THE HARLEM CHILDREN’S ZONE:
A LITERATURE REVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This is a literature review specifically focusing on the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) and current educational practices as they relate to improving educational outcomes for children in poverty. While the HCZ encompasses a myriad of researched best practices, this study focuses on early intervention and K-12 school practices. The implications of this study are beneficial for use in teacher training, educational leadership and collaborative agency efforts to provide similar supports for students in poverty. The data gathered directs us away from the discussion of deficit thinking toward a discussion of capacity-building for students, teachers and schools that deserve the right to rise above the great divide known as the “Achievement Gap”.

The evidence gained from correlating the practices of the HCZ and current literature is useful for informing practice within school settings and community environments. Early implementation of educational supports, providing culturally responsive teaching, and a deep understanding of literacy instruction are represented as vital for promoting effective schools, which are shown to positively impact the life trajectories of children and communities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began this endeavor with the purpose of fulfilling a goal of obtaining a master’s degree in education in order to check it off of my “to do” list. I had resigned from the teaching profession with no intention of returning, but along the way my perspective changed. As I sat under the guidance and instruction of so many giving and caring professors, I felt myself once again energized and excited about engagement in this profession once again. This time around, I sense an urgency that didn’t exist earlier in my teaching career. It may be my midlife crisis speaking, or it could be my enlightened cognitive understanding of issues and practices affecting the lives of our nation’s most precious resource--our children. Regardless of original intent, I am grateful for the experience of learning more about what I thought I already knew, only now it’s richer, more meaningful and never ending.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Susan Catapano for patiently guiding me through the process. She listened to me more than answering my questions, which I see now as reflective guidance. She corralled my wondering ideas into a reasonable project, and provided exceptional support in the writing process. All along the way, when I wanted her to hold my hand and tell me my next step, she treated me with professionalism and integrity holding me accountable for my own learning.

Dr. Maurice Martinez has been an inspiration for me in this journey as well. It was through his unabashed confrontation of cultural awareness that I began to examine myself and identify with the cultural baggage that needed unpacking. I will always appreciate his candor, his humor, and his passion for life. My thanks to him for the cultural lens that he shared with me in order that I may see others more clearly.
I find it interesting that I have been so influenced by someone with whom I’ve had little personal interaction. Candace Thompson’s presence in the Watson School of Education has been such a call to integrity, honesty and authenticity. Her words of encouragement, her enthusiasm, her willingness to help others and her professionalism have not gone unnoticed. I will never forget a simple conversation that motivated me to deal with my beliefs about personal perceptions.

I am forever grateful for my husband’s continued love and support as I have been an absentee wife at times during this entire process. He has patiently listened to my dialogue, read many a paper, and fixed the copier more times than I can count! He picked up the slack, rallied the troops and kept me humble, and I am honored to have him by my side.

I would like to acknowledge that my personal faith has played a part in my accountability into action, looking inward at myself as part of the problem as well as part of the solution in changing lives within the global community within which we live.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The discussion of closing the achievement gap has been occurring for many years and research has focused on addressing this issue. The idea of providing high-quality education for all children for the purpose of winning the war on poverty, as Geoffrey Canada from the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) puts it, is an idea whose time seems to have come (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). The Cradle to College (n.d.) document produced by the HCZ discusses the mission of this organization in this social endeavor.

The goal is to create a "tipping point" in the neighborhood so that children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults, a counterweight to "the street" and a toxic popular culture that glorifies misogyny and anti-social behavior. The two fundamental principles of The Zone Project are to help kids in a sustained way, starting as early in their lives as possible, and to create a critical mass of adults around them who understand what it takes to help children succeed (p.7).

This speaks to the purpose behind all of the programs and practices within the HCZ and points out the necessity of tackling this issue of poverty with intent.

There has been progress in the educational barriers for many, but the barrier of poverty is one that has not experienced any significant progress as evidenced by the low numbers of literacy achievement and college degrees obtained by people living in generational poverty (Beegle, 2003). While there appears to be no national consensus on the solution to this enormous issue in the United States, it is clear that the status quo of our education system has failed many students (Kunjufu, 2002; Paige & Witty, 2010). Fullan, Hill, and Crevola (2006) emphasize that much of the groundwork has been laid for educational reform to take hold and create positive change for learning in spite of socioeconomic status. The education of America’s students is and always has been predetermined by the experiences, cultures, and perceptions of the environments in which they live. Educators must reconcile themselves to an idea presented by Marie Clay
(1968) so many years ago (as cited in Fullan et al., 2006, p. 78): “What teachers need to do is find points of contact in children’s prior learning, the things that children can do, and spend time helping children firm up their grasp of what they already know”.

One of the major factors in schools today is the social disorganization and disconnect that is present within the classroom and outside of the classroom (Edwards, McMillon & Turner, 2010). Much of the classroom teaching population is comprised of White middle class women, who bring with them their cultural viewpoints and experiences far different from many students within the schools (Howard, 2001; Kunjufu, 2002). Research has pointed out the need for teacher education programs to excel in preparing teachers and administrators in an elevated level of authentic knowledge of diverse cultures with a sincere appreciation for the experiences: the “funds of knowledge” brought to the classroom (Beegle, 2003; Gandara, 2010; Edwards et al., 2010; Payne, 1996). These experiences should be perceived as differences rather than deficits from which to build upon. The student populations in U.S. schools are diverse and represent a multitude of races, religions, ethnicities, languages, abilities, classes, gender and lifestyle choices where individual learning needs are dependent on context and prior experience. Any single aspect of the U.S. student populations presents various challenges and possibilities, but the complex combinations and intersections between and among these differences offers opportunities for our nation critically examine past reform efforts consider future reform that promotes successful learning opportunities for all. The diversity of experiences presents itself early in the educational continuum as evidenced by the diverse abilities of young children entering school. Many children participate in out-of-school experiences that are beneficial for cognitive expansion and growth, and school serves as an extension of this learning. Countless other children engage in out-of-school experiences where opportunities for cognitive
development are absent or minimal at best, and school serves as the primary site for learning to take place. It is imperative that we have schools where all children are successful, not just the lucky ones whose backgrounds are more privileged than others (Allington & Cunningham, 2007b).

