.

Holistic Arts-Based Group Work

A 2009 study by Coholic et al. investigated a creative arts program that served children living in foster care. The Holistic Arts-Based Group Work model included creative art activities designed to help foster youth develop greater self-awareness and positive self-esteem. Mountain (2007) explained how the Holistic Arts-Based method was beneficial for children who have experienced trauma, such as foster youth. He said that "creative arts activities engage children in learning that is intimately related to spiritual development, involving self-understanding, understanding relationships, wider environmental connectedness, and connection with the divine" (p. 191). Additionally, Goodman (2005) acknowledged that traumatized children were frequently more comfortable expressing themselves nonverbally, through imaginative experiences.

Interviews with foster youth that participated in the Holistic Arts-Based Group Work program revealed that the creative activities helped them to better understand and regulate their

emotions. Foster parents also expressed positive feelings about the program, acknowledging that their children now demonstrated more appropriate methods of coping with difficult situations and circumstances. The authors of this article posited that the non-threatening style of the Holistic Arts-Based Group Work program benefitted foster children because they did not feel pressured to recollect and discuss traumatic experiences.

Gaps in Treatment

The four treatment programs profiled include interventions that more appropriately met the needs of foster children. However, the scope of each of the treatment programs was small. For example, each education specialist worked with only one or two foster children concurrently (Zetlin et al., 2004), and each Holistic Arts-Based group consisted of just four or five children (Coholic et al., 2009). While the treatment programs benefitted the foster children who participated in them, there were thousands of children in foster care that did not have access to these interventions because of their small scope.

Furthermore, each of the four treatment programs addressed only one of the foster children's needs—social, emotional, or academic. The Holistic Integration Techniques intervention, for instance, focused on the emotional turmoil often experienced by foster youth, yet it did not attend to the social or academic difficulties the children were experiencing (Kirven, 2000). Conversely, the Foster Youth Services program concentrated on obtaining educational assistance for children in foster care, but did not specifically address the social or emotional distress the youths may be internalizing (Ayasse, 1995).

Additionally, each of the treatment programs provided one way to better meet the needs of foster youth. The Education Specialist utilized advocacy to improve foster children's

academic outcomes (Zetlin et al., 2004), FYS employed tutoring to facilitate positive school experiences (Ayasse, 1995), H.I.T. used storytelling to lessen the emotional toll of foster care (Kirven, 2000), and the Holistic Arts-Based Group incorporated creative exercises to help foster children regulate their emotions (Coholic et al., 2009). Yet the fragmentation of these treatments and interventions did not allow for foster children to have all of their social, emotional, and academic needs met in one comprehensive program.

Finally, the effectiveness of the treatments and interventions has not been consistently established by rigorous, empirical research (Timmer et al., 2006). Few studies have been conducted to determine if these other agencies and organizations provided appropriate and effective interventions for foster youth. Furthermore, there was a dearth of scholarship that explored the integration of effective components of successful organizations serving foster youth.

One nonprofit community-based organization, however, Peace4Kids, incorporated advocacy, academic enrichment, and creative arts in a program that strived to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of children in foster care.

Peace4Kids

Peace4Kids is a nonprofit, creative education, community-based organization that serves foster youth in South Los Angeles. Peace4Kids seeks to create better outcomes for foster children by encouraging reciprocal, trusting relationships between youth and adults, by promoting social-emotional development, and by cultivating pre-academic skills. Four Core Concepts—*Respect, Effective Communication, Personal Responsibility,* and *Community as*

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Family—provide the impetus for foster youths to make positive choices regarding their membership in the organization, their group activity preferences, and their behavior.

Attachment theory, specifically the notion that appropriate, reciprocal relationships can help children to compensate for detrimental early experiences (Bowlby, 1988), provides the theoretical foundation for the organization. Peace4Kids acknowledges that children in foster care often have difficulty forming secure attachment relationships to individuals (Stovall & Dozier, 1998). Therefore, Peace4Kids strives to cultivate attachment relationships between foster youth and the organization itself through its fourth core concept, *Community as Family*.

The idea of *Community as Family* distinguishes Peace4Kids from other nonprofit, community-based organizations serving foster youth. *Community as Family* conveys unconditional care and support to foster children, and allows youth to develop attachments to the group that are independent of attachment relationships with peers, volunteers, teachers, and administrators. While it is possible for foster children to develop attachment relationships with individual members of Peace4Kids, *Community as Family* conveys that they are accepted and valued as participants in the group itself. Although the history of foster youths' insecure attachments may serve as a barrier to forming positive relationships with individuals, the sense of belonging that comes with group membership may be a qualitatively different experience (Smith et al., 1999).

Research published by Smith et al. (1999) provided some insight into the attachments that adults establish with groups. Borrowing features of adult attachment theory, they created a measure to study group attachment along two dimensions, attachment anxiety and avoidance. Preliminary results from this study indicated that the measure they constructed effectively

evaluates adults' attachments to certain groups, such as fraternities and social clubs (Smith et al., 2009). While this study represented an important development in our understanding of adults and their attachment to groups, it did not address the ways in which group attachments are formed. Most importantly, this study did not explore children's attachments to groups.

A sense of belonging is often missing from the attachment relationships that foster youth form with peers and caregivers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). At Peace4Kids, teachers and administrators report that foster children want to be part of the group because the organization has a strengths-based approach and it recognizes the gifts and talents that each child brings to the community. Similar to the model suggested by Smith et al. (1999), Peace4Kids promotes a bond with children in the community to positively affect their ideas, feelings, and actions.

Foster youth experience *Community as Family* at Peace4Kids even as they move from placement to placement in the child protection system. Peace4Kids' staff members work collaboratively with social workers, private agencies, and child protective services to monitor children's placements changes and to bring them back to their "family" at Peace4Kids. When foster children's home placements change, they are able to return to consistency and structure at Peace4Kids. Additionally, Peace4Kids provides opportunities for sibling visitations to occur. The friendly atmosphere at Peace4Kids allows separated brothers and sisters to interact in a fun, relaxing, and meaningful manner.

<center>**Barriers to Research**</center>

Many nonprofit community-based organizations provided constructive programs for youth in foster care; however, researchers have not established the effectiveness of these organizations and programs (Coholic et al., 2009). One explanation for the dearth of existing

scholarship regarding foster youth organizations and programs was a lack of access to the foster care population. Foster youth frequently experienced placement change (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006), and it was challenging for researchers to locate and maintain contact with possible study participants. Additionally, frequent placement changes compromised a researcher's ability to obtain consent from the children's foster parents or guardians.

Another explanation for the lack of empirical research regarding organizations and programs that served children in foster care may be found in studies of foster youth and attachment. Recent scholarship acknowledged that the abuse, neglect, and frequent placement change experienced by foster youth (Casey Family Programs, 2007) contributed to insecure attachment organizations (McWey, 2004). Scholars also recognized that insecurely attached foster youth struggled to cultivate trusting and reciprocal relationships with caregivers, such as foster parents and teachers (Stahmer et al., 2006). Therefore, researchers who sought proximity and confidence in a research setting often provoked feelings of insecurity, mistrust, and apprehension among foster children. Researchers were frequently unable to collect appropriate and meaningful data in these settings.

In this research study, methodological choices reflected careful consideration of the barriers most often faced when conducting research with children in foster care. Direct contact methods, such as foster youth interviews, observations, and surveys, were discarded in order to be sensitive to the children's potential distrust of adult caregivers. Alternatively, this study was designed to gather data about a nonprofit, community-based organization serving foster youth from adult members. Because children in foster care constructed distinct attachment relationships with each of the participant subgroups, foster parents, teachers, and administrators

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offered unique perspectives on the impact of Peace4Kids on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills.

Summary

Understanding how young foster youth develop social-emotional competence and acquire pre-academic skills necessitated an examination of their experiences within the child protective system. This review of literature traced the history of foster care in the United States, described the types of maltreatment suffered by foster youth, and detailed the theoretical framework of the research study, attachment theory. The literature review then explored the role of attachment in foster youths' relationships with caregivers and peers within both social and academic contexts. A close examination of the primary classroom followed, with an emphasis on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. The review of literature concluded with a discussion of selected programs and interventions that addressed the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of children in foster care.

The literature review demonstrated that young foster children were at-risk for social, emotional, and cognitive maladjustment as a result of caregiver neglect, abuse, and abandonment. A lack of resources within the foster care system made it difficult for foster youth to obtain essential resources and services to address their needs. As a result, young children in foster care often struggled to develop social-emotional aptitude and to acquire pre-academic skills. Nonprofit, community-based organizations such as Peace4Kids attempt to address foster children's needs by providing necessary social, emotional, financial, and material support for youth and their families.

Conclusion

Chapter Three describes the research study's design and procedures, and utilizes the information disseminated in the literature review to provide justification for the context and participant sample. Consideration of the unique challenges facing foster youth is taken in identifying the methods for data collection and analysis. Limitations of the research study are explored and issues such as bias, confidentiality, and validity are investigated.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization, on the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster youth through the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators. The unique characteristics of the foster care population detailed in the review of literature guided the methodological choices made for this study. After considering issues of maltreatment, multiple placement changes, and attachment, a qualitative study was conceived. Data collection methods reflected an understanding of young foster children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, and a constructivist perspective informed data analysis. Together, the study's design and methodology encouraged the participants to share their experiences and to provide appropriate and detailed data (Creswell, 2009) that answered the research question.

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter presents a thorough description of the research study's context, participants, design, and methods. It begins with a brief history of Peace4Kids and a thorough explanation of the organization's Saturday Core Program. Next, the study's participant sample is identified and the research context is described. In addition, the research design and methods are delineated, and a complete explanation of the data collection and analysis process is provided. At the conclusion of the chapter, the roles of bias, validity, reflexivity, and reactivity are explored.

Preserving the confidentiality of the study's participant sample was integral to this research study, and precautions were taken to ensure that most of the participants would not be

identified. Zaid Gayle, the organization's founder and executive director, consented to use of his actual name since he is featured on the Peace4Kids website and in published literature about the Saturday Core Program. All other participants—parents, teachers, and one administrator—were given pseudonyms to maintain their privacy and safety. In addition, the name of the city was not disclosed, nor was the name of the public recreation complex publicized.

The context, participants, design, and methods discussed in this chapter were used to answer the study's research question: *What are the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills?*

History of Peace4Kids

In March of 1998, a minister in South Los Angeles challenged his congregation to find "64 days, 64 ways to practice non-violence" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). The congregation's unique response to the minister's challenge generated a community project that would eventually lead to the establishment of Peace4Kids.

A group of teenagers at the church, led by Peace4Kids founders Zaid Gayle and Emily Smith, acknowledged that violence had profoundly affected their neighborhood. The group wanted to create a community space where the principles of non-violence could be celebrated and shared by adults and children. They decided to plant an organic peace garden as a living tribute to the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma K. Gandhi. A neighborhood elementary school where many of the students had been personally impacted by violence was chosen as the location for the peace garden (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

Over the next three months, Zaid, Emily, and a group of ten children and five adult volunteers came together on Saturdays and cared for the peace garden; they planted seeds, watered plants, and tilled the soil. During this time, the number of children and volunteers tripled. As the group continued its work, Zaid and Emily noted that many of the young peace garden participants had been impacted by the child welfare system. They noticed that these children truly enjoyed coming to the peace garden, and Zaid and Emily witnessed positive changes in the children. As a result, Emily, a social worker in the foster care system, suggested that the peace garden program be specific for at-risk children and foster youth in South Los Angeles (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

Under the leadership of Zaid and Emily, the peace garden grew. They continued to meet each Saturday, and the volunteer staff provided a variety of programs and activities for foster youth. In the peace garden's first year and a half, for example, the volunteers and children traveled to the beach and went on an overnight camping trip. The peace garden group was officially granted nonprofit status in 2000, and Peace4Kids, as it is now known, currently provides a myriad of services for at-risk children and youth in foster care from age four until age 24.

Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program

The Saturday Core Program, which met weekly for approximately two-and-a-half hours, served as the main point-of-entry for most Peace4Kids' participants. The Core Program featured four age-segregated groups and included the Peace Garden (four-to-six-year olds), Early Education (seven-to-nine-year olds), Creative Education (10-12 year olds), and Love Me Now/Leadership, Manhood, and Nobility (13-15 year olds) classes. A variety of courses,

including arts and crafts, cooking, creative writing, music, and dance provided the participants with opportunities to internalize and demonstrate Peace4Kids' Four Core Concepts: *Respect, Effective Communication, Personal Responsibility,* and *Community as Family.*

Additionally, Peace4Kids offered specialized assistance for foster youth ages 12-24 through the Emancipation Services Program. As teenagers and young adults prepared to leave the foster care system, trained resource specialists provided in-depth services and crisis support for the transition to independent living. The program assisted youth with accessing physical and mental health services, employment counseling, temporary and permanent housing, and financial management.

Instructional and support staff. The Peace4Kids instructional and support staff reflected one of the central components of a secure attachment relationship: consistency over time (Bowlby, 1973). Dependable and qualified educators who had made a minimum of a one-year commitment to the program taught the four age-segregated groups on a weekly basis. The teaching staff was augmented by a significant number of reliable volunteers who agreed to attend at least one Saturday Core Program session per month over the course of a year. Teachers and volunteers attended an orientation and several training sessions where they were prepared to identify, understand, and meet the unique needs of children in foster care. Once a Live-Scan was obtained and approval from the Department of Justice was granted, teachers and volunteers began working with children at the Saturday Core Program. Many members of the instructional and support staff expressed high levels of satisfaction with the organization and remained with Peace4Kids for extended periods of time. This provided consistency for Peace4Kids members

and they viewed teachers and volunteers as sensitive, perceptive caregivers who responded to their needs appropriately.

Routine. The Core Program followed a predictable routine that began with a whole group morning meeting. A Peace4Kids administrator led the morning meeting and utilized role-playing, singing, and recitation to reinforce the program rules and the Four Core Concepts with the participants. The administrator then released the participants to their age-segregated groups for one-and-a-half hours of creative education activities. Within the age-segregated groups, participants selected the activity of their choice from a group of creative education learning centers. At the conclusion of the age-appropriate activities, all participants congregated in a courtyard to eat a family-style lunch provided by Peace4Kids staff members and volunteers. As the participants ate their lunch, they informally socialized with friends, volunteers, teachers, and siblings. The Core Program concluded with a whole-group closing meeting. During the closing meeting, an administrator invited individual participants to communicate how their behavior reflected the Four Core Concepts. The day ended with administrators, teachers, and volunteers thanking the children for their attendance and encouraging them to return next Saturday.

<div align="center">

Participant Sample

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In order to obtain an accurate representation of foster youths' experiences at Peace4Kids, it was important to generate a participant sample with multiple perspectives. To achieve this, I incorporated purposeful selection, the deliberate choice of particular persons to provide information for a study (Creswell, 2009) to yield a maximum variation sample. Maxwell (2005) identified a maximum variation sample as one that captures the diversity of the participants by allowing them to provide a range of perceptions about the same experience. In this research

study, the inclusion of parent, teacher, and administrator perspectives captured a richer and more detailed account of foster youths' experiences in different settings and with different individuals within the context of Peace4Kids. The maximum variation sample also allowed for data triangulation, the process of incorporating multiple data collection sources to develop a more comprehensive depiction of the phenomena being studied (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Participation in this study was contingent on meeting the following criteria. Parents were invited to participate in the study if: (1) he/she was the parent of a child in the foster care system or he/she had an inconclusive referral (See Definitions of Terms.) to the Department of Children and Family Services, (2) he/she was the parent of a child that is a registered member of Peace4Kids, and (3) he/she is the parent of a child between four-to-six-years old that attended the Peace Garden (early childhood) program. Teachers were invited to participate in the study if: (1) he/she was an educator of four-to-six-year old children in the Peace Garden program at Peace4Kids, and (2) he/she made a minimum of a one-year commitment to teach in the Peace Garden program. Administrators were invited to participate in the study if: (1) he/she was employed as a director or manager at Peace4Kids, and (2) he/she made a minimum of a one-year commitment to a leadership position at Peace4Kids.

Lynn, the Peace4Kids creative program manager, identified and contacted eligible parents, teachers, and administrators about their participation in the research study. The resulting participant sample was comprised of ten adults in three subgroups.

Six female parents consented to participate in the research study. Additional characteristics including name, race, foster care license, and family status for each parent are disaggregated in Table 1.

Table 1
Parent Participants

	Name	Gender	Race	Foster Care License	Family Status
Interview #1	Christine	F	AA	Yes	KC
Interview #2	Camille	F	AA	Yes	KC
Interview #3	Jane	F	AA	Yes	FC
Interview #7	Allison	F	C	No	IR
Interview #8	Molly	F	AA	Yes	FC
Interview #10	Martha	F	AA	Yes	KC

Note. AA=African-American; C=Caucasian; KC=Kinship Care; FC=Foster Care; IR=Inconclusive Referral

Two female teachers agreed to take part in the research study. Demographic information,

including each teacher's length of tenure at Peace4Kids, is disseminated in Table 2.