Under the leadership of its founder Geoffrey Canada, the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) has been at work for the past ten years promoting the well-being of children in their schools and communities. The HCZ philosophy is based on the belief that the children in Harlem, with effective interventional support, can experience academic achievement on par with their typically developing middle-class peers (Tough, 2008). An understanding of the significance of the early presentation of the achievement gap has led to development and inclusion of early intervention programs among the varied supports offered within the HCZ.

The HCZ has been a model in comprehensive supports where effective, high achieving schools are the core, providing programs from birth through college and supporting families. The results have been communities that have been rebuilt; where parents are reading more to their children, four year olds are cognitively ready for school, poor minority youth are narrowing and closing the achievement gap, teens are graduating from high school and entering college in record numbers, and parents are becoming fiscally responsible-filing tax returns and spending earned credits in the local economy (Canada, 2010). It is from this lens that this thesis reviews the research of the HCZ, focusing on the specific practices that are getting these results, particularly early intervention and school strategies.

The literature for this study has been synthesized and analyzed in order to provide answers to the following question: What structures are in place, and what specific practices are followed within the HCZ framework to produce the positive gains in student achievement? The
positive impacts of the HCZ on student achievement deserves examination, not as a set of prescriptive strategies, but rather possible options for empowering communities and school systems throughout the nation. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a literature review that informs and is informed by the HCZ and its successful programs and practices. A corollary purpose of this thesis is to provide information for others who wish to replicate similar programs and practices.

Early intervention support has been shown to have significant positive impact on cognitive gains for children, as well as high quality school environments where cultural responsiveness is practiced and expectations are high (Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Edwards et al., 2010; Gandara, 2010; Hirsch, 2006; Neuman, 2003, 2009; Payne, 1996). Every community is unique, but the lessons learned from the study of the HCZ can be modified because of their foundational principles supported by the growing research base in the field of education and learning.

This literature review includes approximately 60 sources ranging from journal studies, articles and texts, to HCZ program documents and related websites. The review is organized around three broad categories: (1) HCZ, (2) Early Intervention, and (3) School Practices. These categories were natural progressions of the literature and seemed useful in revealing strategies and practices for classroom teachers in addition to providing the necessary information to address the guiding question of this thesis.
Key Terms

Following are some key terms that will be helpful in providing understanding throughout the review. The definitions are for clarification purposes for this study to assist the reader with understanding of context.

*Achievement gap:* the difference in academic proficiency levels or cognitive levels of acquired knowledge of students by race, culture, or gender

*Comprehensive supports:* all-encompassing supports including education, social, medical, career, and mental health for children, adults and families (federal, state, local).

*Cultural responsiveness:* understanding and valuing the cultural experiences of others and responding in ways that promote this understanding

*Early intervention:* preventive supports to avoid later problems or difficulties

*Generational poverty:* having been in poverty for at least two generations

*High quality schools:* programs where students develop their knowledge and skills within stimulating environments, focused instruction, data driven decision making, strong leadership, and accountability

*Poverty:* (as defined by Payne, 1996) “the extent to which an individual does without resources”, financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/mentors, and knowledge of hidden rule
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Harlem Children’s Zone

Overview and Purpose

An examination of the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) reveals that children living in poverty can achieve academic proficiency levels equal to children of higher socioeconomic status when positive supports are provided. The HCZ has been able to create and sustain beneficial collaborative networks that target the “at-risk” factors in the lives of so many children in Harlem, with quality school experiences serving a crucial centrepiece of the network (Edwards et al., 2010; Tough, 2008). This social experiment has been so successful, that it has been recognized by President Obama as a model for replication in cities across the nation (Edwards et al., 2010; HCZ, 2010; Obama, 2007; Tough, 2008).

The HCZ is a multifaceted, comprehensive, collaborative and continuous support system, established to change the lives of poor children. It has grown from a 24-block target zone to 97 blocks in Harlem where over half of the children live in poverty. This vision of “creating a safety net woven so tightly that children in the neighbourhood can’t slip through” is shared by the HCZ and Canada, the founder (Tough, 2008, p.5). The bottom line for these programs is to give the children of Harlem a better chance for success than has currently existed (Tough, 2008). Table 1 provides an overview of programs, purposes and participants that are part of the HCZ and surrounding area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>TARGETED PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby College</td>
<td>Parenting Workshop: teaches child development, parenting skills, and language development</td>
<td>Parents and infants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Year-Old Journey Program</td>
<td>Parenting Workshop: teaches child development, parenting skills, and language development</td>
<td>Parents and toddlers of Promise Academy lottery winners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Ready for Pre-K</td>
<td>Help future Gem students become familiar with school schedule and procedures before school begins in the fall</td>
<td>New Gem students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlem Gems (3 sites)</td>
<td>Pre-k program</td>
<td>Children within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy Charter Schools (Elementary)</td>
<td>High quality, low-class-size, extended day/extended year schedule</td>
<td>Children within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlem Peacemakers</td>
<td>Trains young people who are committed to making neighborhoods safe/funded by AmeriCorps</td>
<td>Young people within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 5th Grade Institute</td>
<td>After-school Peacemaker program designed to prepare students for Middle School/goal: academic performance</td>
<td>Children within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy Middle School</td>
<td>High quality, low class size, extended day/extended year schedule</td>
<td>Children within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Case Management</td>
<td>Support for students 5th-12 grades: individual case managers</td>
<td>Children within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Renaissance University of Community Education (TRUCE)</td>
<td>Fitness and nutrition center/academic assistance. Video production instruction and experience: cable television show/newspaper reporting. Job skills/college prep.</td>
<td>Focus: middle school and high school youth within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cut Above</td>
<td>After-school middle school program/academic assistance/leadership development/high school-college prep/</td>
<td>Middle school youth not attending the Promise Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys-to-Men and Girl-Power</td>
<td>Guidance and support for leadership within the community/prevention of drug use and gang violence</td>
<td>Gender specific/ run by Peacemakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy High School</td>
<td>High quality, low class size, extended day/extended year schedule</td>
<td>2010-grade 9-11, 2011-grade 9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment and Technology Center (ETC)</td>
<td>Teaches computer and job skills</td>
<td>Teens and adults within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to Earn</td>
<td>After-school program/improve academic skills/college and job prep</td>
<td>High school juniors and seniors within the HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Preparatory Program</td>
<td>Goal: College as an option</td>
<td>Harlem youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College Success Office</td>
<td>College support services/summer and winter-break internships</td>
<td>HCZ high school graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon Community Centers</td>
<td>After-school programs/educational-art-recreational, summer day camps</td>
<td>Youth and adult for families outside HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Pride</td>
<td>Organizes tenant and block associations/ community pride</td>
<td>Harlem residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Stop</td>
<td>Financial advice, public benefit connections, legal guidance, domestic crisis resolution/one-on-one sessions</td>
<td>Residents within HCZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The HCZ Asthma Initiative</td>
<td>Management and support</td>
<td>Asthmatic children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Obesity Initiative</td>
<td>Fight obesity and corresponding health problems</td>
<td>Children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Family Development Program</td>
<td>Access to mental health professionals, collaboration with caseworkers, intervention support</td>
<td>Children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Family Support Center</td>
<td>Specialized in providing crisis intervention services and referrals/anger management education</td>
<td>Children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Midtown Family Place</td>
<td>Counseling, referrals, advocacy/after-school and summer programs for 5-12 grades/ literacy programs/food pantry</td>
<td>Children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project CLASS (Clean Living and Saying Sober)</td>
<td>Drug and alcohol referrals, program implementation, Baby Initiative program</td>
<td>Children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauancy Prevention</td>
<td>Workshops on domestic violence/parenting</td>
<td>Families and teenage groups at risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dobbie and Fryer (2009); HCZ.org (2010)
Table 2 shows programs specifically located within the zone. The scope of the programs includes supports at all levels within the context of community and family.

Table 2 *HCZ Programs within the Zone*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Community Pride</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family Support Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Service</td>
<td>Baby College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3-yr. old Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HCZ Asthma Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HCZ Healthy Living Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>Get Ready for Pre-k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harlem Gems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harlem Gems Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Promise Academy Charter School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peacemakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Promise Academy Charter Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRUCE Fitness and Nutrition Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys to Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girl Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Promise Academy Charter High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRUCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College Success Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and Technology Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational or College Support</td>
<td>College Success Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HCZ.org (2010)

Covey discusses in his book, *The Leader in Me* (2009), the importance of beginning any task with the end in mind. Canada and the HCZ considered the desired outcomes before designing the programs necessary to address and meet those outcomes (Tough, 2008). That vantage point provided a comprehensive scope from which to work and share with others. In Canada’s vision, the success of the program would be achieved when thousands of Harlem’s children would graduate from colleges and return to the community to raise their children in Harlem (HCZ, 2010). That is yet to be determined, but preliminary results are quite promising (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008; Dobbie & Fryer, 2009).

The HCZ actually began in the early 1970’s with just a handful of staff and the primary mission of reducing truancy among Harlem’s school-age youth. It now has grown to 20 sites,
serving approximately 10,500 children and their families, and has a staff of at least 1,300
dedicated individuals. Early interventions for children provide the pivotal difference in future
academic achievement. An important aspect to note about the personnel of the HCZ is the fact
that many of the programs are run by African American instructors and leaders, lending
credibility, trust, and acceptability from the participants. In many traditional intervention
services, White, middle-class teachers are in the position to “tell” culturally diverse students and
families what to do and how to act; not a formula for building trust and promoting the agenda of
equitable education for all (Kunjufu, 2002; Tough, 2008). The goal of the HCZ is to expand
services to 15,000 children by the 2011 school year. The school structures within the zone
include three preschool sites, two elementary (Promise Academies I and II), one middle school
(Promise Academy Middle School) and one high school (Promise Academy High School).

The core mission of the HCZ preschools and Promise Academies is to provide a high-
quality, well-rounded education to the children of Harlem. The teachers and other trained staff
are educated, trained, and qualified to promote environments that are safe, rich, and filled with
high expectations. Language enrichment and vocabulary development are the primary emphasis
of the preschool experiences for all children (Tough, 2008). Classroom teachers focus on explicit
teaching and modeling, build on student strengths, establish high expectations for student
achievement, provide language experiences, practice content inclusion and integration, and
participate teacher training (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). All schools offer extended day and
extended year calendars, providing students with maximum learning opportunities. This creation
of extended opportunity for learning creates a culture and atmosphere where achievement is
valued and student participation is high. Schools are equipped with chefs that offer fresh, local,
and nutritional meals in addition to daily opportunities for physical exercise and activity (HCZ, 2010).

Collaboration between school staff and after-school program staff works to ensure continuity in curriculum expectations and academic assistance. These after-school programs offer a wide range of classes including chess, music, photography, technology, karate, dance, as well as, academic support, which is always a top priority. Saturday Academy is offered for children who need intervention in math or reading skills (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008).

Some recent results indicate the effectiveness of these programs in promoting student success. In 2008, 100 percent of the students attending Promise Academy II (PA2) scored at proficient or above on the state-wide math test and the Promise Academy I (PA1) students had 97 percent of their students scoring at or above proficiency levels in math (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). The Promise Academy Middle School, whose students entered sixth grade with deficits of two to three years in the state-wide math test, has experienced outstanding progress. The eighth graders scored 87 percent on or above grade level compared to previous scores of 40 percent proficiency. The results have gained recognition from the New York City Department of Education with an “A” rating in student performance, as well as national recognition from President Obama who hailed the HCZ as an effective model for others to follow (Obama, 2007).

The HCZ success can be replicated in other cities with attention and focus on five principles (Canada, 2010):

1. Comprehensive service to neighborhoods
2. Continuum of high-quality support from birth through college graduation
3. Build community, support one another
4. Promote culture for success: accountability, leadership, dedication and teamwork
5. Evaluate programs: monitor, adapt and eliminate if necessary

The focus on five principles allows communities to individualize programs and practices to meet their specific needs. It is important to monitor progress and modify according to specific data relevant to environment.