Table 2
Teacher Participants

	Name	Gender	Race	Tenure at Peace4Kids
Interview #4	Roberta	F	C	1 year
Interview #9	Donna	F	AA	1 month

Note. AA=African-American; C=Caucasian

Two administrators assented to participate in the research study. Each administrator's

characteristics, including name, gender, race, and length of tenure at Peace4Kids, is included in

Table 3.

Table 3
Administrator Participants

	Name	Gender	Race	Tenure at Peace4Kids
Interview #5	Zaid	M	AA	14 years
Interview #6	Lynn	F	AA	6 years

Note. AA=African-American

Rationale for Participant Sample

Child development findings supported the decision to research the perspectives of

parents, teachers, and administrators regarding the social-emotional competencies and pre-

academic skills of young foster youth in the Peace Garden group. The social, emotional, and

cognitive domains of functioning in four, five, and six-year-old children are rapidly changing

(Hughes & Leece, 2010). According to Maslow (1943), young children still depended on their caregivers to meet their basic physiologic and safety needs, such as food, water, and protection from danger. In his landmark text *Child and Society*, Erik Erikson (1950) posited that four, five, and six-year-olds also depended on their caregivers to cultivate social-emotional skills such as persistence, cooperation, and initiative. When caregivers met their biological, social, and emotional needs, children were able to interact appropriately with their environment and to learn (Vygotsky, 1978).

During the preschool and Kindergarten years, changes in children's social, emotional, and cognitive functioning are substantial, and these changes are evident in children's behaviors and in their relationships with peers and caregivers (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009). At the Saturday Core Program, the Peace Garden group provided ample opportunities for caregivers to examine children's development as manifest in their actions and interactions with others. Through simple observation, parents, teachers, and administrators detected changes in children's social-emotional development and pre-academic skills and subsequently assessed the impact of Peace4Kids.

Context

The context of this research study included both the physical location of the Saturday Core Program and the community in which Peace4Kids is situated. The Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program took place at a local public recreation complex that included a gymnasium, a game room, several multi-purpose rooms, a variety of offices, and a courtyard. The morning and closing meetings were held in the gymnasium, and the age-segregated classes occurred in the

multi-purpose rooms. Breakfast and lunch were provided for the children in the courtyard

behind the gymnasium.

Peace4Kids is located within a small, unincorporated area in the southern part of Los

Angeles. The community represents an urban neighborhood that has struggled to shield its

residents from the complex and pervasive problems of the inner city such as crime, violence, and

destitution. Statistics from the first seven months of 2012 reveal that 277 violent crimes and 504

property crimes were committed in this community (Los Angeles Times, 2012). As a result, this

neighborhood has been identified as one of the most violent areas in Southern California.

Demographic data collected in the 2010 United States Census showed that approximately

33% of the neighborhood′s residents were children under the age of 18. Roughly two-thirds of

the community′s total population identified themselves as Latino, while about one-third labeled

themselves as African-American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The percentage of individuals in

the neighborhood living below the federal poverty line was 31.5%, close to three times the

national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Qualitative Design

In order to gather appropriate and sufficient data to answer the study's research question,

I utilized an interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam & Associates, 2002). According

to Patton (1985), the overarching goal of interpretive qualitative research is to understand how

individuals make sense of their actions and relationships within a specific context. To facilitate

this understanding, the researcher becomes a mechanism for data collection and analysis

(Merriam & Associates, 2002). Thus, I gathered data through a close examination of the

participants and produced a rich description of their experiences (Hatch, 2002). This rich

description included information that reflected the experiences of the selected participants in this particular setting (Creswell, 2009) and might not be generalizable to other populations.

Methodology

This research study purposed to reveal the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators regarding the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization, on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. In order to generate an authentic understanding of Peace4Kids, its programs, and its participants, a hybrid approach of descriptive case study methodology and program evaluation research was employed.

Scholars have classified traditional case study research as an exploration of a phenomenon that transpired within a particular setting (Gay et al., 2009), and described the goal of conventional case study methodology as understanding the distinct experiences of the participants (Stevenson, 2004). However, recent scholarship acknowledged that the goals of case study research have expanded to include program evaluation (Gay et al., 2009). In addition to examining the experiences of participants in a particular program (Springer, 2010), Yin (2008) explained that contemporary case studies "have a distinctive place in evaluation research, explaining causal links in interventions, describing interventions, illustrating aspects of an evaluation, and illuminating unclear outcomes" (p. 15). The case study approach is especially valuable when program evaluation describes variation among participants and illuminates their experiences of the program itself (Gay et al., 2009).

Data Collection Process

In order to collect appropriate and detailed data that effectively answered the study's research question, ten semi-structured interviews of parents, teachers, and administrators were

conducted at the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012. The creative program manager at

Peace4Kids arranged for most of the interviews to take place at the public recreation complex

during the Saturday Core Program. The parent interviews were conducted on December 3 and

December 10, 2011, January 28, 2012, and February 4, 2012. I scheduled the teacher and

administrator interviews at a time and place that was convenient for those participants. The

teacher interviews were held on January 18, 2012, and February 4, 2012. I met with the

administrators on January 24, 2012, and January 27, 2012.

Before the interviews began, each participant received a detailed description of the study

(See Appendix C.), an informed consent form (See Appendices D, E, and F.), and a copy of the

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights (See Appendix G.). The informed consent explained that

all interviews would be digitally recorded and described the measures that would be taken to

protect the confidentiality of the participants. I provided an opportunity for participants to ask

questions about the study before the interviews began. At the conclusion of the interviews, the

participants received a $10.00 gift card for a national retail store.

I utilized two data collection methods for this research study: interviews and field notes.

Used in concert, these techniques allowed me to understand the perspectives of parents, teachers,

and administrators regarding the impact of Peace4Kids on foster youths' social-emotional

development and pre-academic skills.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In this qualitative study, I employed semi-structured interviews of parents, teachers, and

administrators to gather adequate and appropriate data that answered the research question.

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), semi-structured interviews typically began with a

series of scripted questions to gather particular information from the participants. Subsequently, the researcher posed unscripted questions based on the participants' initial responses and "the social contexts being discussed, and the degree of rapport established" (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). The flexibility inherent in semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to convey their experiences, to delineate meanings, and to form opinions (Hatch, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews allowed the parents, teachers, administrators, and researcher to co-construct knowledge in this study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I guided the interviews by providing broad topics for discussion, and the participants elaborated on these topics with specific examples from their lives. For example, I asked parents to discuss their involvement with the foster care system (See Appendices H, I, and J.). In response to this prompt, most parents provided specific examples of how and why their children were placed into their homes, and they included instances of abuse and/or neglect suffered while their children were in the care of their biological parents. Many parents told me stories that illustrated the challenges they face in caring for their children, and how these challenges impacted their families. In the course of listening to parents' responses, I asked further probing questions for clarification and explanation. In this way, parents were encouraged not only to share their stories, but also to communicate their own interpretations and opinions about the interview topics (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007).

Field Notes

Field notes, written accounts of what transpired at the research site, were generally associated with ethnographic studies; however, scholars have recently established their utility in studies where interviews are the primary data collection method (Gibbs, 2007). Though field

notes may contain simple descriptive elements, they are more likely to include the researcher's own experiences, feelings and interpretations (Gibbs, 2007).

Throughout the study, I produced detailed field notes to augment the data collected from semi-structured interviews of parents, teachers, and administrators. Upon completion of each interview, I typed field notes, including important words, significant phrases, and behavioral observations onto my laptop computer. The field notes reflected my opinions and provided insights about the participants, settings, and data. The field notes were especially useful for capturing dialogue that happened after the digital recorder was stopped. I acknowledged that my field notes were subjective, and, they reflected, to some extent, my biases and positionality.

Rationale for Data Collection Methods

Collecting data about the experiences of foster youth was a challenging task that required me to recognize the vulnerability of this population. Research indicated that foster children often experienced abuse, neglect, and/or frequent placement changes, and that they were prone to insecure attachment organizations (Stovall & Dozier, 1998). Insecurely attached children often avoided proximity with unknown adults (Lanyado, 2003) and experienced feelings of distrust or anxiety in the presence of strangers (Pears et al., 2008). Consequently, I used data collection methods that did not require direct interaction with foster children. In utilizing methods such as detailed field notes and semi-structured interviews of foster parents, teachers, and administrators, I collected meaningful and appropriate data while protecting children in foster care from the social and emotional consequences of yet another transient attachment relationship with an adult stranger.

My reasons for collecting data from foster parents, teachers, and administrators were grounded in the theoretical framework of the study, attachment theory. I understood that foster children have experienced at least one separation from their birth parents, and that they had to construct an attachment relationship with an unfamiliar foster parent (Schofield & Beek, 2005). Additionally, when foster youth attended Peace4Kids, they had opportunities to create attachment relationships with unknown peers, teachers, and administrators. Scholars have demonstrated that attachment organizations are most visible during episodes of separation and reunion with foster parents and other caregivers (Gauthier et al., 2004). Therefore, drop-off, activity choices, transitions, and pick-up at Peace4Kids offered several opportunities for attachment behavior to manifest and give foster parents, teachers, and administrators a unique perspective on the attachment behavior patterns of participating children.

It was also important to recognize the reasons for understanding the impact of Peace4Kids on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. There was a correlation between social-emotional competency and academic achievement. Research demonstrated that children who possess a strong foundation in social and academic skills were likely to experience a variety of positive school outcomes (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Scholarship also acknowledged that early learning experiences, such as those provided in the Peace Garden program at Peace4Kids, prepared children for future social and academic success (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

Data Analysis Process

As the interviews were completed, I uploaded the digital recordings to my laptop computer and emailed them to a reputable digital transcription service. When the transcribed

interviews were returned, the process of coding commenced. Coding, the practice of

systematically labeling fragments of text to reveal patterns and meaning (Gay et al., 2009),

provided what Gibbs (2007) referred to as "a focus for thinking" (p. 40). This focus allowed me

to recognize themes, to acknowledge relationships, to develop justifications, and to formulate

interpretations (Hatch, 2002).

A constructivist perspective anchored data analysis and coding. Constructivists

acknowledged that "the world we experience arises from multiple, socially constructed realities.

These constructions are created because individuals want to make sense of their experiences"

(Gibbs, 2007, p. 7). A constructivist approach recognized that truth was not absolute; rather, it

was grounded in people's perceptions about themselves and the world around them. Therefore, I

approached coding as a process of discovery, and as a way to illuminate the participants' own

truths.

I employed two types of data analysis while coding the study's transcribed interviews:

concept-driven coding and open coding. Gibbs (2007) noted that these two methods of coding

were not exclusive, remarking that, "most researchers move backwards and forwards between

both sources of inspiration during their analysis" (p. 46).

 I first analyzed the transcribed data by establishing a set of preliminary codes derived

from the short-term and medium-term outcomes as identified in the Peace Garden Logic Model

(See Appendix A.). This type of analysis, concept-driven coding, utilized codes created from

existing scholarship, previous studies, or interview topics (Gibbs, 2007).   The preliminary codes

provided a framework to develop themes and categories incorporating the participants and their

experiences. As the data analysis procedure continued, I began the process of open coding, a

practice Gibbs (2007) described as "simply . . . reading the texts and trying to tease out what is happening" (p. 45). Open coding allowed me to develop themes and categories that better reflected the participants' perceptions and experiences as recorded in the transcribed interviews. I continued to dissect the data into what Bogdon and Biklen (2007) called major codes and sub-codes. Major codes represented broad, general categories of data such as social-emotional development, while sub-codes included narrower, more precise classifications such as persistence. As the data was coded, I gained a deeper understanding of parent, teacher, and administrator perceptions and experiences.

While conducting data analysis, I acknowledged that coding was a consequence of what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) called "prior interpretive and conceptual decisions" (p. 167). Indeed, the entire process of interviewing, transcribing, and coding was a reflection of my choices, and was constantly mediated by my positionality.

Validity

A hallmark of effective research was what Geertz (1973) termed "thick description." Thick description resulted from a researcher's immersion in the setting of a study and from a researcher's purposeful interactions with the study's participants. Immersion allowed the researcher to "experience . . . both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 2). Creswell (2009) advocated for the use of such description, arguing that it imparted multiple participant perspectives, produced more realistic findings, and strengthened the validity of the findings.

In this study, the participants' responses to semi-structured interview questions illuminated their perspectives on significant events (Maxwell, 2005) in their everyday lives and at Peace4Kids. As these significant events were conveyed, I asked probing follow-up interview questions that provided opportunities for the participants to elaborate with details, fostering a deeper and more complete understanding of their perspectives. When the participants added supplemental details to their responses, I generated a thick description of their experiences and their perceptions about those experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I endeavored to conduct this study as a parent, educator, and investigator. My role as a mother to a daughter, adopted as a foster child through the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, could not be separated from my role as a scholar. Likewise, my role as an educator at a residential care facility for foster youth could not be separated from my role as a doctoral candidate. I arrived at a decision to conduct my research study with inherent biases as a result of my extensive personal experience with the child protective system in general, and foster-adoption, specifically. My interpretation of this study's findings undoubtedly reflected, to some extent, my positionality and bias (Creswell, 2009).

Reflexivity

The notion of reflexivity recognized the influence of researcher interpretation in data collection and analysis (Hatch, 2002). In this qualitative inquiry, I was a critical component of the interview process; I was what Merriam and Associates (2002) termed a "human instrument." As such, I determined which questions to ask, as well as how to adjust to and react to participant responses. In considering all aspects of the human instrument, Peshkin (1988) argued that

incorporating biases into research might produce an unexpected benefit: a study that makes a distinctive contribution to the literature.

It was important for me to acknowledge that this study would not reflect what Atkinson (1990) termed "an independent order of reality." Rather, the study investigated the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of Peace4Kids on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. Consequently, my unique perspective became an integral part of this study (Hatch, 2002) and was recognized as a persuasive element in this study's findings.

Reactivity

As the researcher conducting the proposed study, it was critical to recognize the impact of my presence at Peace4Kids. In order to best understand the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of the organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills, I needed to be close to the study's participants. This notion of closeness implied both physical proximity and relational intimacy. I acknowledged the presence of reactivity, or what Maxwell (2005) defined as "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals being studied" (p. 108). I understood that, by conducting semi-structured interviews, I disrupted the regular routines of Peace4Kids parents, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, I realized that unfamiliar settings and people could distract the participants being interviewed. In qualitative studies, it is impossible to eliminate reactivity; rather, it was my job to acknowledge it and utilize it to collect meaningful data (Maxwell, 2005).

Summary

In this chapter, I described the research study's design and methods. I provided a rationale for the creation of a qualitative study that included case study methodology and program evaluation research. The research study's context and participants were detailed, and the study's data collection methods and data analysis process were explained. Lastly, issues of bias, validity, reflexivity, and reactivity were addressed.

Chapter Four presents the data as articulated by parents, teachers, and administrators. The responses gathered during semi-structured interviews include insights about Peace4Kids and answer the study's research question: *What are the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills?*

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit, community-based organization, on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. A hybrid approach of case study methodology and program evaluation research was utilized to gather appropriate and detailed qualitative data (Creswell, 2009) from the organization's parents, teachers, and administrators. A protocol of semi-structured interviews and detailed field notes encouraged participants to convey their perceptions of Peace4Kids. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), the theoretical framework of the study, provided a basis for recognizing the importance of changes in the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster children as they participated in the Saturday Core Program.

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter, divided into three major sections, presents the data generated during the research study. The sections—Parent Perspectives, Teacher Perspectives, and Administrator Perspectives—disseminate participants' thoughts, feelings, and opinions (Hatch, 2002) regarding program benefits and the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster children. The cumulative findings articulated in this chapter provide evidence that answers the study's research question: *What are the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills?*

Parent Perspectives

Parent perceptions about the impact of Peace4Kids are conveyed in this section. Parents acknowledged the importance of program benefits for their children, and indicated that the organization promoted social-emotional development through a variety of shared experiences. Additionally, parents recognized that selected tasks and activities fostered their children's acquisition of pre-academic skills.

Program Benefits

Program benefits, described by Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) as "interventions or services that seek to achieve some particular outcome(s) in response to a perceived educational, social, or commercial problem" (p. 8), were provided for the youth at the Saturday Core Program. Peace4Kids staff members used a positive approach to interact with the children, according to parents. They also recognized that the organization utilized internal and external resources to establish consistency, structure, and community for young foster youth.