Consultants, external evaluators and researchers are constantly assessing, analyzing and evaluating HCZ data, and using the information gained to modify and drive program implementation (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). A longitudinal study was commissioned in 2008 by the HCZ and is being conducted by Dr. Edmund Gordon of Teachers College to follow the parents and children of the HCZ for 10 to 20 years. This study is expected to yield insight into the effectiveness of the comprehensive systematic support system of the HCZ and the educational outcomes and success of the participants.

**HCZ Programs**

In order to fully understand the scope of comprehensive support and wide range of services offered, refer to Table 1 and Table 2 above. An annotated list of programs included in the Appendix provides further information relating to the specific programs. These programs have been referred to as a conveyer belt or a pipeline of services by the HCZ (HCZ, 2010) Ideally, early entry is the best, beginning before birth as research indicates early interventions provide the most impact for children living in poverty (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). The longer children live without interventions, the more difficult the job of intervention will be (Tough, 2008). The HCZ believes that building a system of intense and continuous academic rigor and support from the earliest possible entry point, will minimize or alleviate the need for middle school and high school interventions (Tough, 2008).
Early intervention programs target parents and children through parent education meetings encompassing child development, discipline, language and literacy acquisition, and health issues. Participants continue to sustain contact through community gatherings and reunions (Tough, 2008). Quality pre-kindergarten programs consist of highly qualified teachers, rich language oriented curriculum, extended day and extended year calendars, and low student-to-teacher ratio. The Promise Academy Charter Schools (elementary) also follow the extended day, extended year calendar, have highly qualified teachers, and offer Saturday school (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). The Promise Academy Middle School currently serves students in grades 4-6, follows an extended schedule, and includes wrap-around services such as free medical, dental, and nutritional care. Promise Academy High School began in 2008, beginning with ninth grade, expanding to tenth grade the following year, with expansion projected to incorporate grades nine through twelve within two years (HCZ, 2010). Academic case management services support 5th-12th grade students and consist of individualized plans, assigned staff members who monitor progress and find assistance when necessary (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008).

Out-of-school supports include after school programs with academic, leadership, recreational, college prep, and drug prevention focuses (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Services for adults feature computer and job skills, job training, conflict resolution, financial planning, social development, legal guidance, social service advice, rehabilitation programs, literacy programs, and mental health programs (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Specific services are provided for foster care prevention and specialize in mental health access and interventions, education in parenting skills and anger management, and drug and alcohol referral programs (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Services are funded through corporate donations and private funding, and staffed by HCZ employees and volunteers (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008).
According to a speech made before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in April, 2010, Canada stressed his belief in the Promise Neighborhoods concept promoted by President Obama as a way to break the generational cycle of poverty experienced by so many Americans, especially those of color. He emphasized the importance of the role of high quality schools as the core of this process and programs for children from cradle to college. To quote Canada, who makes the plight of African American males bleak, he states:

As today’s poor children enter tomorrow’s economy, under-educated and ill-prepared, the cost to America’s future competitiveness in the world marketplace is incalculable. In fact, 75 percent of young people in the U.S. today can’t join the military because they are too poorly educated, are overweight or have a criminal record. In America’s inner cities, more than half of all black men do not finish high school. The impact of this is devastating communities: By their mid-30’s, six in ten black men who had dropped out of school had spent time in prison.

This quote personifies the consequences of failing to provide educational equity and excellence for all children as it shows the importance of healing communities through supportive and systematic programs like the HCZ. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, emphasized the importance of schools during his 2009 address to the HCZ, stating that they were still “hands-down,” the most critical anti-poverty tool for closing the achievement gap (Duncan, 2009). Duncan went on to say that even though these support services and preschool programs have been around for years, the HCZ has capitalized on the comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of poverty with the focus on coordinated high-quality programs, from cradle-to career, keeping schools at its core.

Early Intervention

The Harlem Children’s Zone supports early intervention as evidenced by the inclusion of programs like Baby College and Harlem Gems to mention a few. For discussion purposes, early intervention includes all programs and practices that promote compensatory experiences for children considered at risk for academic success. It is important to remember that literacy
acquisition is directly related to early life experiences of children prior to formal entry to school (Darling, 2008; Foster & Miller, 2007; Justice, Invernizzi, Geller, Sullivan & Welsch, 2005; Keaton, Palmer, Nicolas & Lake, 2007; Morrow, 2005; Neuman & Wright, 2007; Takanishi & Kauerz, 2008). The achievement gap is evident for many children living in poverty from the first day of kindergarten. As illustrated in Table 3, they often struggle to catch up to their average achieving peers (Allington, 2009; Gandara, 2010; Neuman, 2003).

Table 3 Beginning Kindergarteners’ School-Readiness Skills by Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Lowest SES</th>
<th>Highest SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies initial sounds</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies primary colors</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counts to 20</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes own name</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours read to before kindergarten</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accumulated experience with words</td>
<td>13 million</td>
<td>45 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: as cited in Neuman, 2003, p.287

Literacy Acquisition

Kaderavek and Sulsby (1998) defined early literacy as the concepts, skills, and knowledge of young children prior to formal literacy instruction (as cited in Justice et al., 2005, p.1). This study goes on to state that the preschool years are a critical time in which children gain knowledge implicitly and explicitly about oral and written language. This early knowledge base is referred to as emergent literacy, early literacy, preliteracy or emerging literacy (Clay, 1966; Justice et al., 2005; Morrow, 2005). This emergent literacy perspective exposes children to books early and is a dynamic process involving communication skills that are interconnected (Morrow, 2005).