Positive Approach. Parents indicated that the administrators, teachers, and volunteers at the Saturday Core Program emphasized their children's positive attributes and encouraged their children to confront personal challenges with a positive approach. Jane explained the impact of support and optimism at Peace4Kids

> [for] those hours that they're here, they see people that look like them, that talk
> like them, that may have been through the same things as them. They see them
> doing good, and that's why it's so important for them to be here . . . if you're
> around positive energy all the time, you can't help but to be a positive person.
> (Parent Interview 3, 2011)

Peace4Kids administrators, teachers, and volunteers reminded Jane's children that anxiety and pessimism could prevent them from reaching their potential and achieving personal goals (Parent Interview 3, 2011). Jane noted that Zaid and Lynn, Peace4Kids administrators, offered frequent and sincere praise to her children and reminded them, "You're going to be great. If I have to keep telling you, you're going to be great until you're great, that's what I'm going to do" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Consistency. Parents reported that the Peace4Kids community established a culture of consistency for their children. When confronted by inappropriate and problematic behaviors, administrators did not expel children from the Saturday Core Program; rather, Peace4Kids provided dependable support for children and parents within the structure of the organization. Christine remembered that her son often reacted to boundaries and rules belligerently as a result of diagnosed psychological problems related to prior abuse and neglect. She elaborated that when he began attending the Saturday Core Program

> [he] would act out and fight. He was very aggressive. And they didn't give up.
> Every program that—and I kid you not. Every program that he's been in, they've
> been asked to have him removed, and Peace4Kids has been the only program that
> has not asked him to leave. (Parent Interview 1, 2011)

Camille concurred, recognizing that at Peace4Kids, "[I] don't get that phone call, 'You need to come get your kid because I can't handle your kid.' I've never had a call like that. Never. And my kids are very challenging. They have some serious behavior problems" (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Parents acknowledged that the Four Core Concepts were purposefully and consistently integrated into each session of the Saturday Core Program. Camille categorized the morning and closing meetings as "a crash course for kids" and a time to facilitate discussion of the Core Concepts. She recalled one particular Saturday when her children learned about "keeping their hands to themselves . . . [and] respect." At the conclusion of this Core Program session, her children received Peace4Kids certificates that Camille proudly displayed on the walls of her home (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Parents recognized that the Four Core Concepts positively influenced their children's personal conduct and interactions with others. Christine, for example, recognized *Personal Responsibility* as an idea that she consistently reinforced at home. She claimed that "respecting other people's boundaries" has been a difficult concept for her children to grasp, and that she has "to drill that in, even though sometimes, you know, it's repetitive" (Parent Interview 1, 2011). Christine believed that Peace4Kids' emphasis on *Personal Responsibility* has helped her children to understand the importance of being accountable for their behaviors and interactions (Parent Interview 1, 2011).

Resources. Foster parent Camille expressed heartfelt gratitude for the financial and material support that Peace4Kids has given to her family. She remembered receiving a telephone call from the creative program manager, Lynn, during the holiday season to ask what her children wanted for Christmas. Two weeks later, her children were surprised at a Peace4Kids holiday celebration with several gifts: a basketball, a truck, and a Target gift card. "[At] Christmas, they've been very, very good to my kids," Camille remarked (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Camille also emotionally conveyed a story about "an unexpected blessing" she received during the Thanksgiving holiday this year. She recollected

[things] was kind of tight this year for me. I thought I wasn't going to be able to

have Thanksgiving for the kids, not telling anybody I was going to maybe do

some chicken or something like that. And God is really good. Peace4Kids was

like, "Ms. Camille, you want a basket?" And it was a gift card in there to go get

the turkey and the cranberries and some juice . . . I wasn't expecting it, and I

wasn't going to tell nobody. I just was going—they wasn't going to eat

something, but it might not be no turkey. But they made it happen. (Parent

Interview 2, 2011)

Additionally, Camille acknowledged the Peace4Kids t-shirts that her children were given when they began attending the Saturday Core Program. She also recognized the breakfast, snack, and lunch that Peace4Kids provides for her children each week. She said, "I know it's costing them to feed all these kids, but it helps a lot" (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Structure. Parents acknowledged that the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids provided structure for their children. Christine identified Peace4Kids as "part of the [children's] somewhat structured life" (Parent Interview 1, 2011). She added that her family looked forward to being at the Core Program each Saturday, and that her children expressed disappointment if they were unable to attend. She recalled, "Even days when they don't go, they're like, 'Huh? We're not going to Peace for Kids? Aw'" (Parent Interview 1, 2011).

In addition, parents shared that structure within the Saturday Core Program itself provided benefits for their children. Parents cited classroom routines such as lining up quietly

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for lunch as important for their children. When teachers, volunteers, and administrators

reminded children that pushing and shoving were not allowed at Peace4Kids, children usually

heeded the reminder and refrained from physical contact (Parent Interview 2, 2011). Camille

acknowledged that following directions is a difficult task for her children, and she appreciated

the extra practice that Peace4Kids provided for her children during the Saturday Core Program

(Parent Interview 2, 2011).

       Community. Parents felt that their children were unconditionally loved and cared for by

the entire Peace4Kids community at the Saturday Core Program. Camille, for example,

appreciated that teachers and administrators consistently dialogued with her regarding her

children's behavior, program participation, and progress (Parent Interview 2, 2011). Camille

believed that her children were positively influenced by the warmth and concern they

experienced at Peace4Kids. She remarked, "If somebody is taking the time to share and give

them love and affection, even if it's only one day out of the week, it's the little things that count

because it's going to impact them" (Parent Interview 2, 2011). The love and affection

demonstrated by the Peace4Kids staff prompted Camille's children to reciprocate thoughtfully

and compassionately to other children and adults at the Saturday Core Program (Parent Interview

2, 2011).

       Christine told a poignant story that epitomized the love and care that her children

experienced as members of the Peace4Kids community. One morning, Christine loaded her

children into her car and began the drive to the recreation complex. As she stopped at a red light,

her son opened the car door, jumped into the street, and started to run. She followed him for a

short distance, but was unable to keep up with him. Distraught, Christine brought the rest of her

children to the Saturday Core Program, told staff members that her son jumped from her car and ran away, and asked if he had shown up at the recreation complex. Lynn comforted Christine, saying, "No, he hasn't come here yet, but we're going to help you look for him" (Parent Interview 1, 2011). With the assistance of Zaid, Lynn, and various volunteers, Camille located her son and brought him back to Peace4Kids.

Social-Emotional Development

Parents acknowledged that Peace4Kids positively impacted foster youths' social-emotional development, the developmentally and culturally appropriate ability to manage emotions, relate to adults, relate to peers, and feel good about self (Brault, 2009). Young foster children's peer relationships afforded them opportunities to engage in conflict resolution and to be held accountable for their decisions and actions.

Peer Relationships. The opportunity to construct relationships with other youth in foster care was cited by parents as a strength of the Saturday Core Program. Christine commented that Peace4Kids diminished the isolation that her children sometimes felt as foster youth. She stated that they now recognize that "there are always going to be children that don't live with their mom and dad" (Parent Interview 1, 2011).

Jane mentioned that the friendships her children established at Peace4Kids changed their negative perceptions of foster care. She noted that the Saturday Core Program provided "an opportunity to open up to see that there are kids that are in the same situation as them, that you can have fun and achieve even though you're in foster care" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

According to Camille, Peace4Kids offered a safe space for youth to discuss changes in their foster care placements and birth families. She recalled that one Saturday, a young boy told

his friends that he was currently "in placement," but that after Christmas, he was returning to his birth family. When his friends asked him what he meant when he said he was going home, the boy talked about his personal experience with his birth family. Camille cited this conversation as an example of "kids [teaching] other kids" about foster care (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Conflict resolution. Parents indicated that Peace4Kids gave their children techniques to resolve conflict in peaceful ways. Allison remarked that her youngest son began to use deep breathing to soothe himself when he was angry or upset. In the midst of emotional episodes, Allison noted that her son was less confrontational, and that "he'll relax and calm down and then he'll come and talk to me" (Parent Interview 7, 2012). She said that "[he] never did that . . . [he] has changed" since he began attending the Saturday Core Program (Parent Interview 7, 2012). Jane stated that Peace4Kids explicitly taught her children how to settle arguments and how to express contrition. She commented, "They've given [the children] the skills and things that they need . . . they tell you, 'Okay, take these steps to calm yourself down. Take these steps to apologize to the other person'" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Camille mentioned that when she dropped off and picked up her children, she didn't witness arguing and fighting; rather, she observed appropriate and friendly interactions. She attributed the tranquility at Peace4Kids to the examples set by the adults. Camille said, "For some reason, here, it's like the Peace for Kids name, it fits this program. It really, really does" (Parent Interview 2, 2011). Martha also acknowledged the importance of the teachers, administrators, and volunteers at the Saturday Core Program. She stated that they allow conflict to occur so that children have opportunities to express their frustrations and "to work out their little problems" (Parent Interview 10, 2012).

Accountability. Rules and consequences were recognized by parents as ways to influence children's behaviors and to promote safety at the Saturday Core Program. Rules and consequences set the foundation for a culture of accountability and responsibility, according to Jane. She continued

> [when] [teachers, administrators, and volunteers] tell them these are the rules and
> you have to follow them . . . they reinforce them. Every time we have Peace for
> Kids, they have to give them information, like, "Tell me some of the rules." And
> the kids literally have to know them. (Parent Interview 3, 2011)

> Jane also acknowledged that teachers and administrators followed through when children broke the rules at Peace4Kids. She stated, "If you violate the rules, we show you that there's consequences behind it, and they actually stick to their consequences" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Camille noticed that children were held accountable for breaking the rules at Peace4Kids. She remarked that when children misbehaved during the Saturday Core Program, they were not expelled from the organization; rather, the administrators provided an immediate and relevant consequence for the misbehavior. She said

> [Zaid and Lynn] don't just like, "Oh, they can't come back." They [tell parents],
> "Okay, maybe just we'll let them not go on the fieldtrip . . . but they can still
> come to Peace for Kids. We just won't let them go on the fieldtrip because of
> their behavior." And that's understandable because any place you go, there's
> consequences. (Parent Interview 2, 2011)

Jane acknowledged that it was important for children to become accountable for their actions, to know and understand the relationship between negative behaviors and their repercussions. She stated that, "When they come here, there's rules. There's consequences. There's this. If you do this, you do that. If you don't act right, you can't go on a trip. If you don't act right, you're suspended" (Parent Interview 3, 2011). Jane categorized the expectations as "very high" at Peace4Kids, and she believed that these expectations helped children to follow the organization's rules. "You don't want to mess that up," she remarked, "because then you don't get to participate in the fun time" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Pre-Academic Skills

Parents indicated that Peace4Kids helped their children to acquire pre-academic skills, a set of competencies that includes listening, oral language, reading, and writing (Espinosa & Burns, 2003). At the Saturday Core Program, young foster children chose literacy and cocurricular tasks and activities that interested them.

Literacy. Parents recognized that Peace4Kids positively impacted their children's interest in books and literacy. Allison recalled that when she picked up her children from the recreation complex, they frequently told her about books their teachers read to them during the Saturday Core Program. Although her children were not always able to remember the titles of the books, they urged Allison to "go look for the book" (Parent Interview 7, 2012).

Camille remembered that Peace4Kids once attended a book fair, and each of her children came home with a book. She expressed the importance of the book fair for her children, saying, "You teaching them to be responsible, to love reading. If you implant that in them now while

they little, it goes a long way because literacy is a big problem in youth" (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

Cocurricular program. Parents expressed an appreciation of the cocurricular experiences that augmented the academic components of the Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program. Activities such as camping, cooking, dancing, and going on field trips presented children with options for creative expression and experiential learning (Parent Interview 1, 2011; Parent Interview 2, 2011; Parent Interview 10, 2012). Martha explained that Peace4Kids provided her children with opportunities to access and discover things that were typically unavailable to them (Parent Interview 10, 2012). Christine agreed, stating, "It helps the children to get exposure that I wouldn't be able to give them" (Parent Interview 1, 2011).

Parents reported that their children eagerly anticipated the Saturday Core Program because Peace4Kids encouraged creativity and imagination. Completing simple arts and crafts projects, singing, and dancing produced feelings of joy and satisfaction in Camille's children (Parent Interview 2, 2011). Martha spoke about her children's excitement as they planted seeds in cups of dirt at Peace4Kids and patiently watched the seeds grow into plants at home (Parent Interview 10, 2012). Camille noted that Peace4Kids administrators, teachers, and volunteers regularly took photographs of the children engaged in activities, and that her children enjoyed looking at themselves in the pictures afterward (Parent Interview 2, 2011). Camille also recalled that her children often rushed to show off their Peace4Kids creations, smiling and yelling, "Nana, look what I made!" or "Nana, we did this!" (Parent Interview 2, 2011).

According to parents, their children actively participated in a range of hands-on activities at the Saturday Core Program. For example, Martha said that her 11-year-old son developed an

interest in cooking as a result of Peace4Kids; now, he aspires to be a chef (Parent Interview 10, 2012). Christine stated that her older children have gone on overnight camping trips during the summer with Peace4Kids, and that her younger children are looking forward to their turn (Parent Interview 1, 2011). Martha recognized that Peace4Kids field trips provided her children with opportunities to practice appropriate conduct in diverse settings and with a variety of people (Parent Interview 10, 2012). In addition, Martha believed that field trips allowed her children to act as leaders by modeling proper behavior and decorum for younger Peace4Kids participants (Parent Interview 10, 2012).

Choices. Parents revealed that Peace4Kids allowed their children to choose curricular and cocurricular experiences that interested them. Jane explained the selection process at Peace4Kids, stating, "They let you make the choice . . . to do something different, or if you like doing the same thing, keep it going" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Jane said that when her children selected preferred activities, they displayed renewed enthusiasm about learning, and they sometimes discovered hidden talents. She recalled that her son, who had always struggled at school, developed an aptitude for chess. She remembered

> [w]ho would have thought that this kid who couldn't do his timetables would get
> smart enough to learn how to play chess? But that was something he wanted to
> do. We bought him a chess set. You like chess? Let's go. (Parent Interview 3,
> 2011)

Jane believed that when her children engaged in preferred activities at Peace4Kids, other aspects of their lives, such as school and peer relationships, were positively impacted. When her

children found activities that they enjoyed, she told them, "Hone in on that because maybe that's what's going to bring you out of all the trouble that you're having" (Parent Interview 3, 2011).

Teacher Perspectives

Teacher perspectives about the impact of Peace4Kids are iterated in this section. Teachers reported that program benefits encouraged the normative cognitive, social, and emotional development of the foster youth that participated in the Saturday Core Program. Additionally, teachers recognized that social-emotional competence was promoted through a diverse array of experiential tasks. Finally, teachers acknowledged that pre-academic skills were cultivated through innovative activities that stimulated the curricular and cocurricular interests of the organization's young participants.

Program Benefits

Teachers reported that it was important to incorporate a consistent and positive approach when they interacted with the youths at the Saturday Core Program. By regularly focusing on children's assets, teachers provided a foundation for young people to establish trusting relationships with the adult staff members at Peace4Kids.

Positive approach. Teachers in the Peace Garden utilized a positive discipline approach that encouraged pro-social and cooperative behaviors. Donna found that this approach mirrored her own beliefs about discipline. She elaborated, "From my background you don't use 'no,' you let the children know what else, what the other alternative things are . . . in a positive light" (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Donna acknowledged that it was not always easy to affirm children, especially when their negative behaviors compromised the classroom environment.

She confronted these behaviors by utilizing redirection and frequently achieved positive results (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Each session of the Saturday Core Program provided opportunities for teachers to recognize children that engaged in pro-social and cooperative behaviors. Roberta recalled that she identified and praised Peace Garden children whose actions exemplified the Four Core Concepts. She explained, "We would give them examples of like, 'I saw Lawrence being personally responsible because he picked up his toys afterwards'" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Consistency. Teachers indicated that Peace4Kids' Saturday Core Program provided consistency for children who often experienced multiple placement and school changes. Roberta explained, "No matter where they're at, no matter what home they're in, they always know this is the family that I'm going to see every Saturday" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). She recalled that Peace4Kids teachers were required to make a one-year commitment to the Saturday Core Program, and she believed that was an important part of the consistency the children experienced. Roberta stated, "You're going to come, and we're going to be in your life every Saturday for the next year" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Teachers also utilized consistency as they managed the classroom environment and interacted with the young children in the Peace Garden. Donna stated that because the children tended to act impulsively and emotionally, it was essential for her to remain composed and objective. Donna told the Peace Garden children that she understood their challenges, that she was concerned about their safety and comfort, and that she was available to help them (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). When challenging behaviors presented in the classroom, she spoke to the children in a calm way, without raising her voice or displaying anger, disappointment, or

frustration. The consistency of temperament and tone helped the children to seek Donna's

assistance when they needed it (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Trust. Teachers revealed that they struggled to establish trust with many of the children

at the Saturday Core Program. Consequently, teachers employed a variety of strategies that

promoted the construction of healthy, reciprocal, and trusting relationships with the Peace

Garden children.

Roberta found that she had to engage the girls and boys in different ways to generate

trust. She recalled that girls tended to equate physical proximity with trust, and that this

sometimes reinforced immature behaviors. She iterated

> [the girls] . . . want to sit in your lap, and they want to play with your hair. They
>
> want to do all these things. So I think for me, it was trying to help the girls build
>
> healthy relationships apart from being babied. (Teacher Interview 4, 2012)

She emphasized the girls' independence through frequent reminders about "big girl behavior"

and redirection. Roberta realized that the boys in the Peace Garden group were largely tactile

learners who enjoyed manipulating objects with their hands. As a result, Roberta helped the

boys to construct buildings, cars, airplanes, and roads from blocks and Legos. Roberta asked

open-ended questions about the boys' block and Lego creations. She reported that most of the

conversations were spontaneous and casual; however, one conversation with a timid child

revealed that he was developing trust. Roberta recalled

> [one] of the boys, he didn't really talk about much stuff with me. And then at one
>
> point I think when we were building, he said . . . "I'm going to see my other

mom" . . . he directed that statement toward me. He never directed that statement

toward anybody else. (Teacher Interview 4, 2012)

Donna noticed that as children in the Peace Garden began to trust her, they interacted

with her differently. The children began to ask her for help in times of confusion or conflict, and

they reached out to her for physical comfort in the form of hugs. Donna commented that after a

few weeks of teaching in the Peace Garden, she could see trust being developed with other

teachers, administrators, and volunteers (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Social-Emotional Development

Teachers reported that Peace4Kids provided opportunities for young foster youth to

practice social and emotional skills such as self-regulation and risk-taking. As a result, children

in foster care were able to develop persistence and social-emotional competence.

Social-emotional skills. According to the teachers at Peace4Kids, the development of

children's social-emotional skills provided a foundation for learning and academic progress.

Donna summarized the significance of the social and emotional domains of functioning as she

explained, "You can't teach a child unless you address all the circumstances that make up that

child. If they're not socially emotionally competent they're not going to learn anything"

(Teacher Interview 9, 2012). She further stated that social and emotional skills help young

children to integrate increasingly complex academic content, such as applying learned skills,

following multi-step directions, and solving problems. Donna also remarked that children who

lacked social-emotional competence were more likely to experience difficulties as they

transitioned to elementary school (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Because social-emotional

competence was identified as a necessary prerequisite for learning, Peace Garden teachers

selected classroom activities that concurrently promoted social and emotional development and delivered academic content (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

   Self-regulation. Teachers reported that children often lacked sufficient self-regulation strategies to manage their own feelings, actions, and learning (Baker et al., 2003) while at the Saturday Core Program. Donna observed that children sometimes used their bodies to communicate emotions, including frustration, anger, and sadness (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Roberta noted that the Peace Garden children utilized maladaptive behaviors such as crying, lying on the ground, and isolating in response to stimuli from teachers and peers (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

   Though episodes of physical confrontation were infrequent, Roberta remembered an instance when one boy, John, violently pushed one of his peers. When she saw John shove his friend, Roberta knew he was unable to regulate his feelings or his body. She informed John that he needed to come outside with her until he could compose himself, but he refused. "You can help yourself and walk out," Roberta told John, "or I can carry you out." As he again refused to move, Roberta carried John outside. She observed that when she held John against her body, he calmed down and was able to talk about the pushing incident. After several minutes, John came back into the classroom; he read quietly in the corner for a few minutes before eventually rejoining the group (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

   Roberta recalled that some children shed tears when they were unable to regulate their emotions. She recollected that one young girl in the Peace Garden, Sarah, had difficulty controlling her feelings in various situations. Roberta said that if Sarah didn't want to do

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something, or if she didn't get her way, or if she experienced conflict with her peers, she cried. Roberta struggled to help Sarah regulate herself. She stated

> [for] me as a teacher, I know it was really hard to not just baby [her] and, "Oh, it's
> okay" . . . I had to say, "You have a choice to make now. I'm really sorry you're
> sad, but you have to make a choice to step out of that." So I think for me, my
> goal was try to help talk to each other about what was going on. (Teacher
> Interview 4, 2012)

Donna indicated that in her limited time as a Peace Garden teacher, she has witnessed increased self-regulation in the children. She acknowledged that the children prefer to "use their bodies" to communicate their feelings rather than talk to each other, so Donna has modeled and practiced active listening with the children (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). As a result, she has seen behavior changes. "They started off real aggressive," she noted. "There are some that are moving, but they're not hitting out at their friends anymore" (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Risk-taking. Roberta believed that the Saturday Core Program provided opportunities for young children to engage in new and different learning tasks. Roberta stated that she "[laid] foundations and [helped] them take more risks that they might not be able to take in classrooms" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). For example, she remembered that children wanted to try to read out loud in front of their peers, regardless of their skill levels. Roberta said that children felt safe in the small Peace Garden group, and they were comfortable "[taking] that risk . . . [trying] to sound out things out loud" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Persistence. Teachers commented that some of the children in the Peace Garden were unable to persist when challenging activities were introduced. Both Donna and Roberta reported

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that the children were discouraged when presented with tasks that required sustained attention and focus (Teacher Interview 4, 2012; Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Roberta noticed that some of the kids became easily aggravated and they told her, "I can't do it. Miss, you do it for me" or "You draw it for me" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Sometimes, the type of activity or project presented by the teachers influenced the children's persistence. Roberta found that giving the Peace Garden children open-ended projects that maximized their creativity and imagination positively impacted their persistence. In contrast, close-ended projects often evoked the children's annoyance and frustration. Roberta remarked that children became impatient with close-ended projects because they felt that their completed work was "never going to look exactly like that" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Donna discovered that the children's persistence increased when she selected tasks and activities that clearly delineated a beginning, middle, and end process (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Roberta acknowledged that when she encouraged the children and provided appropriate scaffolding for them, persistence improved (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Additionally, Roberta realized that engaging the children physically in tasks such as building and assembling resulted in greater focus and enhanced persistence (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Roberta talked about a particularly active little boy who became engrossed in making a necklace. Jeffrey, who had great difficulty sitting still or paying attention for sustained periods of time, surprised Roberta. She noted that

Jeffrey spent like 15 minutes one day trying to get like a string into a small little

bead, and he wanted that string on that bead for his necklace because that was

going to be the middle bead . . . Even when I was like, "I'll hold it for you," he's

like, "No, no, no, I'm going to do it myself." (Teacher Interview 4, 2012)

Pre-Academic Skills

Teachers disclosed that the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids promoted student

engagement and presented a variety of opportunities for children to acquire pre-academic skills

in literacy and math activities and lessons.

Student engagement. Teachers recognized that children responded more positively to

learning when concepts were taught in interesting and imaginative ways. Roberta commented

that the children were more engaged when she presented lessons "in a fun way, without saying,

'You're learning,'" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Donna stated that she purposefully selected

activities that promoted creativity and were "not the cookie-cutter." She added that children

enjoyed learning when concepts were taught in fun, unconventional ways (Teacher Interview 9,

2012).

Roberta believed that children felt more optimistic about school and learning as they

participated in artistic and inventive activities (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Donna agreed,

noting that the Peace Garden children enjoyed themselves while they acquired necessary skills

that supported their transition to elementary school (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Literacy. Teachers revealed that the Peace Garden curricular program emphasized

literacy and afforded numerous opportunities for children to demonstrate reading, writing,

listening, and speaking skills during the Saturday Core Program. Roberta indicated that she

purposefully created activities and projects that encouraged literacy development for all four-,

five-, and six-year-olds at Peace4Kids. Tasks such as drawing, discussing, painting, cutting, gluing, and reading encouraged children to display their knowledge (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Scaffolding, the practice of adjusting instructional methods and tasks so that children can develop new skills (Bos & Vaughn, 2006), was regularly utilized by the teachers at Peace4Kids. Roberta indicated that scaffolding helped her to best meet the needs of the young children in Peace Garden. She described the range of literacy skills present during a typical session of the Saturday Core Program:

> There were some kids who were [five and] six years old, but they're reading way
>
> higher than that . . . but then we also had the opposite where we had kids who
>
> were five and six and couldn't sound out the letters of their name. (Teacher
>
> Interview 4, 2012)

Roberta considered factors such as maturity, social skills, emotional capacity, and cognition as she supported each child's literacy development. She recalled that some children mastered complex tasks such as reading sentences and paragraphs independently, while others required assistance with fundamental skills such as letter/sound correspondence and blending sounds together to read simple words. As Roberta identified each child's strengths and challenges, she differentiated instruction and learning tasks appropriately (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Donna found that as she incorporated scaffolding, Peace Garden children "still [learned] the concepts that's geared for successful transition into the higher grade level" (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Teachers acknowledged that literacy development at Peace4Kids was dependent on a variety of interpersonal factors. According to Roberta, frustrations, disagreements, and encouragement were frequently revealed during oral reading instruction and practice. She

remembered that children generally supported struggling readers that exhibited kindness and friendship to their peers in the Peace Garden. Conversely, children often responded negatively to struggling readers that misbehaved or created conflict within the Peace Garden. Additionally, Roberta noted that children encouraged struggling readers if they "were pretty much doing it well and just needed some help" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). However, when children's basic skills were inadequate and explicit instructional support was necessary, peers occasionally expressed impatience or resentment toward the struggling readers (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Social, emotional, and environmental factors also impacted literacy development at the organization. Donna noticed that the Peace Garden children became restless if she tried to read an entire book at one time. She said that when the children began to fidget and move around the room, she stopped reading and started a different learning activity (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). Roberta commented that she tried to provide a space for the children to read independently, but that the recreation center did not provide an environment conducive to silent reading. Although she supplied a variety of books, Roberta remarked that it was often too chaotic and noisy at the recreation center for most of the children to read quietly (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

In addition to reading, teachers purposefully included writing in the literacy curriculum at Peace4Kids. Roberta recalled that the Peace Garden children practiced writing words and drawing pictures on oversized pieces of construction paper. She frequently asked the children questions about their writing or drawing, such as, "Can you tell me about this?" These open-ended questions often encouraged further discussion and promoted children's written and oral language skills (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Teachers reported that children at the Saturday Core Program struggled to communicate effectively with their peers. Donna remarked that the young children in Peace Garden often lacked the vocabulary to communicate orally; consequently, the children frequently chose to communicate physically (Teacher Interview 9, 2012). She indicated that as the children matured, they were able to articulate their feelings more clearly; however, the four and five-year-old children needed explicit modeling and direct language support from the Peace4Kids staff (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Teachers gave children at the Saturday Core Program many opportunities to practice and integrate oral language skills. Roberta recognized that the boys in Peace Garden conversed most comfortably while they were simultaneously engaged in kinesthetic or tactile activities. She remembered, "I always felt like I had to engage them in whatever they were doing . . . I [would] go over there and start building stuff with them and ask them what they're building and why they're building it" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Donna found that the Peace Garden children produced more oral language when she provided a topic for discussion and the children communicated their thoughts and feelings. She elaborated

> [it's] open and [they] can contribute. So having them have that forum where, you
>
> know, they know what I have to say or contribute is important and I'm important
>
> to listen to what you have to say, what you have to input. (Teacher Interview 9,
>
> 2012)

Roberta incorporated oral communication skills into her lesson plans for the Saturday Core Program. For example, she asked children to tell her how many pieces of paper they used for an art project or which crayons they used to color their pictures (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

At the conclusion of the Saturday Core Program, Roberta sometimes encouraged the children to describe how they communicated effectively. She recalled that one child told her, "Well, you know, when he took that toy from me, I said, 'No, that's mine,' and then he gave it back to me" (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Donna noted that as the children's speaking skills improved and as they produced more oral language, their active listening skills remained deficient. She reported that the children did not often demonstrate respect for their peers, and consequently struggled to develop close friendships with other youth at Peace4Kids. Donna said that she deliberately included classroom activities that fostered concepts such as self-reflection, consideration, and trust amongst the young children in the Peace Garden. Once they demonstrated an understanding of these concepts, Donna strengthened the children's listening skills. She said, "I'm . . . working on their active listening skills . . . being able to respect each other, and as we're speaking, you know, we listen to each other" (Teacher Interview 9, 2012).

Math. Teachers reported that the Peace Garden curriculum included math ideas and concepts, but little formal instruction in computation or problem solving. Activities such as counting objects, painting pictures, and creating math problems provided children with opportunities to reinforce basic skills. Roberta combined numbers and movement when she encouraged the children to use their fingers to count to 100 using groups of ten. She commented that she asked children to identify shapes, colors, and numbers as they participated in various activities (Teacher Interview 4, 2012).

Administrator Perspectives

In this section, administrator perceptions of Peace4Kids are disseminated. Administrators disclosed that a variety of program benefits helped young foster youth to more readily meet the developmental tasks associated with childhood. In addition, they identified several ways that Peace4Kids influenced the social-emotional competence of children and recognized the positive impact of recently implemented curricular and cocurricular changes.

Program Benefits

Administrators acknowledged that resources donated by internal and external providers were an integral component of the organization, allowing Peace4Kids to better serve the young foster youth that participate in the Saturday Core Program. Furthermore, administrators reported that consistency, modeled by adult staff members, promoted a sense of trust in foster children.

Resources. As a nonprofit community-based organization, Peace4Kids accepted monetary and material donations from individuals including former volunteers, small businesses, corporations, and foundations. Peace4Kids used these contributions to provide foster children and their families with necessities such as household appliances, food, clothes, and shoes. In some instances, items were distributed to families who requested them. Lynn contended, "The parents and the kids feel comfortable letting us know, 'This is where I am. This is what I need'" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). In other instances, Peace4Kids teachers or volunteers observed behaviors, such as children hoarding food, or they noticed that a child's clothes were ill fitting or worn. When these observations were made, Lynn said, "We just are mindful and when we notice something we'll step in or ask" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

Zaid classified the holistic approach as a "first line of defense" against poverty and other

social ills often facing young foster children and their parents (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

He stated that providing for foster families experiencing economic hardship personified the

organization's Four Core Concepts, especially *Community as Family* (Administrator Interview 5,

2012). Lynn said that the level of community support validated Peace4Kids, its mission, and its

families. She remarked, "People know what we're doing, they want to give us things so that we

can give to our families . . . that's what makes this so much better" (Administrator Interview 6,

2012).

In addition, Peace4Kids provided personal care items, school supplies, tutoring, and

household goods when DCFS was unable to give families necessary provisions and services.

Lynn explained, "Sometimes kids get reunited with their parents and . . . it's unfortunate the

system didn't set the [family] up for success, so, you know, we've stepped in in those cases"

(Administrator Interview 6, 2012). In those situations, Peace4Kids' holistic approach

compensated for an agency that has been devastated by budget cuts and insufficient personnel.

Consistency. Administrators stated that the Saturday Core Program provided

consistency for children whose lives were often characterized by trauma, changes, and

movement (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Zaid noted that Peace4Kids gave foster children

stability that is "not the norm" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Lynn explained the

importance of consistency for children who attend Peace4Kids. She said

> [through] their transient lifestyle and going from home to home, school to school,
>
> foster home to foster home, or whether they're placed back with their biological
>
> parents, that's a lot of transition. It's a lot going on. This is something consistent.

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So the same people, the same setup, the same vibe. (Administrator Interview 6, 2012)

Although the teachers and volunteers changed periodically, Zaid believed that the consistent culture of the organization positively impacted the young children in the Peace Garden. He claimed that

[over] time you will see how a kid can move from being very caught up in the chaos and confused and not knowing how to respond to different people to understanding how different people operate, being able to negotiate with people differently, being able to set their intention for the day. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Lynn added that children perceive the organization's consistency as evidence that administrators, teachers, and volunteers at the Saturday Core Program genuinely cared about them. She posited that the concern demonstrated at Peace4Kids frequently contradicted children's prior experiences in the foster care system. According to Lynn, many children felt that their previous foster parents only tolerated them "because they wanted a check" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). However, at the Saturday Core Program, children recognized that the Peace4Kids staff "actually [cared] about them" and "[wanted] to be there" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Lynn believed that when children encountered caring Peace4Kids administrators, teachers, and volunteers, children experienced the consistency often lacking in their homes (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

Trust. Administrators recognized that children at Peace4Kids did not easily trust adults. Zaid posited that there was a direct correlation between foster youths' tumultuous childhoods . . .

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and their reluctance to trust others. He categorized the interdependence in this way: "If you've experienced multiple traumas with adults in your life, that's like the last thing you want . . . stop pushing people on me that I don't trust, I don't feel comfortable with" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Recognizing that foster children required consistent encouragement in order to construct trusting relationships, Peace4Kids administrators incorporated a variety of approaches that promoted integrity and mutual respect between adults and children.

The institutional culture at Peace4Kids fostered trust among the organization's participants and staff members, according to Zaid (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). He noted that Peace Garden children felt comfortable asking him questions, requesting supplies, and soliciting help even though he did not interact with the young children regularly. Zaid discovered that

> [they] recognize that I'm a part of this thing, but it doesn't matter whether or not I'm here or not . . . they ultimately trust that folks that are in the Peace for Kids community will abide [by] these Four Core Concepts. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Lynn recognized that it was inadequate for teachers and support staff to merely be present at the Saturday Core Program. She modeled genuine care and concern for the organization's children through her words and actions. Lynn took time to discuss problems with the children, regardless of her demanding schedule. She commented

> [when] I'm doing 18 things and somebody runs up to me . . . instead of just, "I can't handle that right now," you know [I say], "Can you walk and talk with me?

or "Would you like to talk about it later," or . . . maybe right now I just have to stop and talk to them. (Administrator Interview 6, 2012)

Zaid found that specific praise and positive reinforcement strategies facilitated trust among parents, Peace4Kids staff members, and children. He discussed one male participant, Anthony, who began the Saturday Core Program as an angry child that had limited impulse control (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Zaid recalled that Anthony demonstrated social and emotional progress as he continued to attend Peace4Kids, and Zaid shared the young man's development with his uncle. His uncle said that he had noticed "a huge shift" in Anthony, and he stated

[he] really loves coming here. So we're really grateful that you guys stuck it out with him, because we know that he was a really difficult case. But he enjoys coming and he trusts you guys. He trusts you probably about as much as he trusts us, and we see him every day. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Zaid and Lynn agreed that establishing trust with the children at the Saturday Core Program was essential for continued social, emotional, and academic progress. In this trusting environment, children built relationships and understood that they were valued members of the Peace4Kids community (Administrator Interview 5, 2012; Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Zaid commented, "When I think about the things these kids have walked through and to still say, 'Hey, I'm showing up. I'm trying to build relationships. I want to build trust.' All those things, it's absolutely remarkable" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

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Social-Emotional Development

Peace4Kids administrators recognized that social-emotional competence is cultivated through support, accountability, and conflict resolution. As foster youth develop social-emotional skills, administrators posited that resiliency is promoted. As a result, children in foster care were empowered to discover their own voices and identities.