According to Allington & Cunningham (2007b), readiness to read has more to do with experiencing books, stories and print than with any drill or skill practice. Research shows that
effective treatment of literacy deficits must be initiated as early as possible before phonics and decoding become problematic (Foster & Miller, 2007; Justice et al., 2009). Early reading indicators are associated with reading proficiencies ten years later (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Foster and Miller (2007) also noted it has become very apparent that the literacy achievement gap already exists for many students when they enter kindergarten, and must be addressed during the years prior, as elementary reading deficits and difficulties continue to manifest themselves in subsequent years if no interventions are in place. Lyon (2001) presented research showing that children who receive early, targeted support are able to develop average reading skills 85 percent to 95 percent of the time (as cited in Foster & Miller, 2007).

Multiple research studies indicate exposure to positive literacy experiences involving reading aloud, dialogic interaction, vocabulary development, parental and caregiver participation, alphabet promotion and phonemic awareness with oral language competencies have positive impacts on literacy acquisition (Foster & Miller, 2007; Edwards et al, 2010; Fox, 2009; Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2007; Moustafa, 1997; Schickedanz, 1999). White (2009) stated that vocabulary knowledge is the single best predictor of reading comprehension, and the cumulative effect of this knowledge can begin early to prevent deficits. According to White, oral language is fundamental for reading success, and reading success can be predicted by the language development as early as four years of age. Vocabulary knowledge leads to oral language proficiency, determining a child’s ability to transition to literacy awareness, understanding and achievement. Comprehension skills (i.e., meaning making), which lead to optimal knowledge acquisition are influenced by oral language proficiency (Hirsch, 2006; White, 2009). White stated the vocabulary gap exists upon school entry among low income children (3,000 words) and middle class children (20,000 words), further indicating the
importance of early language experiences. Hirsch pointed out that we miss a critical opportunity for gaining foundational knowledge when we fail to spend large amounts of time reading aloud and discussing challenging material with children before they are capable of reading and decoding independently. During the early years, listening and talking are the primary ways in which children acquire knowledge (Foster & Miller, 2007; White, 2009).

Morrow (2005) presents several rationale points based on current research and practices describing successful literacy programs as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Rationale Points of Successful Literacy Programs

- Literacy is a process beginning in infancy
- Family participation promotes literacy acquisition
- School environments must realize that prior knowledge differs with individual children
- Literacy skills are dependent on prior knowledge
- Social context promote dialogic experiences, leading to oral language
- Literacy learning is best learned in adult facilitated supportive environments
- Frequent monitoring and assessments should be tied to instruction
- Reading fluency by third grade should be goal of early reading programs

Source: Morrow (2005)

Reading Aloud

Mem Fox, a well known children’s author, writes about the significance of parental and caregiver participation in the read aloud experiences of infants and preschool children. Fox (2009) states that by the age of one, children will have heard all of the sounds of their native language, and book language is similar to learning a native language. She refers to the theory that children need to have heard approximately 1000 stories read to them before they attempt to read for themselves, stating that in one year with three stories per day that target can be reached, not to mention the cumulative number of stories in the multiple years before entry to school. Fox goes on to discuss the value of familiarity with book language and provision of a knowledge base for future reading experiences, which reading aloud provides for children who are too young to read for themselves. Darling (2008) also discusses the importance of the positive impact of
parental involvement, regardless of socioeconomic status on children’s reading acquisition. The more children are read to, the more knowledge they will gain about the world around them which promotes understanding and “meaning-making” leading to literacy success (Fox, 2009; Hirsch, 2006). One benefit of reading aloud to children is the knowledge gained in print concepts as it is referenced over and over (Fox, 2009; Justice, et al., 2009). Early vocabulary development leads to literacy success. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) conducted a study that showed current school assessments reveal that the vocabulary acquisition of second graders has a reliable predicting effect on 11th grade academic performance (as cited in Hirsch, 2006, p. 61). This vocabulary development begins at an early age, and it is a prime example of the importance of providing young children language experiences regularly, before kindergarten.

**Quality Preschool Programs**

While parental involvement is vitally important for children’s early literacy success, quality preschool programs are an essential component for providing compensatory experiences lacking in many home environments (Edwards et al., 2010; Gandara, 2010; Justice et al., 2009; Neuman, 2003; Takanishi & Kauerz, 2008; Zimmerman, Rodriguez, Rewey & Heidemann, 2008). Quality programs are identified by literacy rich environments and practices including a focus on vocabulary development and meaningful experiences, trained teachers and staff, alignment of education goals with assessment instruments, parental involvement and education, extended time, intensive explicit instruction if necessary, two-way conversational experiences, direct instruction mixed with developmentally appropriate practices, and scaffolding of lessons (Darling, 2008; Fox, 2009; Hirsch, 2006; Justice, et al., 2005; Keaton et al., 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2008). As Fox (2009) pointed out; reading problems are difficult to fix, but easy to prevent. This prevention should happen long before the first day of school; at this point
the instruction switches from prevention to intervention and remediation. Hirsch (2006) states that the long term gain for starting school early is extremely beneficial for children in poverty, promoting effective schooling experiences are compensatory in nature, providing foundational experiences for literacy success.

According to Takanashi and Kauerz (2008), any discussion involving educational reform should include increased attention to improving the front end of the preschool-college continuum. This study emphasizes the correlation of academic trajectories and third grade reading levels as an impetus for the earliest possible interventions, with vertical alignment of educational goals, including both public and private domains. Unless adults take the lead in promoting positive literacy experiences for children, they will have little opportunity to become familiar with the formal structures used in written language (Schickendanz, 1999). An excerpt from the 1998 Joint Position Statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for Education of Young Children, present the corollary of the early childhood years and future reading success (as cited in Schickendanz, 1999, p. 159).

Learning to read and write is critical to a child’s success in school and later in life. One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in our increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing. Although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years—from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development.