Social-emotional support. Administrators stated that they provided social and emotional support to Peace4Kids participants, such as collaborating with foster parents and coaching for young children. Zaid categorized the organization's support as a "critical component" in the growth and development of the Peace Garden children (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

Zaid stated that administrators often collaborated with foster parents to develop effective behavioral strategies for their children. He explained that in the course of a child's participation at Peace4Kids, administrators "will inevitably begin to pick up on tools that can work with a child, and inevitably we'll have a conversation with [the] foster parents" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). During these dialogues, Zaid typically made behavior modification suggestions based on actions and interactions he witnessed at the Saturday Core Program. Additionally, he asked parents questions regarding their children's behavior at home, such as, "I've noticed that these two brothers, when they get together they're having a serious problem, so how do you negotiate that at home?" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Reports, observations, and anecdotes helped Zaid to provide prompt and appropriate support for parents.

Accountability. Administrators reported that rules and consequences promoted accountability and structure at Peace4Kids. Zaid said that expectations for conduct were

generalized in the Four Core Concepts and were further specified in the Peace Contract; all parents and children read and signed the Peace Contract prior to participation (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Consequences were clearly delineated and pro-social behavior was encouraged and recognized (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Zaid explained that the organization's accountability structure was an extension of foster parents' home rules and consequences. This structure shaped behavior and created a safe environment for all children who attended the Saturday Core Program. He continued

> [you] know, we pass out warnings, so if they're not abiding by the Four Core
>
> Concepts and following the Peace Contract then they're asked to take a week off.
>
> And so they inevitably learn over time that no, these are the rules, and it's about
>
> keeping everybody safe, and so if you want to participate you have to follow these
>
> rules. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Lynn said that it was imperative for children to acknowledge the connections between their behaviors, emotions, responses, and consequences (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). She explained how an awareness of these relationships helped children to abide by the organization's rules. She commented that children understood "why they're feeling that way, and then if they reacted in a not-so-positive way what are the repercussions and how could they have done that differently, and then what are the consequences" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Lynn acknowledged that implementing rules and assigning consequences was frequently repetitive for teachers and volunteers. However, she understood that consistency increased the effectiveness of the organization's accountability structure (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

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Conflict resolution. Administrators utilized explicit strategies to promote peaceful conflict resolution at Peace4Kids. At various times, Zaid acted as a mediator, advisor, counselor, and coach for children experiencing discord. He recounted a particular incident he witnessed as he sat in the stands in the gymnasium one Saturday morning. Michael, a young man that "turns a corner very quickly," pushed a child during a game of basketball. When Zaid saw the confrontation, he came down from the stands and reminded Michael to ask for help from administrators or teachers instead of responding to conflict in a physical way. "You have to trust that that's what we're here for," Zaid told Michael. Later in the day, Michael had the same problem with the same child. Instead of retaliating physically, however, Michael found Zaid in the stands and said, "You told me to come up to you and ask you for help. This kid is initiating something." Zaid intervened on Michael's behalf, and the conflict was resolved. Reflecting on the incident, Zaid remarked, "For me to be able to give [Michael] some very specific coaching at the beginning of the day and for him to take that on . . . was brilliant" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

Voice. Zaid asserted that the Saturday Core Program empowered children to voice their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about their participation in the organization. He believed that when children freely expressed themselves to administrators, teachers, and volunteers, it was "a good sign of success" for Peace4Kids (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). He recalled that some foster children indicated they "don't do the group thing," and declined to attend the Saturday Core Program. Others felt anxious and overwhelmed by the number of people at Peace4Kids, and these children opted to discontinue their membership in the organization (Administrator Interview 5, 2012).

Zaid noted that children also spoke to him about their experiences with friends and staff members within the organization. For example, when children disagreed with the consequences given by adults at the Saturday Core Program, they dialogued with administrators about the fairness of the repercussions (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Zaid felt that these conversations positively impacted Peace4Kids participants. He said

> [what] an empowering thing it is for a youth to be able to come and say, "Hey,
> listen, I'm having this experience and I think I'm right and I'm willing to have a
> conversation about why I believe I'm right." (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Resilience. Administrators indicated that Peace4Kids fostered a spirit of resilience in the children that attended the Saturday Core Program. Children understood that teachers and volunteers would not give up on them, even when their behaviors did not reflect the Four Core Concepts or embody the Peace Contract. According to Zaid, the impact of Peace4Kids' unconditional acceptance was that children continued to try, despite the enormous obstacles they often faced (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). The organization recognized that resilience did not develop spontaneously; however, Zaid indicated that patience and determination encouraged this quality (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). He spoke emotionally of the children's resilience, saying

> [why] I do this work, what has inspired me over the years, is the fact that in the
> face of so much adversity what I witness is the power of the human spirit. And
> I've seen kids walk through some pretty horrible experiences and they still have
> this great capacity for love. And it's not to say that the path to trust and
> companionship and building relationships isn't a difficult one, I'm not saying that.

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But intellectually if I walked through some of the things these kids had walked

through I would probably be done. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Empowerment and identity. Administrators reported that some participants came to the

Saturday Core Program with a negative self-concept related to their experiences as a foster youth

(Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Lynn said that children at Peace4Kids frequently felt

confined by their circumstances and believed that people felt sorry for them (Administrator

Interview 6, 2012). She acknowledged that children's pasts were often characterized by abuse

and neglect; however, Lynn said that the organization refused to dwell on those negative

experiences. She summarized the Peace4Kids approach to children's detrimental pasts, stating,

"We get it . . . It's the reality, but let's move from there . . . We promote and support the youth

and look at all that [they] have to offer" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

At Peace4Kids, Lynn posited, children in foster care enjoyed the "freedom to . . . find out

who they are" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Lynn recalled that foster youth have identified

Peace4Kids as their family, and they have referred to the recreation complex as their safe place

(Administrator Interview 6, 2012). She noted that teachers and support staff at the organization

looked beyond traditional negative stereotypes of children in foster care; instead, they helped

children to discover who they were and what they were meant to do. The relationships and

support provided by teachers and volunteers positively impacted the participants' self esteem and

allowed the children "to see within themselves" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). As a result,

Lynn commented, children "[had] a whole different view on life and, you know, what is

attainable" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

Zaid maintained that children's identities changed as they were empowered to seize control of their lives for the four hours encompassing the Saturday Core Program (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). He explained that when children began to attend Peace4Kids, their self-identity conflicts diminished. While it was difficult for children to identify themselves as individuals with unique strengths and challenges, Peace4Kids created a positive group identity for them. Zaid summarized the organization's approach in this way: "We're going to take this self thing that you struggle with and we'll give you a group identity and then from that group identity you'll be able to see where your inherent strength is in a group" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). When children joined Peace4Kids, Zaid surmised, they developed an attachment to the organization and felt a sense of empowerment within the group.

The idea that group attachment empowered children was evidenced when Zaid interviewed a Peace4Kids alumna named Paula. Paula spoke honestly of the loneliness she faced as an adolescent, feeling embarrassed by her status as a foster child and isolated from her friends that lived in "typical" homes with their birth families. She concealed her foster care identity from friends and their families, and avoided invasive questions about her placement in the child protection system. Paula told Zaid, "When you come to Peace4Kids . . . all of a sudden you realize you're amongst other people that are your peers, and for the first time you recognize that there are other kids like you" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Paula found an identity at Peace4Kids, and over time, her perceptions of the foster care system evolved. She described her evolution, remarking, "All of a sudden my experience isn't 'woe is me,' my experience is 'Wow, look how much you've achieved in the face of all these obstacles'" (Administrator Interview 5).

After listening to Paula's story, Zaid acknowledged that Peace4Kids helped children discover their strengths:

It's okay to have the experiences that you've had, but that does not have to define your identity; it's a part of your experience, but it's a platform that you get to rise from and then create whatever you want to out of it. (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Pre-Academic Skills

Administrators noted that modifications to the curricular and cocurricular programs at Peace4Kids better met the needs of young foster children and aligned with the organization's logic model.

Curricular and cocurricular changes. Administrators identified changes to Peace4Kids' curricular and cocurricular programs as positive and beneficial for children attending the Saturday Core Program. Lynn contended that the development of the organization's logic model compelled the Board of Directors to hire certified educators and to extend its instructional calendar (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). She characterized these changes as "really investing in our kids in a different way and making sure that everything is pointing to those outcomes that we see for our kids and that they need" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

Lynn felt that qualified teachers were assets to the Saturday Core Program; she said that these educators brought knowledge and skills to the Saturday Core Program that allowed children to achieve the short, medium, and long-term outcomes as delineated in the organization's logic model. She reported that teachers utilized observations and informal

assessments to tailor assignments to best meet the needs of the children (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Additionally, Lynn revealed that Peace4Kids teachers incorporated ideas such as Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) to purposefully develop lessons and activities that engaged children in the learning process (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). She acknowledged that certified teachers imparted knowledge that enhanced and supplemented children's traditional school experiences (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Teachers' expertise positively impacted the children and made the Peace4Kids curricular and cocurricular programs unique and more effective (Administrator Interview 6, 2012).

Lynn stated that the decision to extend the Peace4Kids programming year has yielded positive results. She observed that the expanded schedule afforded children additional opportunities to attain the outcomes identified in the organization's logic model (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Additionally, administrators, teachers, and volunteers provided consistent social and emotional support to children throughout the year, and more closely observed children's growth as they progressed through the program (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Lynn reported that this change has allowed Peace4Kids to "have the outcomes that we intend and that we think are necessary for the kids" (Administrator Interview 6, 2012, p.16).

Summary

In Chapter Four, evidence was presented that answered this study's research question: *What are the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills?* Participants identified several ways that Peace4Kids positively impacted the foster youth that attended the Saturday Core Program. Trust, conflict resolution,

accountability, a positive approach, and resources were cited by two of the participant subgroups as providing children in foster care with opportunities to develop social-emotional competence and to acquire pre-academic skills.   All of the participant subgroups—parents, teachers, and administrators—identified consistency as a critical component of the Saturday Core Program, allowing foster youths to practice emerging social, emotional, and pre-academic skills. In addition, participants acknowledged the role of literacy in both the curricular and cocurricular programs at Peace4Kids.

Conclusion

The final chapter includes discussion and analysis of the data garnered in this research study. Utilizing attachment theory as a lens, insights about Peace4Kids and its impact on young foster children's social-emotional development and pre-academic skills are shared. Additionally, implications and suggestions for future research are iterated at the conclusion of the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of a nonprofit community-based organization serving foster youth. In order to evaluate the efficacy of the organization's programs, the research study examined the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of the organization on young foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. The perspectives of the participants provided evidence of the effectiveness of the organization's programs, and "[arrived] at judgments about their impact and worth" (Springer, 2010, p. 479).

Additionally, this study was conducted to promote change within the broader contexts of the foster care and child protection systems (Bell, 2007). The experiences of foster youth have been traditionally disregarded by lawmakers, advocates, clinicians, and educators (Pecora et al., 2003; Springer, 2010). The responses generated by parents, teachers, and administrators during data collection provided suggestions for changes to current practices, policies, and laws that impacted the lives of young foster children.

Organization of the Chapter

This final chapter discusses the results of the research study. It begins with a brief synopsis of the investigation, a review of the research question, and a summary of findings. Next, the concepts of community and family are explored, and young foster youths' relationships with peers, volunteers, teachers, and administrators are examined. Significant groups within Peace4Kids are then identified and additional findings are reported. Attachment theory, the

theoretical framework of the study, provides a basis for understanding the influence of group dynamics on foster children's acquisition of pre-academic skills and development of social-emotional competencies at the Saturday Core Program. The chapter concludes with the implications of the study and suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

This research study explored the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization in South Los Angeles, on the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster children. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, and administrators to authenticate foster youths' experiences and relationships (Stevenson, 2004) within Peace4Kids and to assess the extent to which the organization generated the inputs, outputs, and outcomes articulated in their logic model (See Appendix A.). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and provided participants with opportunities to elaborate on general topics with specific examples from their own lives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Parents, teachers, and administrators related their personal stories throughout the interviews, and their forthright responses illuminated the challenges and successes experienced by young foster children as they participated in the organization.

Research Question

This study sought to understand the influence of a nonprofit community-based organization, Peace4Kids, from the point of view of parents, teachers, and administrators. In order to comprehend foster youths' experiences and relationships within the context of Peace4Kids, the following research question was posed: *What are the perspectives of parents,*

teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on

foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills?

Summary of Findings

The study's findings indicated that parents, teachers, and administrators perceived that Peace4Kids positively impacted young foster youths that attended the Saturday Core Program. Specifically, the participants revealed that the relationships fostered within Peace4Kids created a community that actively promoted the development of social-emotional competence and the acquisition of pre-academic skills. Thus, the interactions among children, volunteers, parents, teachers, and administrators engendered feelings of kinship embodied by the organization's Four Core Concepts.

Community as Family

According to the study's participants, one of the Four Core Concepts, *Community as Family*, empowered adult members of Peace4Kids to construct positive relationships with young children that provided important social-emotional support including consistency, structure, and accountability. In addition, *Community as Family* presented children with opportunities to practice foundational skills such as conflict resolution, self-regulation, and risk-taking. Volunteers, teachers, and administrators at the Saturday Core Program encouraged children as they developed pre-academic competencies that included trust, persistence, and resilience. During semi-structured interviews, parents, teachers, and administrators affirmed that the Peace4Kids curricular and cocurricular programs complemented children's emerging social-emotional and pre-academic skills in a responsive and reciprocal atmosphere.

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, the study's participants often used the words "community" and "family" interchangeably as they described Peace4Kids. Parents, teachers, and administrators confirmed that the organization embodied the basic principles of community-common characteristics, established neighborhood destination, shared goals, and cultural identity (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011). The study's participants also acknowledged that the Peace4Kids staff acted as family, caring for children and fulfilling the traditional roles of parents/guardians at the Saturday Core Program (Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, 2011). However, parents, teachers, and administrators recognized that Peace4Kids' material, academic, psychological, social, and emotional support for foster families in South Los Angeles provided benefits for children that exceeded conventional definitions of community and family.

Parent Perspectives

Parents communicated that relationships were central to the community their children experienced at the Saturday Core Program. Volunteers, teachers, and administrators consistently demonstrated love and care as they interacted with their children. As a result, children felt happy and relaxed at Peace4Kids and wanted to return each weekend. A majority of parents said that their children viewed the organization as their family and a place where they felt appreciated and accepted. In addition, parents stated that their children talked excitedly about the Saturday Core Program during the week and expressed disappointment if they were unable to attend.

Parents believed that these relationships positively influenced their children. Volunteers, teachers, and administrators conveyed love and affection to the children at Peace4Kids, and parents felt that "the little things" impacted their children beyond the scope of the Saturday Core

Program. Because of the love and care their children experienced at Peace4Kids, children "blossomed" and were able to open up to others.

The security of these relationships allowed children to trust others; consequently, children were empowered to try new things. Parents believed that Peace4Kids provided their children with opportunities to discover what they were passionate about. At the Saturday Core Program, parents noted, children were encouraged to continue participation in selected curricular and cocurricular experiences that they enjoyed. Additionally, parents felt that their children were less likely to behave negatively when they were engaged in preferred activities with their peers.

Parents believed that the relationships established at Peace4Kids helped their children to develop self-worth and confidence. They reported that volunteers, teachers, and administrators provided genuine praise and encouragement for the children that resulted in improved self-esteem. Children exhibited persistence and resilience as a result of the unconditional love they experienced at the Saturday Core Program. Parents noted that the authentic care exhibited by Peace4Kids volunteers, teachers, and administrators included forgiveness. When children failed to abide by the organization's rules, appropriate consequences were given and children were subsequently welcomed back to the Saturday Core Program.

Teacher Perspectives

During the semi-structured interviews, teachers spoke about creating a smaller classroom community in the Peace Garden group within the larger Peace4Kids community. They identified understanding, trust, and consistency over time as important components of teacher-child relationships. Teachers acted as support systems and encouraged children to discuss their thoughts and feelings honestly. They guided collaborative discussions and facilitated appropriate

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interactions amongst the group members. An open and friendly setting was maintained that acknowledged children's unique qualities and supported their cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

The Four Core Concepts were introduced in the Peace Garden, and teachers believed that young children gained a rudimentary understanding of their role in the classroom. Teachers utilized the Core Concepts to construct a cooperative, responsive, and positive environment where children supported each other. When the Core Concepts were not evident in the classroom, teachers reminded children that the classroom community was negatively affected and offered suggestions for alternate behavior and choices.

Administrator Perspectives

Peace4Kids administrators identified several characteristics of community during the semi-structured interviews. At the Saturday Core Program, Peace Garden members established friendships with other children that were in foster care. The children shared common experiences as foster youth and as residents of the neighborhood where Peace4Kids is located. These relationships and similarities promoted a group identity that helped children to confront their personal struggles and to recognize their individual strengths. Administrators felt that peers, volunteers, and teachers supported children and helped them to acknowledge their unique qualities, to develop initiative, and to achieve their goals.

Organizational guidelines established behavior expectations for children and kept all Peace4Kids members safe, according to administrators. Children were expected to abide by the Four Core Concepts and the Peace Contract in order to participate in the Saturday Core Program. Administrators created a culture of accountability and children understood that appropriate,

succinct consequences were disseminated when rules were not followed. This accountability

structure created an affirmative community which empowered children to make choices about

their behavior and interactions with others.

Administrators reported that children recognized the Saturday Core Program as a setting

where they felt comfortable and secure and where volunteers, teachers, and administrators

genuinely cared for them. The kind and gentle support of staff members and peers allowed

children to discover their interests and to develop their personalities. As a result, children

described the recreation complex where the Saturday Core Program meets as their "safe place"

and identified the adult and youth members of Peace4Kids as their "family."

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Communities within Peace4Kids

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Participant responses to the study's research question affirmed that the relationships

established at the Saturday Core Program positively impacted the development of young foster

youths' social-emotional competencies and pre-academic skills. However, the semi-structured

interviews yielded additional insights regarding the interactions among other member groups

within the organization. Parents, teachers, and administrators noted that several small

communities developed within the larger Peace4Kids community. The relationships established

within these subordinate groups enhanced the fellowship that the organization nurtured at the

Saturday Core Program.

Volunteers as Community

A significant group of volunteers augmented the teachers and administrators at

Peace4Kids and created a "sense of family" for its members. In order to best meet the needs of

the foster youth at the Saturday Core Program, the organization provided training for volunteers,

educating them about the child protective system and gaps in treatment and assistance for children in foster care. In addition, the training taught volunteers to recognize the dynamics of caregiver-child relationships and to acknowledge the challenges that foster families face. As a result of this increased knowledge base, volunteers were able to offer appropriate and considerate support for Peace4Kids members.

Volunteers established relationships with children as they provided different services at Peace4Kids. Some volunteers supplied transportation to and from the Saturday Core Program, while others worked one-on-one with children in the classroom. In these situations, children and parents often expressed their feelings and concerns to volunteers. In response, volunteers became "the first line of defense" and assisted families in need by utilizing their training to assess the social, emotional, and material needs of Peace4Kids members. Volunteers informed administrators of families in need of assistance, and goods and services were procured accordingly.

Many volunteers remained with Peace4Kids for several years and witnessed children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth over time. Volunteers regularly communicated with teachers and administrators about the development of children in the Saturday Core Program, and children were recognized for representing the Four Core Concepts and for assuming leadership roles within each of the age-segregated groups. Volunteer roles gradually expanded as children progressed in the organization, and mentor relationships were established with teenaged participants. One parent characterized her daughter's volunteer mentor as "just like part of the family."

Parents as Community

As their children participated in the Saturday Core Program, parents developed a unique fellowship at Peace4Kids. At morning drop off and at afternoon pick up, parents shared their families' successes and challenges and provided encouragement to one another. More formal Peace4Kids gatherings allowed parents to discuss their positive and negative experiences with different neighborhood agencies and adjunct service providers. Additionally, parents acknowledged the struggles faced by families at Peace4Kids and provided social and emotional support to fellow foster parents at the Saturday Core Program.

Parents recognized that Peace4Kids supplied invaluable services to foster families in the South Los Angeles area, and they spoke highly of the Saturday Core Program to others. Parents recommended the organization to relatives, friends, and fellow foster parents as a place where children interacted with peers, engaged in curricular and cocurricular activities, and shared meals. As a result, the community of parents at Peace4Kids expanded to include men and women from diverse backgrounds. Their particular experiences with child protective service agencies fostered a unique fellowship among the organization's parents.

Foster Youth as Community

At the Saturday Core Program, foster children were provided opportunities to consistently interact with other youth in foster care on a weekly basis. Peace4Kids members established relationships with their peers, and looked forward to playing with and talking to their friends each week. Children formed friendships that began in the Peace Garden group and evolved as they progressed in the organization; often, these relationships lasted for several years.

Additionally, many friendships extended beyond the Saturday Core Program as children met outside of the recreation center for play dates and sleepovers.

Interacting with other youth in foster care contributed to children's sense of belonging at Peace4Kids. Several parents indicated that it was important for their children to establish friendships with other youth that shared their racial and ethnic heritage and had experienced similar life circumstances. As children participated in activities at the Saturday Core Program, they discovered that youth in foster care could have fun and achieve their goals.

Friendships at Peace4Kids often reflected the transitory experiences of children in the child protective system. At times, placement changes briefly disrupted children's regular attendance at the Saturday Core Program, and children missed their friends when they were absent. At other times, children endured prolonged absences from Peace4Kids, and their friends happily embraced them upon their return. If children failed to return to the organization after reunification with their birth families, their friends expressed sadness. Although the community of foster youth often changed, children accepted and welcomed new members, and forged friendships with their peers at the Saturday Core Program.

Adjunct Service Providers as Community

Local businesses, service providers, and individuals cooperated to supply material and monetary support to members of the Peace4Kids community in need. Administrators stated that the organization's purpose and Four Core Concepts motivated neighborhood companies and suppliers to donate goods and services to foster families. Additionally, adult volunteers at the Saturday Core Program frequently gave funds directly to Peace4Kids for the purchase of

household items. These charitable donations were identified as the "first line of defense" for foster parents and children that required or requested assistance.

Because monthly stipends from child protective service agencies rarely covered household expenses, contributions from businesses and individuals were essential for foster families. Donations of new items, such as food and toiletries and used items, such as clothes and shoes allowed parents to fulfill their children's basic needs. Thus, the assistance supplied by donors encouraged feelings of stability and security for foster families, and supported the development of the Peace4Kids community.

Additional Findings

In addition to disclosing perspectives about community and family, parents, teachers, and administrators identified three other variables that impacted members' experiences of *Community as Family*: medication, child protective service providers, and respite care.

Role of Medication

In the course of the semi-structured interviews, three participants discussed the relationship between psychotropic medication and foster youth. Roberta reported that some Peace Garden members exhibited a lack of energy during the Saturday Core Program as a result of overmedication to treat hyperactivity and attention problems (Teacher Interview 4, 2012). Additionally, Zaid and Lynn stated that children's medications changed often and without warning; their reactions to medication adjustments frequently caused behavior changes and made classroom management difficult for volunteers and teachers (Administrator Interview 5; Administrator Interview 6, 2012). As a result, some children were unable to participate fully in the curricular and cocurricular activities offered at Peace4Kids.

Role of Child Protective Service Providers

Peace4Kids has been unable to establish a consistent and beneficial relationship with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (LA-DCFS). Lynn indicated that it was difficult to network with county social workers due to their heavy caseloads and prolonged work schedules (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). Therefore, most social workers were unaware of the Saturday Core Program. Lynn stated that when LA-DCFS personnel came to Peace4Kids and witnessed children engaged in curricular and cocurricular activities, they were complimentary of the organization and acknowledged the potential benefits for foster children and parents (Administrator Interview 6, 2012). However, it was unclear whether or not social workers regularly referred families to the Saturday Core Program. The lack of a working relationship with LA-DCFS appeared to limit the scope and impact of Peace4Kids.

Role of Respite Care

Parents categorized the time that their children spent at the Saturday Core Program as "somewhat of a reprieve." The three and a half hours that children spent at Peace4Kids gave their parents an opportunity to run errands, wash dishes and clothes, cook, and shop for groceries. Parents indicated that they were able to socialize with friends through telephone calls and uninterrupted conversations when their children were at Peace4Kids. While their children attended the Saturday Core Program, parents often completed necessary household chores.

In addition to providing time for important tasks, parents explained that the Saturday Core Program gave them "downtime" away from their children. Parents were encouraged to "go home and relax" after they dropped off their children on Saturday mornings. Some parents acknowledged that this peaceful time allowed them to do things and go places that they

"normally wouldn't be able to do." Christine described the Core Program in this way, saying, "I look forward to Peace for Kids just like the kids do . . . I love to see them go sometimes, and I love to see them come back" (Parent Interview 1, 2012).

Discussion of Findings

Community as Family, one of Peace4Kids' Four Core Concepts, was emphasized by all of the study's participants as they discussed the impact of the organization on the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster youth. According to parents, teachers, and administrators, *Community as Family* permeated Peace4Kids and promoted an environment that supported the relationships of foster children and their caregivers. This supportive environment allowed the organization's members to cultivate relationships with others based on similar curricular and cocurricular interests and shared experiences with child protective service agencies and the foster care system.

The foster child-caregiver relationships forged at Peace4Kids included behaviors that encouraged attachment, defined by John Bowlby (1980) as a bond that develops between two individuals over time in response to familiarity and caregiving. The bonds that foster youth and caregivers experienced as they participated in the Saturday Core Program were initiated and strengthened when Bowlby's four criteria for attachment were met: proximity, consistency, responsiveness, and reciprocity. As attachment relationships developed, foster children utilized these bonds to create expectations of positive caregiving interactions and to compensate for detrimental experiences and maltreatment by previous caregivers, a process identified by Bowlby in his writings on the Internal Working Model (1980, 1988). When these caregiving

expectations were met reliably, attachment bonds were constructed that could act as corrective measures for youth in foster care (Bowlby, 1988).

Proximity

Bowlby (1969) believed that proximity, closeness to or contact with a preferred caregiver who meets the physical or emotional needs of a child, initiated behaviors that facilitated meaningful attachment relationships. In this research study, teachers explained the role of proximity in their interactions with the young children who attended the Saturday Core Program. They reported that Peace Garden participants often lacked the vocabulary to communicate negative feelings effectively. As a result, children at Peace4Kids frequently utilized their bodies to express emotions such as frustration, anger, and sadness. Sometimes foster youth engaged in proximal physical acts, including pushing, hitting, and kicking.

At other times, proximity fostered positive interactions between teachers and Peace Garden members. When children experienced uncertainty or discord with their peers, they approached their teachers and sought physical consolation through embraces and gentle touches. These types of interactions soothed children and encouraged them to discuss their emotions.

Teachers noted that maintaining proximity with the organization's young members helped to facilitate meaningful verbal communication. They reported that Peace Garden participants often initiated conversations with peers and teachers while engaged in cooperative activities and projects. During these informal activities, children exhibited trust in their teachers by standing close to them and sharing significant details about their lives.

Consistency

Bowlby (1951, 1960) wrote that continuous and reliable care promoted secure and intimate caregiver-youth relationships, encouraged the social and emotional development of children, and fostered attachment. As data was gathered for this research study, participants discussed the impact of consistency on the youth at Peace4Kids. Foster children benefitted from seeing the same people, visiting the same place, and experiencing the same routine each Saturday at the Core Program. The organization's volunteers and teachers were described as caring individuals that provided stability for children whose homes and birth families were often erratic and volatile. While home or school placement changes frequently occurred, Peace Garden participants and their caregivers knew that they would see their "family" at Peace4Kids each weekend. Although volunteers and teachers changed periodically, the consistent culture at Peace4Kids positively influenced the young Peace Garden members.

Responsiveness

Bowlby (1973) also identified responsiveness, a caregiver's physiological and emotional availability to a child, as a critical component of attachment. At the Saturday Core Program, responsiveness was evident in the material and financial support provided to foster families. It was reported that children's physiological needs were met with donations such as food, personal care items, clothing, and shoes. Additionally, Peace4Kids responded to children's needs with donations of school supplies, household goods, appliances, and gift cards for families to purchase holiday meals.

Responsiveness was also apparent in the physical and affective support supplied by volunteers, teachers, and administrators. At the Saturday Core Program, a variety of curricular

and cocurricular experiences were offered, and members selected the classes and activities that interested them. Staff members provided appropriate support such as verbal encouragement, direct instruction, and practical help for children in response to requests for assistance.

Additionally, the administrators at Peace4Kids demonstrated responsiveness through frequent communication with parents regarding their children's social and behavioral progress. At the Saturday Core Program, administrators made observations about children's social interactions and general conduct and developed effective strategies for managing behavior and relationships. Administrators then shared their ideas with parents and together, they developed plans for addressing behavioral and social concerns.

Reciprocity

John Bowlby (1969) recognized that reciprocity, the mutual dependence and influence of caregivers and children and the changes that result from their interactions, contributed to attachment. Throughout this research study, participants noted that children who attended the Saturday Core Program felt unconditionally loved and genuinely cared for by volunteers, teachers, and administrators. The organization's staff members established authentic relationships with young Peace Garden members and modeled sensitivity and concern in their language and actions.

As children observed care, concern, and love at Peace4Kids, their interactions with staff members changed and reciprocity was cultivated. Parents reported that their children began to exhibit qualities such as compassion, thoughtfulness, patience, and resilience. These qualities enabled Peace Garden members to initiate pro-social and cooperative behaviors with parents, volunteers, teachers, and administrators.

This study's participants acknowledged that reciprocity was also evident in the children's interactions with their peers. Peace4Kids staff members modeled actions such as sharing, taking turns, and waiting patiently for young children at the Saturday Core Program. In turn, children developed friendships with fellow Peace Garden members that included pro-social behaviors and fostered positive qualities such as respect and compassion. Occasionally, children experienced emotions including anger, frustration, and sadness; subsequently, disagreements and arguments ensued. Discord provided volunteers, teachers, and administrators with opportunities to demonstrate conflict resolution to children and to encourage forgiveness and acceptance.

Internal Working Models

Bowlby (1973) asserted that children develop "expectations of the accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures" based upon interactions with previous caregivers (p. 238). These expectations, known as Internal Working Models (IWMs), included emotions and recollections that shaped children's assumptions about caregivers: their identification, their accessibility, and their responses in times of distress (Bowlby, 1969). Additionally, IWMs reinforced children's beliefs that they were worthy or unworthy of warm, intimate, and continuous care (Bowlby, 1973).

Volunteers, teachers, and administrators at Peace4Kids recognized that many children experienced placement instability throughout their time in foster care. The study's participants reported that the consistency of the organization's culture and the reliability of staff members promoted the formation of affirmative IWMs. Children realized that expectations and rules remained the same at the Saturday Core Program, and they understood that they interacted with familiar and reliable people each week. Parents understood that when their children did not meet

expectations or comply with rules, consequences would be applied in a fair and consistent manner. These experiences often contrasted with episodes of placement instability, and replaced previously held notions of caregiver inconsistency.

This study's participants revealed that foster children's experiences with volunteers, teachers, and administrators at Peace4Kids encouraged the construction of positive IWMs. The organization's staff members conveyed genuine love and care for children at the Saturday Core Program through their words and actions. Teachers and auxiliary staff exhibited sympathy, compassion, and kindness to the young children in the Peace Garden. This support differed from most of the children's prior caregiving experiences, and disconfirmed formerly held negative beliefs about the responsiveness of caregivers.

At the Saturday Core Program, volunteers, teachers, and administrators acknowledged that children's pasts included abuse and neglect. However, they emphasized the strengths of the young Peace Garden members and fostered the development of positive IWMs. At Peace4Kids, children participated in activities that revealed hidden aptitudes and interests. The organization's staff members cultivated children's creativity and imagination by incorporating a variety of learning experiences into the Saturday Core Program. These experiences helped children to feel successful and to recognize their unique talents and abilities, and supplanted prior adverse impressions of caregiver reciprocity.

The result of abuse, neglect, and placement instability was that foster children frequently viewed caregivers as unavailable, inconsistent, and unresponsive. Consequently, their IWMs were largely negative. As children participated regularly in the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids, however, their IWMs were altered. When volunteers, teachers, and administrators

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established proximity and exhibited consistency, responsiveness, and reciprocity, young Peace Garden members developed positive caregiver expectations. These new, affirmative IWMs supported children's secure attachment to the organization's staff members. In addition, children's attachment relationships with volunteers, teachers, and administrators promoted their attachment to the organization itself and to groups within Peace4Kids.

Group Attachment

For some people, groups including school clubs, sports teams, political parties, religious affiliates, and auxiliary organizations represent an essential attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969). Often, an individual's attachment to a group is mediated by a primary attachment to a prominent person within the group itself, such as a coach, administrator, teacher, or minister (Bowlby, 1969). These complementary attachment relationships—dyadic and group—are significant and influence a member's thoughts, emotions, and conduct (Smith et al., 1999).

The tenets of group attachment parallel John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's findings about caregiving experiences, interpersonal relationships, and attachment patterns. A study by Smith et al. (1999), for example, found that group attachment often mirrors Bowlby's theory of the Internal Working Model. They discovered that the security of an individual's attachment to a group is contingent upon a person's prior involvement with groups and organizations. These previous experiences established expectations of groups and organizations as cold and judgmental or as warm and friendly. Additionally, individuals established mental representations of themselves as group members, and these representations frequently influenced a person's decision regarding group membership (Smith et al., 1999).