As this quote indicates, early language opportunities are vital for promoting the acquisition of literacy. Much of the research repeatedly focused on early exposure to language patterns, structures, and vocabulary as preparation for future reading and writing success (Darling, 2008; Fox, 2009; Hirsch, 2006; Justice, et al., 2005; Keaton et al., 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2008).
The commitment of the HCZ to early intervention is demonstrated by the attention given to the development and structure of the programs that promote healthy positive environments for young children. The Baby College is intended for families of children, from prenatal through three years of age, and illustrates the importance of preventive care and nurturing developmental environments. After a nine week class, these families continue to meet in order to remain connected and supported (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Tough (2008) stated that the primary emphasis of the preschool programs was language enrichment and vocabulary development, known to be key factors in literacy development. As noted in the discussion of the HCZ programs, the preschool classrooms are staffed with highly qualified teachers. In addition, the preschool curriculum includes exposure to three languages with explicit and focused instruction, and extended schedules (HCZ, 2010). Family support services, medical services, and foster care preventive services all exemplify the dedication of the HCZ to improving the lives of children (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Hirsch (2006) stated that failure to provide equal opportunity for all children at the beginning of life is a failure in our duty to preserve what is best in our inheritance and a squandering of the most precious resource our country has for influence in the global world of today.

School Practices

While student achievement discussions naturally include school practices that influence student performance and learning, they must reference that school practices are not exclusionary efforts in education (Edwards et al., 2010). Cultural, community, and family entities must be understood, valued and promoted within any area of student learning (Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond, French & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Howard, 2008; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Payne, 1996; Young, 2010). Classroom teachers however, have a tremendous impact on
the motivation, instruction, and learning that occurs within school environments (Beegle, 2003; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is within this context that literature was reviewed to identify common practices positively affecting student achievement and to show the correlation between these practices and HCZ programs and practices.

Effective classroom instruction includes culturally responsive teaching, focus on student achievement with emphasis on literacy acquisition, and effective intervention programs (Allington & Cunningham, 2007b; Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Edwards et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Gandara, 2010; Hirsch, 2006; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2002; Payne, 1996; Schmoker, 2007; Young, 2010). Other factors that influence classroom instruction are the overall climate of the school and district, the leadership of both, and the systems that drive instruction. Teaching occurs within the socio-educational environment within which it is framed and is influenced by the policies and procedures driven by the expectations of those who hold the dominant influence of the time (Beegle, 2003; Hirsch, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010; Payne, 1996; Young, 2010). Teachers and educators who possess an extensive and deep understanding of diverse learners and effective teaching strategies, as well as participate in collaborative professional learning environments positively impact student achievement for all learners (Edwards et al., 2010; Howard, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Young, 2010).

Teaching Practices

The literature surrounding this topic is voluminous and includes many aspects of effective teaching practices impacting student achievement, including in no particular order of importance: teacher focus on achievement, belief in student achievement, clear and explicit goals and mission, emphasis on reading skills, dedication to diversity and equity, data driven decision making, teacher accountability and understanding, regular teacher-parent communication,
collaborative sharing of information, coherent standards based curriculum, available instructional resources, positive and orderly environment, caring faculty and staff, high priority of time on task, compensatory instructional interventions, and explicit direct instruction for some skills (Beegle, 2003; Blankstein, 2004; Edwards et al., 2010; Howard, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Kunjufu, 2002; Payne, 1996). It is difficult to engage in any discussion of positive teacher practices without mentioning practices that have negative influences on student achievement. In the discussion of negative practices it is the intent that educators would begin to examine behaviors and beliefs as they structure learning around those behaviors and practices that have been identified as having positive impacts on language and literacy achievement. Educators must begin to move beyond the concept of thinking that reading is a skills-based approach and recognize that it is a process that includes contextual interactive experiences (Compton-Lilly, 2009).

One particular practice of literacy instruction is the traditional practice of reading groups: above average, average, and below average (high, middle, low). Edwards et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of examining grouping practices for reading instruction and the effect that it has on teacher expectations, student perceptions, and achievement. This practice has been cited to promote differing expectations for different groups of students, rather than ensuring all students gain equitable experiences and opportunities in learning (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Lewis & Kim, 2008). Allington and Cunningham (2007a, b) state that beliefs precede practice, and many teachers still believe and are trained that grouping is beneficial for all involved. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) discuss the importance of differentiated instruction dependent on individual needs, not assumed expectations. The problem exists when teachers believe that students in the lowest group can never catch up with their peers.
and instruction follows that expectation, yielding inequity in teaching practices for an entire
group of learners and leads to student tracking (Allington and Cunningham, 2007b; Corcoran &
Mamalakis, 2009; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Edwards et al., 2010; Hirsch, 2006; Jensen, 2009). It
has been shown that teacher expectations, especially high expectations and belief in successful
academic achievement capabilities promote high student achievement (Howard, 2001, 2008;
Kunjufu, 2002). Small group instruction dependent on assessment evaluation has been shown to
positively impact skill acquisition of learners, but also needs to be viewed as a dynamic process
that is driven by data informed practices (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Chenoweth, 2009;
Edwards et al., 2010; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2002). Small group instruction for explicit
instruction of reading strategies is most effective when implemented by trained and qualified
teachers of reading instruction (Allington & Cunningham 2007a, b; Edwards, McMillon &
Turner, 2010; Howard, 2001; Schmoker, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Focusing on
specific skill acquisition for literacy achievement and developing instructional strategies based
on individual progress should be the practice of effective literacy instructional programs rather
than grouping students based on perceived levels of achievement or current levels of
achievement (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Edwards et al., 2010). What goes on in the
classroom is of significant importance (Jensen, 2009).

*Time on Task*

Establishing learning environments where students are actively engaged in the learning
processes required for knowledge and understanding require an appreciation that time on task
and student learning are related (Davis & Dupper, 2004; Howard, 2001; Schmoker, 2007).
Allington & Cunningham (2007a) stressed the importance of allowing students to actively
engage in actual reading and writing experiences, stating that higher levels of reading proficiency
were noted in schools that offered longer blocks of time for authentic reading and writing experiences. Time spent on vocabulary development through explicit and implicit instruction has shown positive correlates with student literacy achievement; specifically acquisition of background knowledge necessary for comprehension (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Hirsch, 2006). Howard’s 2001 study highlighted the instructional beliefs of African American teachers, showing their no-nonsense approach to teaching, with the intent of using time wisely to instruct students with the skills required for foundational learning. Howard also pointed out their focus on skill sets to be learned, and their sense of urgency to prepare students for success.

Classroom management was cited as a critical factor in advancing more quality time for learning opportunities to occur (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Howard 2001; Young, 2010). Many studies have pointed out the importance of learning within the social context of collaboration, sharing and conversing with one another, and promote allocating time for this kind of interaction to take place within classroom environments (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Edwards et al., 2010, Fisher & Frey, 2007; Howard, 2001). Allington and Cunningham (2007b) also support the significance of dialogic interactions among students to and increase understanding and achievement.

Another aspect to consider, is what Hirsch (2006) described as “opportunity cost” (p.80). Hirsch explained that some benefits may be lost at the expense of engaging in other experiences. It is crucial to remember the possibility that time spent on one activity may undermine what really may need attention. If students already have acquired a knowledge or skill base, the practice of spending precious time teaching that same concept would represent a loss of opportunity for other bases of knowledge. The same can be said for lost instructional time during transitions. Teachers must examine classroom procedures from the opening minutes to the final
minutes of each day, with instructional opportunity as a focus, especially for learners who
acquire most of their academic knowledge from school (Hirsch, 2006; Howard, 2001, 2008;
Jensen, 2009; Kunjufu, 2002).

Instructional time is of the essence in HCZ programs as noted in the extended day and
extended year schedule (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). According to Tough (2008), much of the
instructional time is spent on skill set instruction. As evidenced through student-teacher ratios,
after-school academic assistance, and the encouragement of Saturday school attendance, the
HCZ practices are aligned with current research related to learning and time-on-task (HCZ,
2010; Tough, 2008). This extended exposure to learning opportunities must be facilitated by
teachers who are trained in effective practices of instruction and learning.

Teacher Expertise in Literacy Instruction

Schmoker (2007) highlights the importance of the inclusion of authentic literacy (the
ability to read, write, and think effectively) in any discussion related to educational reform
(p.488). Intellectual power and achievement are dependent on the ability to read purposefully
and strategically and this ability opens doors of opportunity in our society; pointing to the larger
teacher core beliefs of literacy to the systematic instructional programs in place; when teachers
are dedicated to refining practice, participating in learning communities, and peer coaching,
literacy results are strong. Professional training and developing teacher expertise is critical in
teaching struggling learners or literacy skills (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Chenoweth,
training includes but is not limited to pre-service teacher training, professional development,
collaborative learning communities, and review of research and current literature (Blankstein,
2004; Chenoweth, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Jensen, 2009). Allington and Cunningham, (2007a, b) state the importance of connecting students with the most need to teachers with the most qualifications.

Strong literacy programs include teachers who understand that good readers need time to practice reading with few interruptions in addition to having opportunities toward making meaning and understanding texts (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Edwards et al., 2010; Hirsch, 2006). Inclusion of authentic experiences, such as hip-hop lyrics for students provides motivation as well as builds on strengths instead of weaknesses (Corcoran & Mamalakis, 2009; Edwards et al., 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Howard, 2008; Lewis & Kim, 2008). Explicit teaching and modeling are components of effective teacher practice (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b). Teacher belief and understanding of the importance of language in the instructional process is significant (Payne, 1996). Oral language opportunities should be valued and encouraged as reading and writing are extensions of language; oral language vocabularies are smaller than written language vocabularies, therefore exposure to written texts is important for vocabulary expansion and understanding (Allington & Cunningham, 2007b; Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Hirsch, 2006; Howard, 2001; Payne, 1996). Reading aloud should be a daily experience in every classroom (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b). Teachers who understand the integration of content instruction and provide opportunities for student choice in the process are teachers who produce students with higher levels of reading proficiency (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a; Edwards et al., 2010; Hirsch, 2006).

Fullan et al. (2006) offer three factors influencing student achievement: (1) providing motivation to learn with high expectations, (2) allowing time on task and opportunity to learn, and (3) focused, explicit teaching. Any one of these factors is in and of itself effective, but in
combination, produces results in achievement for students. Reviewing the HCZ literature and current research, the HCZ practices show alignment with best practice through their focus on explicit teaching and modeling, student strengths, high expectations, belief in student achievement, language experiences, content inclusion and integration, and teacher training (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Instructional practices include the holistic approach of cultural responsiveness which will be discussed further.

*Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)*

Crawford (2007) points out societal viewpoints influence teachers’ attitudes and beliefs and drive their everyday practice (as cited in Paige & Witty, 2010, p.102). As noted earlier in this study, the majority of teachers in U.S. schools are White middle class women, which suggests the possibility of the projection, promotion, acceptance and expectation of those cultural values for all students (Beegle, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002; Payne 1996). This fact makes it necessary for teacher preparation programs to involve understanding of cultural responsiveness in teaching (Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2010; Howard, 2008; Payne, 1996). Cultural issues are not limited to race and ethnicity, but include social class structure as well, citing tensions expressed by lower income parents discouraged from interacting with middle-class teachers (Edwards et al., 2010; Kunjufu, 2002). Howard (2001) states that one of the most pressing issues facing educators today is the effective teaching of African American students. Engaging in dialogue where racial issues are discussed is essential for students and teachers to understand the impact of certain practices and programs on particular cultural populations (Banks, 1993; Edwards et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Howard, 2001, 2008; Paige & Witty, 2010; Young, 2010). A deliberate focus on understanding class issues in addition to racial issues is imperative with the
emphasis on avoiding stereotyping students according to culture and environmental circumstances. Teachers are rarely equipped to provide children with the necessary resources to break the cycle of poverty because they fail to recognize and identify with the elements and obstacles of poverty (Beegle, 2003). It should be noted that poverty includes many cultures and should not be defined as a culture within itself, although many aspects of poverty produce similar outcomes and behaviors creating a framework for understanding.