As Smith et al. (1999) studied group attachment, they recognized attachment patterns similar to those previously identified by Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Main and Solomon (1990) in observations of infants and their caregivers. The researchers found that "attachment to groups has two underlying dimensions that, like those involved in relationship attachment, may be termed *attachment anxiety and avoidance*" (Smith et al., 1999, p. 96). Figure 2 below delineates the characteristics of each pattern:
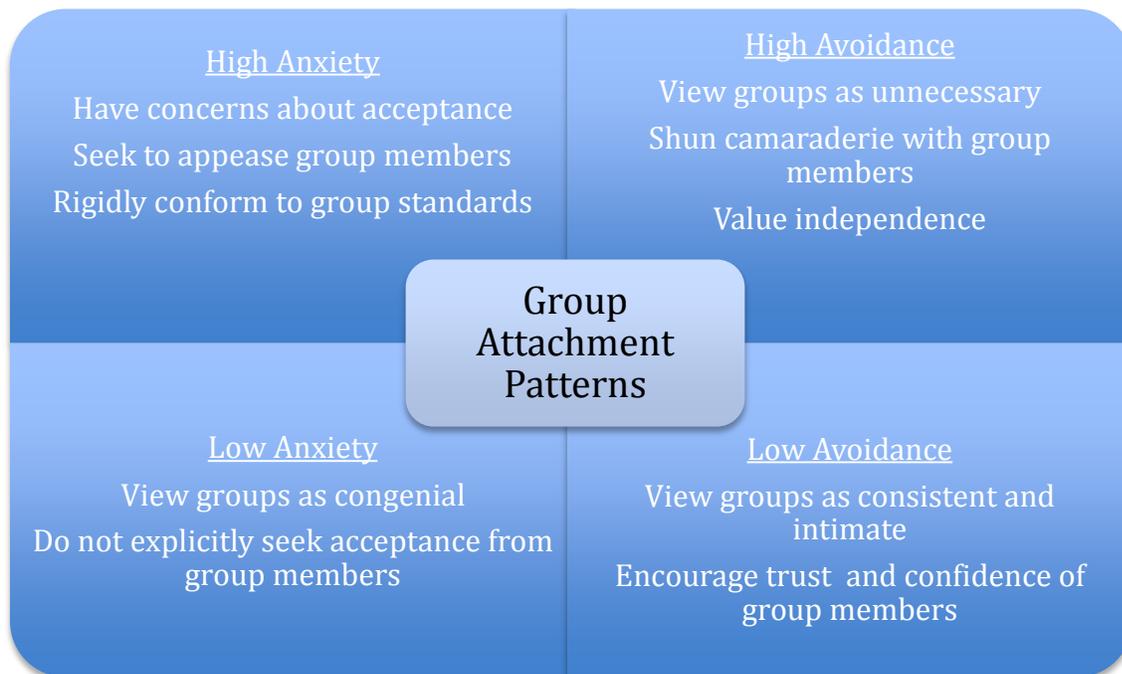
Figure 1. Group attachment patterns. Adapted from "Attachment to Groups: Theory and Management" by E. R. Smith, J. Murphy, and S. Coats, 1999, *Journal of Personality and Social Pathology, 77,* p. 96. Copyright 1999 by the American Psychological Association. Used with permission.

Individuals who experienced high levels of group attachment anxiety were often concerned about being accepted; subsequently, they attempted to appease members and conformed rigidly to group standards. Someone who exhibited high attachment avoidance typically deemed groups to be superfluous and/or bothersome. Avoidant individuals usually shunned the closeness and camaraderie associated with group membership, and instead worked

to establish their independence. Members that experienced elevated degrees of anxiety and/or avoidance were classified as insecurely attached to groups.

People who demonstrated low levels of attachment anxiety frequently regarded groups as congenial and therefore did not explicitly solicit approval from members. Finally, people who displayed low levels of attachment avoidance valued groups' reliability and intimacy; they behaved in ways that encouraged and maintained group members' trust and confidence. These individuals believed that group participation was a positive and valuable experience. Therefore, members who demonstrated both low anxiety and low avoidance were classified as securely attached to groups.

Group Attachment at Peace4Kids

In this study, data collected through interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators demonstrated that children's interactions at Peace4Kids exhibited some of the patterns of group attachment delineated by Smith et al. (1999).

Secure attachment. Most of the study's participants described young foster children at Peace4Kids as securely attached to the organization. Secure children identified the Saturday Core Program as their "family," a comfortable place where they felt supported, nurtured, and cared for. Many foster children felt empowered by interacting with their peers and by sharing their school and home experiences. Peace4Kids encouraged children to confront the obstacles they faced in the foster care system and to overcome challenges and barriers present in their lives.

Additionally, the recreation center provided a "safe place" for children to be themselves and to develop positive identities separate from their statuses as foster youth. One of the

organization's alumnae, Paula, stated that she felt comfortable for the first time in her life. She

recounted how her emotions and self-concept changed as she participated in the Saturday Core

Program:

> So you go through your life feeling this place of isolation and not having identity
>
> and [then] you come to Peace for Kids and all of a sudden you realize you're
>
> amongst other people that are your peers, and for the first time you recognize that
>
> there are other kids like you. And you've not had that experience before.
>
> (Administrator Interview 5, 2012)

Paula's experiences within Peace4Kids illustrated how securely attached children were

empowered to forge a new group identity. Foster youth subsequently realized that their

membership strengthened and improved Peace4Kids.

Insecure attachment. A small portion of the study's participants reported that children

at Peace4Kids did not value group membership and were, in fact, insecurely attached to the

organization. Insecure children often resisted attendance at the Saturday Core Program, and

were persuaded to participate by their foster parents. While at the recreation center, insecure

children sometimes shunned interactions with fellow Peace Garden members, and hesitated to

join shared activities. Some Peace4Kids members appeared anxious and overwhelmed,

remarking that groups made them feel uncomfortable. One child said, "I don't do the group

thing. It's too much for me" (Administrator Interview 5, 2012). Another child rejected the idea

that Peace4Kids could provide structure and emotional support as she confronted anger issues

related to prior abuse and neglect. She remarked, "This is how I've been, and this is how I'm

going to be" (Parent Interview 3, 2012).

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Implications of the Study

Implications for Foster Parents

This research study's participants acknowledged that Peace4Kids also provided social and emotional assistance for foster parents. Parents greeted each other as they dropped off their children at the Saturday Core Program and frequently engaged in brief conversations. During these weekly discussions, parents shared their children's challenges and successes; parenting advice was solicited and suggestions were offered. In addition to the social and emotional support fostered through fellowship, the Saturday Core Program afforded parents with a respite from caregiving.

Going forward, foster parents at Peace4Kids must continue to provide support for one another through regular communication. The organization can facilitate foster parent interaction by encouraging parents to eat breakfast and lunch together at the Saturday Core Program. Additionally, Peace4Kids could create a roster of cellular telephone numbers and email addresses to promote consistent foster parent correspondence.

Implications for the Curricular Program

In this research study, parents, teachers, and administrators recognized that Peace4Kids positively impacts the pre-academic skills of foster youth in South Los Angeles. The data demonstrated that qualified teachers exposed children to a variety of literacy, math, and other curricular experiences that promoted the development of competencies necessary for academic success.

In order for Peace4Kids to positively impact foster youths' pre-academic skills in the future, the organization must reinforce and strengthen the curricular component of the Saturday

Core Program. First, the organization must continue its commitment to an extended schedule that provides expanded opportunities for children to attain the academic outcomes articulated in the Peace4Kids logic model. Second, it is imperative for the organization to hire and retain qualified teachers. Third, lesson plans and activities must actively engage children and must incorporate instructional methods that address a range of learning styles and abilities. Finally, Peace4Kids must provide members with a variety of curricular experiences that allow children to discover their challenges, strengths, talents, and aptitudes.

Implications for the Cocurricular Program

The importance of cocurricular activities was cited by most of the participants in this research study. The Saturday Core Program encouraged foster children to explore creative arts such as painting and crafting, and to engage in fine arts such as dance and music. These cocurricular activities gave children opportunities to discover their interests and to develop their talents in a relaxed, responsive, and reciprocal setting. Children felt positively about their participation in the cocurricular program at Peace4Kids, which resulted in improved self-esteem and feelings of accomplishment.

Limited research has demonstrated that cocurricular activities provide particular benefits for children in foster care. Martin and Jackson (2002) found that "a network of supportive relationships" often result from foster youths' involvement in groups such as sports teams, clubs, and charitable organizations. Participation in cocurricular programs allowed foster children to establish relationships with people outside of the child protective system who care for them, encourage them, and monitor their progress. These relationships and activities provided stability and consistency for youth who often endure multiple placement changes.

In the future, Peace4Kids must continue to provide opportunities for foster children to participate in cocurricular activities. In addition, the organization should solicit input from its members regarding desired and preferred creative and fine arts activities in order to promote interest and participation. Peace4Kids must also procure funds from individuals, small businesses, corporations, and foundations to maintain and expand their cocurricular program.

Implications for the Organization

The data collected in this research study clearly demonstrated that Peace4Kids positively impacts the pre-academic skills and social-emotional development of foster children in South Los Angeles. However, social workers and other child welfare personnel are largely unaware of the programs and services that the organization supplies for children in foster care. As a result, the number of children currently enrolled in the Saturday Core Program represents only a fraction of foster youth who reside in the neighborhood where the recreation center is located. Many foster children in the community do not benefit from the services and programs at Peace4Kids.

Going forward, it is imperative for Peace4Kids to establish a collaborative relationship with DCFS and child welfare workers in Los Angeles County. The organization must encourage social workers and DCFS administrators to attend the Saturday Core Program to observe the academic, social, and emotional support provided by volunteers, teachers, and administrators. Business cards listing the Peace4Kids website address should be distributed to child protective service workers and then given to eligible foster families. Brochures and/or flyers describing the organization's services and programs could be created and displayed in locations such as county offices and public gymnasiums.

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This study's participants also recognized that the organization provides material and financial support for foster families in need. Donations from adjunct service providers have allowed Peace4Kids to procure food, clothing, household supplies, and financial assistance for its members. To effectively meet the social, emotional, educational, and material needs of its members, Peace4Kids must continue to secure donations from individuals and corporations. The organization should explore additional opportunities for people and businesses to support its members by elevating its profile through open houses and community events. Exposure through local and national news outlets and social media may also help to raise awareness of Peace4Kids, the Saturday Core Program, the staff, and the foster children that it serves.

Future Research

In the future, research that endeavors to understand the impact of nonprofit community-based organizations serving foster youth must consider the vulnerability of this population. Prior studies have indicated that children in foster care frequently experience abuse, neglect, and multiple placements and are susceptible to insecure and disorganized attachment organizations. Because insecurely attached and disorganized children often experience anxiety and apprehension when interacting with unknown people, researchers should utilize data collection methods that limit direct contact with foster youth. Approaches such as interviews, questionnaires, and surveys may elicit powerful and rich data while protecting the foster children from the consequences of a transitory relationship with an unfamiliar adult.

Interviews

One suggested modification to the current research study is to employ multiple semi-structured interviews of parents, teachers, and administrators rather than a single semi-structured

interview. These interviews may be scheduled at regular intervals to provide evidence of an organization's impact as foster children participate in a program over time.

Another modification is to conduct interviews in small focus groups of two or three participants. The interview subjects should be segregated according to membership status within the organization; for example, parents would comprise one group and teachers would constitute another group. Dynamic interactions among group members may promote increased trust, and may subsequently produce a collective understanding of the nonprofit community-based organization's impact.

A final modification is to expand the pool of prospective interview participants. Researchers must consider the perspectives of volunteers when evaluating the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization. It may be appropriate to interview older foster youth (ages 13-18) if permission is granted by child protective services and parents/guardians. Additionally, the perceptions of adjunct service providers and benefactors should be included, if possible.

Questionnaires/Surveys

Another option for future research is to collect data through printed questionnaires and/or surveys completed by parents, teachers, and administrators. These approaches may allow participants to communicate their experiences of the organization without direct interaction with the researcher. As a result, the role of the researcher may be moderated, and the impact of reactivity and reflexivity in the study may be diminished. In addition, participants may answer questions more honestly when the researcher is not present. Questionnaires and/or surveys may also provide participants with flexibility. Participants may select the method of correspondence

(email or writing) and the method of transmission (personally, computer, postal service, or fax). A deadline provided by the researcher allows participants to complete questionnaires and/or surveys at a preferred time and in a preferred setting.

Recommendations

It has been previously noted that there is little research that investigates groups and attachment. My first recommendation is for researchers to explore group attachment and to generate an operational definition for the construct. Researchers must also determine if the child attachment organizations developed by Ainsworth et al. (1970) and Main and Solomon (1990) correspond to group attachment. Additionally, researchers must create new measures and/or adapt established measures to identify and quantify group attachment.

My second recommendation is for scholars to conduct thorough program evaluations of organizations that serve children in foster care. These evaluations must be grounded in rigorous, empirical methods, and must include the perspectives of all group members. Because nonprofit and/or community-based organizations increasingly offer services traditionally provided by child protective service agencies, emphasis must be given to these organizations.

This research study investigated the impact of one organization serving approximately 150 predominantly African-American, low socio-economic status foster children in an urban neighborhood. Therefore, my third recommendation is for researchers to examine foster youth organizations that serve larger and more diverse populations in a variety of settings.

Conclusion

In this research study the impact of Peace4Kids, a nonprofit community-based organization, on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills was

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examined. Prior to data collection, I hypothesized that the study's participants would indicate that the organization positively impacted the social-emotional development and pre-academic skills of young foster children. As expected, an initial analysis of the information garnered through interviews of parents, teachers, and administrators confirmed my original hypothesis.

However, a more comprehensive evaluation of the data revealed that the study's participants regarded Peace4Kids as much more than a typical nonprofit organization serving young children. Parents, teachers, and administrators identified Peace4Kids as a community and as a family that effectively meets the particular and complex needs of foster youth who have been exposed to significant trauma. Participants described Peace4Kids as a safe place where foster children experienced unconditional acceptance and love. Children were eager to attend the Saturday Core Program, and enjoyed interacting with staff members and peers. Trusting relationships were nurtured in a positive environment where youth in foster care were encouraged to recognize and develop their own voices, talents, and aptitudes. As a result, a sense of belonging and group attachment emerged.

The feelings of belonging and attachment expressed by parents, teachers, and administrators contrast sharply with the realities of trauma experienced by a majority of children in foster care. The effects of trauma such as abuse, neglect, abandonment, and multiple placements often trigger feelings of insecurity, distrust, rejection, and animosity for foster youth; yet these effects were largely unreported by the study's participants. The organization's physical environment, staff members, and institutional culture partially mitigated the negative consequences of trauma for young foster children attending the Saturday Core Program.

This study's participants identified several ways that Peace4Kids cultivates belonging and distinguishes the organization from schools and programs serving youth in foster care. First, Peace4Kids offers year-round services that provide stability and consistency for foster children. Second, Peace4Kids includes a variety of curricular and cocurricular experiences that engage all learners and encourage creativity. Third, Peace4Kids staff members give direct, explicit, individual coaching to children struggling to abide by the Peace Contract and the Four Core Concepts. Fourth, teachers and administrators collaborate with parents and guardians to create an environment that promotes their child's success. Finally, Peace4Kids offers material and monetary support for families in need.

The results of this study suggested that nonprofit community-based organizations can effectively meet the needs of foster youth by providing programs and services that respond to this population's unique needs. Careful consideration must be given to appropriately address the issues resulting from trauma experienced by most children in foster care. The research participants acknowledged that foster youth are often reticent to engage in conventional attachment relationships with individuals; therefore, they strive to facilitate group attachment within the boundaries of the organization. Parents, teachers, and administrators at Peace4Kids recognized that group attachment partially moderated the negative outcomes associated with trauma. Going forward, it is necessary for researchers to explore group attachment more thoroughly and to study its impact on other foster youth organizations.
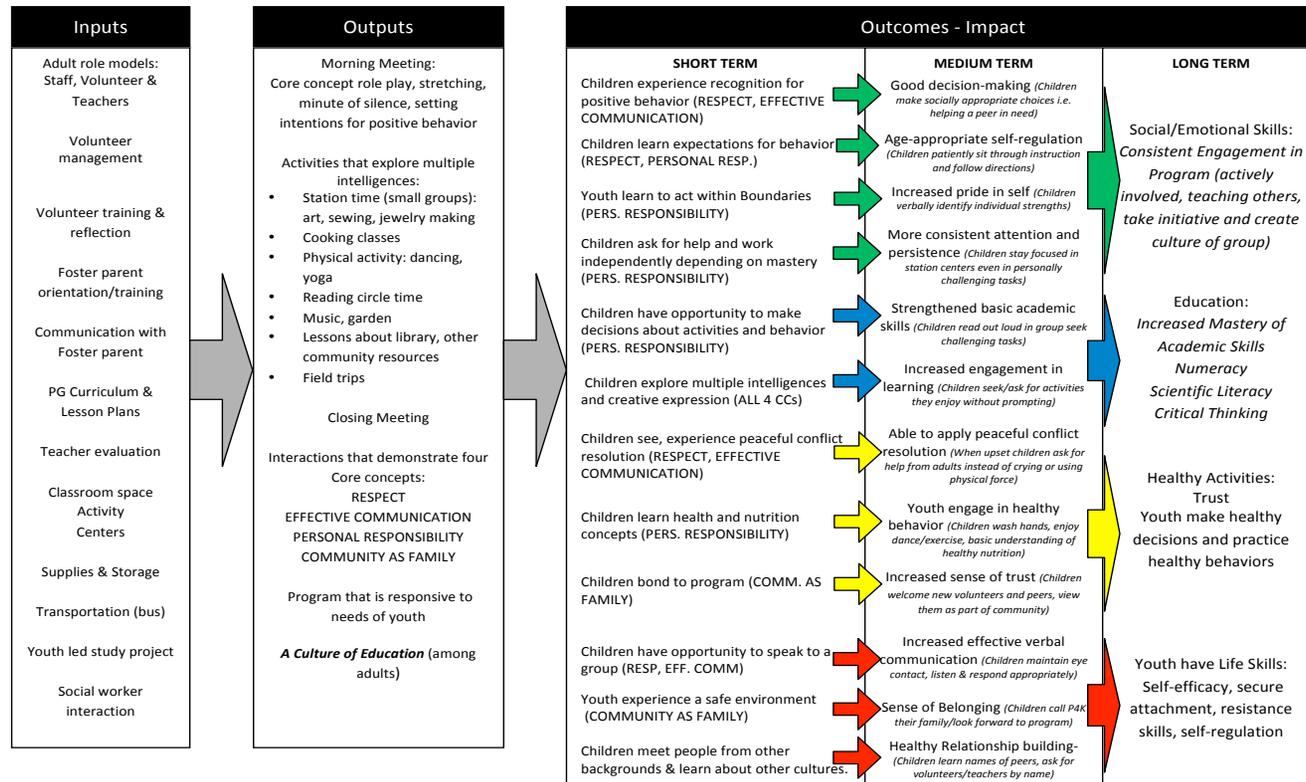
APPENDIX A

Peace Garden (ages 4-6) Program Logic Model
Revised March 16, 2011

Situation/Assumptions:
- *Social Emotional Learning is foundational for educational success; Other systems with which foster youth are involved are not meeting their social/emotional and educational needs.*
- *Participants are interested in being part of P4K*
- *Most foster youth in this age group are not getting a quality pre-school experience;*
- *Foster youth are more likely to form a bond of trust with a group rather than an individual:*

Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes - Impact		
		SHORT TERM	**MEDIUM TERM**	**LONG TERM**
Adult role models: Staff, Volunteer & Teachers	Morning Meeting: Core concept role play, stretching, minute of silence, setting intentions for positive behavior	Children experience recognition for positive behavior (RESPECT, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION)	Good decision-making *(Children make socially appropriate choices i.e. helping a peer in need)*	Social/Emotional Skills: *Consistent Engagement in Program (actively involved, teaching others, take initiative and create culture of group)*
Volunteer management	Activities that explore multiple intelligences:	Children learn expectations for behavior (RESPECT, PERSONAL RESP.)	Age-appropriate self-regulation *(Children patiently sit through instruction and follow directions)*	
Volunteer training & reflection	• Station time (small groups): art, sewing, jewelry making	Youth learn to act within Boundaries (PERS. RESPONSIBILITY)	Increased pride in self *(Children verbally identify individual strengths)*	
Foster parent orientation/training	• Cooking classes • Physical activity: dancing, yoga	Children ask for help and work independently depending on mastery (PERS. RESPONSIBILITY)	More consistent attention and persistence *(Children stay focused in station centers even in personally challenging tasks)*	
Communication with Foster parent	• Reading circle time • Music, garden • Lessons about library, other community resources	Children have opportunity to make decisions about activities and behavior (PERS. RESPONSIBILITY)	Strengthened basic academic skills *(Children read out loud in group seek challenging tasks)*	Education: *Increased Mastery of Academic Skills Numeracy Scientific Literacy Critical Thinking*
PG Curriculum & Lesson Plans	• Field trips	Children explore multiple intelligences and creative expression (ALL 4 CCs)	Increased engagement in learning *(Children seek/ask for activities they enjoy without prompting)*	
Teacher evaluation	Closing Meeting	Children see, experience peaceful conflict resolution (RESPECT, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION)	Able to apply peaceful conflict resolution *(When upset children ask for help from adults instead of crying or using physical force)*	
Classroom space Activity Centers	Interactions that demonstrate four Core concepts: RESPECT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNITY AS FAMILY	Children learn health and nutrition concepts (PERS. RESPONSIBILITY)	Youth engage in healthy behavior *(Children wash hands, enjoy dance/exercise, basic understanding of healthy nutrition)*	Healthy Activities: Trust Youth make healthy decisions and practice healthy behaviors
Supplies & Storage		Children bond to program (COMM. AS FAMILY)	Increased sense of trust *(Children welcome new volunteers and peers, view them as part of community)*	
Transportation (bus)	Program that is responsive to needs of youth			
Youth led study project	*A Culture of Education* (among adults)	Children have opportunity to speak to a group (RESP, EFF. COMM)	Increased effective verbal communication *(Children maintain eye contact, listen & respond appropriately)*	Youth have Life Skills: Self-efficacy, secure attachment, resistance skills, self-regulation
Social worker interaction		Youth experience a safe environment (COMMUNITY AS FAMILY)	Sense of Belonging *(Children call P4K their family/look forward to program)*	
		Children meet people from other backgrounds & learn about other cultures.	Healthy Relationship building- *(Children learn names of peers, ask for volunteers/teachers by name)*	

APPENDIX B

PEACE4KIDS Peace Contract
In order to be a part of the Peace4Kids program,
I promise to abide by the important behaviors listed below.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:
1. I will try my best to express my feelings and needs with words
2. If I'm not ready to express myself, I agree not to act out in a disrespectful manner which includes physical acting out
3. If I need to leave my group/class, for any reason, I will tell the volunteers to get permission
4. I will ask questions when I may not understand

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:
1. Obey all rules established by the P4K, and all local, state and federal laws
2. Not use tobacco products, alcohol or drugs (except those prescribed by a doctor)
3. Not carry a weapon or threaten another person with a weapon, bodily force or language.
4. I will not fight, this includes play fighting, bullying, teasing, cursing, gossiping, acting violently, or taking part in any dangerous behavior.
5. No horse-playing (jumping on backs, play-fighting, play slaps etc.)
6. I won't use bad language (profanity or negative words)
7. No electronics during meetings or classes, if seen they will be taken and given to my guardian at the end of the day
8. I will not use the vending machines at any time during the program
9. I will not use the loud speaker
10. I will keep on my name tag and wristband

RESPECT:
1. Respect the authority of adult volunteers, youth leaders, P4K staff, and others in leadership roles
2. I will listen and follow instructions the first time they are given
3. I will use positive words
4. Respecting my personal space
5. Respecting the environment and those around me

COMMUNITY AS FAMILY:
1. I will show kindness to others and give assistance when needed
2. I will be helpful, cooperative, and friendly with everyone at Peace4Kids
3. I will take part in all activities

I know that at Peace4Kids it is always about making a choice!
I will always try to make choices that are good for me and everyone else in the Peace4Kids community!

If I do make a **POOR CHOICE**, the following things may happen:

1. I know that if I make a poor choice, that **a volunteer/staff will decide** what my consequences will be.
2. I know that if I receive **2 separate warnings** from any **a volunteer/staff** on one day, I will not be able to come to the next program.
3. I know that if I choose to **hit or kick** someone I will not be able to come to the next 2 programs.
4. I know that **a volunteer/staff** may direct me to take a ***break*** to think about my actions.

If my behavior is *very serious*, Peace4Kids will call home and discuss my actions with my guardian and I may be given an extended suspension.

These rules are in place to help achieve the goals of creating a safe, fair and fun place. If I make poor choices or show inappropriate behavior, I understand I will have an opportunity to think about my mistakes to learn to make good decisions, so it will be a fun and safe place for everyone.

October 27, 2011

Dear _____,

My name is Carrie Alpert and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University. In preparation for the doctoral degree, I am conducting a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Peace Garden Program at Peace4Kids. My faculty advisor at Loyola Marymount, Dr. Leslie Ponciano, is a member of the Peace4Kids Board of Directors and has over ten years of experience supporting this organization.

In order to gather information about the Peace Garden program, I will conduct a series of interviews with parents/guardians, teachers, and Peace4Kids administrators. During the interview sessions, I will ask the participants a variety of questions that will explore the social, emotional, and academic experiences of youth in foster care. In addition, I will ask the participants to discuss the ways in which Peace4Kids has impacted the lives of foster children.

The results of my interviews will be shared with the Peace4Kids Board of Directors as a component of their evaluation of the Peace Garden program. Additionally, the results will be written into a dissertation in fulfillment of a requirement for my doctoral degree.

I will conduct interviews of parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators over a two-month span during December, 2011 and January, 2012. The interviews will take place at the recreation complex unless otherwise specified by the participant. The dates and times of the interviews are flexible and will be negotiated by the participants.

The data collected during observations is confidential, and I will protect the participants' identities in two ways. First, pseudonyms will be created for all participants and the pseudonyms will be utilized during interview transcription and in the final dissertation. Second, I will not disclose the exact location of the Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program; the names of the facility and the city will not be used.

Paper data, including charts and notes, and electronic data, such as on a flash drive and external hard drive, will be stored in a locked, fireproof file cabinet, and electronic data will be stored on a secure laptop computer. Additionally, electronic data will be saved on a flash drive and on an external hard drive. Dr. Leslie Ponciano and I are the only people who will have access to the data.

I am available to answer to answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding your child's participation in this research study. You can contact me directly by telephone at (xxx) xxx – xxxx or via email at xxxxxxx@lion.lmu.edu. Additionally, you can reach my faculty advisor, Dr. Leslie Ponciano, via email.

I thank you in advance for providing consent to participate in this research study.

Sincerely,

Carrie Alpert
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice
Loyola Marymount University

Date of Preparation: October 26, 2011

Loyola Marymount University

Informed Consent Form for Research Study on Foster Youth Organization

1) I hereby authorize Carrie Alpert, Doctoral Candidate for Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University, to include me in the following research study: "The Impact of a Nonprofit, Community-Based Organization on Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills."

2) I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to understand the perspective of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. The research study will last for approximately three months. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may decline to participate at any time.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that my child/ward is a 4 – 6 year old participant in the Peace Garden group at the Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in an interview that will last for approximately one hour. The investigator will ask questions related to my involvement with the foster care system and about my experiences with Peace4Kids. These procedures have been explained to me by Carrie Alpert, Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University.

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, or sadness as I disclose my involvement with the foster care system. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions asked during the interview process.

7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are (1) adding to the existing academic literature about nonprofit, community-based organizations serving foster youth; (2) highlighting one potential pathway to promoting the social-emotional development of foster youth; (3)

increasing understanding about the development of pre-academic skills in foster children, and (4) providing data that will be used by Peace4Kids to evaluate the effectiveness of the Saturday Core Program.

8) I understand that Dr. Leslie Ponciano, the faculty advisor for the proposed research, will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study. Dr. Ponciano can be contacted by telephone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by email.

9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without consequence (e.g., my child's/ward's continued participation in the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids.)

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

12) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

13) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D., IRB Chair, at 1 LMU Drive, Suite 1718, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659. Correspondence may also be directed to Julie Paterson, IRB Coordinator, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Date of Preparation: October 26, 2011

Loyola Marymount University

Informed Consent Form for Research Study on Foster Youth Organization

1)   I hereby authorize Carrie Alpert, Doctoral Candidate for Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University, to include me in the following research study: "The Impact of a Nonprofit, Community-Based Organization on Foster Youths' Social-Emotional Development and Pre-Academic Skills."

2)   I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to understand the perspective of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. The research study will last for approximately three months. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may decline to participate at any time.

3)   It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a teacher in the Peace Garden group at the Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program.

4)   I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in an interview that will last for approximately one hour. The investigator will ask questions related to my involvement with the foster care system and about my experiences with Peace4Kids. These procedures have been explained to me by Carrie Alpert, Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University.

5)   I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6)   I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, or sadness as I disclose my involvement with the foster care system. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions asked during the interview process.

7)   I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are (1) adding to the existing academic literature about nonprofit, community-based organizations serving foster youth; (2) highlighting one potential pathway to promoting the social-emotional development of foster youth; (3) increasing understanding about the development of pre-academic skills in foster children, and

(4) providing data that will be used by Peace4Kids to evaluate the effectiveness of the Saturday Core Program.

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9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without consequence (e.g., my continued participation in the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids.)

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

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Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Date of Preparation: October 26, 2011

Loyola Marymount University

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2) I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to understand the perspective of parents, teachers, and administrators about the impact of a nonprofit community-based organization on foster youths' social-emotional development and pre-academic skills. The research study will last for approximately three months. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may decline to participate at any time.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am an administrator for the Peace4Kids Saturday Core Program.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in an interview that will last for approximately one hour. The investigator will ask questions related to my involvement with the foster care system and about my experiences with Peace4Kids. These procedures have been explained to me by Carrie Alpert, Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University.

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, or sadness as I disclose my involvement with the foster care system. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions asked during the interview process.

7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are (1) adding to the existing academic literature about nonprofit, community-based organizations serving foster youth; (2) highlighting one potential pathway to promoting the social-emotional development of foster youth; (3) increasing understanding about the development of pre-academic skills in foster children, and

(4) providing data that will be used by Peace4Kids to evaluate the effectiveness of the Saturday Core Program.

8) I understand that Dr. Leslie Ponciano, the faculty advisor for the proposed research, will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study. Dr. Ponciano can be contacted by telephone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by email.

9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without consequence (e.g., my continued participation in the Saturday Core Program at Peace4Kids.)

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

12) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

13) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D., IRB Chair, at 1 LMU Drive, Suite 1718, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659. Correspondence may also be directed to Julie Paterson, IRB Coordinator, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

APPENDIX H

I. Foster Care System Experience
      1. Describe your personal history in relation to the foster care system. What event(s) prompted your involvement? How long have you been involved in the foster care system?

II. Involvement with Peace4Kids
      1. Describe your initial contact with Peace4Kids. How did you find about the organization?
      2. What did you think Peace4Kids would provide for your child?
      3. Why is it important for your child to be a member of Peace4Kids?

III. Social-Emotional Development
      1. How does your child typically resolve conflict?
      2. Describe your child's peer relationships. How easy is it for your child to make friends?
      3. In what ways does your child express feelings? How does he/she act when he/she is happy? Sad? Angry? Frustrated?
      4. How does your child feel about himself/herself?
      5. Does you child know the Four Core Concepts-Community as Family, Respect, Personal Responsibility, and Effective Communication? What is the role of the Four Core Concepts?

IV. Pre-Academic Skills
      1. Describe your child's feelings about school.
      2. How does your child typically respond when faced with a challenging academic/learning task?
      3. Tell about your child's interest in numbers, letters, and words.
      4. How does your child best communicate with you (talking, writing, drawing, dramatic play)?

V. Impact of Peace4Kids
      1. How has Peace4Kids impacted your child's life?
      2. How has Peace4Kids impacted your life?

APPENDIX I

I. Foster Care System Experience
      1. Describe your personal history in relation to the foster care system.

II. Involvement with Peace4Kids
      1. Describe your initial contact with Peace4Kids. How did you find about the organization?
      2. What does Peace4Kids provide for children in foster care?
      3. Why is it important for children in foster care to be members of Peace4Kids?

III. Social-Emotional Development
      1. How do you assist children at Peace4Kids as they resolve conflict?
      2. Tell about how you help children at Peace4Kids to establish friendships.
      3. How are children at peace4Kids encouraged to express their feelings?
      4. Describe how you gain the trust of children at Peace4Kids.
      5. What is the role of the Four Core Concepts-Community as Family, Respect, Personal Responsibility, and Effective Communication?

IV. Pre-Academic Skills
      1. Do children at Peace4Kids have opinions about school? What are they?
      2. Tell about the strategies you use to help children at Peace4Kids persist when confronted with challenging academic/learning tasks.
      3. In what ways do children at Peace4Kids demonstrate literacy and numeracy?
      4. How do you accommodate children's different learning styles at Peace4Kids?

V. Impact of Peace4Kids
      1. Tell about the strengths of Peace4Kids.
      2. What are the greatest challenges you face as a teacher at Peace4Kids?
      3. How does Peace4Kids impact the lives of children?

I. Foster Care System Experience
      1. Describe your personal history in relation to the foster care system.

II. Involvement with Peace4Kids
      1. Tell the history of your involvement with Peace4Kids.
      2. What does Peace4Kids provide for children in foster care?
      3. Why is it important for children in foster care to be members of Peace4Kids?

III. Social-Emotional Development
      1. How do you assist children at Peace4Kids as they resolve conflict?
      2. Tell about how you help children at Peace4Kids to establish friendships.
      3. How are children at peace4Kids encouraged to express their feelings?
      4. Describe how you gain the trust of children at Peace4Kids.
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      2. What are the greatest challenges you face as a teacher at Peace4Kids?
      3. How does Peace4Kids impact the lives of children?

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