An aspect of CRT that bears much discussion is teacher awareness of language within cultural contexts (Allington & Cunningham, 2007b; Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Howard, 2001; Payne, 1996). Careful attention to the strengths of African American students in oral language preferences should be considered when written assessments are promoted in the early grades, as well as the inclusion and promotion of conversation and discussion within classroom learning environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2010; Howard, 2001). An understanding of the formal and informal registers of language must be acquired by both students and teachers, with sensitivity to the respect and appreciation of the cultural language of many students, realizing that communication style and sentence structure are different from middle class White culture (Beegle, 2003; Howard, 2001; Kunjufu, 2002; Payne, 1996). Beegle (2003) noted that the communication styles of students from poverty often clash with the communication styles within classroom and educational environments. Acceptance and support of standard English as the given language for opening social, educational and financial opportunities, especially within the U.S., while respecting the legitimacy of Ebonics or Black English Vernacular (BEV) in the lives of African American students is a practice of current CRT (Howard, 2001; Payne, 1996). While mention of African American culture has been represented in this discussion, it is worth noting that it no
longer is the only racial or cultural concern; numerous students in today’s classrooms represent
diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic origins which must be respected, acknowledged and
understood through engagement in authentic honest dialogue (Scott, Teale, Carry, Johnson &
Morgan, 2009).

Learning opportunities must be relevant and personal for deep understanding and
meaning making for students, embracing the idea that learning structures and stimuli that are
grounded within familiar cultural context enhance the potential for greater cognitive expansion
(Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Howard, 2001; Jensen, 2009). CRT involves awareness that
race and culture impact learning, providing students with different life experiences and
perceptions from which to draw (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2010; Howard,
2001, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Young, 2010). Hirsch (2006) explicitly states the importance of
building and connecting background knowledge for comprehension proficiency. As well as
academic achievement expectations, it is important to take a look holistically at educating
students with a greater understanding and appreciation of others in order to successfully
communicate within the social constructs of cultural exchange. Engaging in CRT is help
students and teachers recognize the similarities among people as the differences are explored and
understood from a culturally pluralistic lens (Banks, 2009).

The HCZ programs are designed with an awareness of cultural expectations is evidenced
by the focus on skill sets and behaviors necessary to accomplish that goal, in other words,
helping children to become aware of societal expectations for success and developing strategies
to build that success (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). The importance of language acquisition and
exposure to multiple languages is seen in the curriculum inclusion of English, French, and
Spanish (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). Canada’s authentic and honest dialogue about racial
disparity in education shows that he values academic achievement as the trajectory for escaping poverty (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). The HCZ promotes a cultural awareness of expectations among diverse populations, especially the (White) middle class, and prepares students to be successful operating within that culture. In order to meet the needs of all students, it is critical to provide interventions and strategies as needed, focusing on the skill sets to be learned for proficiency within the structure of CRT.

Practices Impacting Struggling Readers (Interventions)

Because poverty is the largest correlate of reading achievement, it is not surprising that many students living in poverty also experience reading difficulties (Cunningham, 2006; Foster & Miller, 2007). Reading is a process that involves social experiences and cultural identities and must be considered in any attempts to assist struggling readers (Beegle, 2003; Compton-Lilly, 2009; Payne, 1996). Most struggling readers never catch up with their higher-achieving peers because interventions are not targeted to their specific needs, and classroom instruction, where they spend much of their day, is geared to the average learner (Allington, 2009). Allington and Cunningham (2007a) stress the idea that struggling readers need more instructional and engaged reading time.

The following practices are referred to in Allington’s, (2009) book, What Really Matters in Response to Intervention. Struggling readers need a full day of high quality instruction delivered by teachers who are trained in reading interventions and strategies. Intervention must be viewed as compensatory in nature, intensive, explicit, regular and accelerated. Teachers must teach with the expectation that students will “catch up” with higher achieving peers. Early intervention is effective for preventive remediation, with the inclusion of classroom supports in place through third grade (Koutsoftas, Harmon & Gray, 2007). One-on-one intervention is best
for struggling readers, with the single most effective component of reading success being the reading and re-reading of instructional leveled texts. Allington and Cunningham (2007b) cite an example of a school where every struggling reader in kindergarten and first grade spent 20 minutes daily for an entire school year with individual staff members, reading and rereading appropriate leveled books. This practice was so successful that very few students required remedial or special education programs beyond second grade, proving the case for early intervention, extra time and support.

Other practices are worth mentioning in the discussion of intervention practices. Direct phonics instruction is beneficial for children in poverty, ESL students, and children with learning disabilities (Foster & Miller, 2007; Edwards et al., 2010). These practices must be used systematically, for short durations, and balanced with authentic reading and writing experiences (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Foster & Miller, 2007). The primary focus on instruction, real reading and writing, student engagement and implementation of a strong foundational instructional framework are essential elements in any program where struggling readers make significant reading gains (Cunningham, 2006).

The intervention programs offered within the HCZ framework are compensatory, accelerated, intensive, explicit, and targeted for success (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008). In addition to early intervention; remediation and extra support are provided through Saturday school opportunities, after school tutoring and highly qualified classroom teachers (HCZ, 2010; Tough, 2008).

In summary, the literature supports the alignment of HCZ programs and practices with current educational research. The attention to the contextual process of cognitive expansion has been shown throughout the literature discussions of foundational experiences and prior
knowledge, family and community involvement including comprehensive supports. This interdependence is discussed further in the findings of the literature.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to address the question: What structures are in place, and what specific practices are followed within the HCZ framework to produce the positive gains in student achievement, I conducted a literature review based on the subject of facilitating high achievement among student populations in poverty. I used nearly 60 sources including journal studies and articles, program documents from the HCZ, speech transcriptions, HCZ website information, and texts generated from topics surrounding the programs and practices of the HCZ. The following descriptors were used in locating sources: early intervention, early literacy, the achievement gap, children in poverty, quality teaching, culturally responsive teaching, language acquisition, and supports for struggling readers. Because the volume of possible literature was extensive, I limited my search to sources dating from 1995 until present day but did include secondary sources dating much earlier as they were cited in my primary sources. The online sources included the following data bases: EBSCO host, Academic Search Premier, Educational Resource Information (ERIC), Google, and Amazon.

My intent was to develop a list of practices that were common among programs that were succeeding in assisting children living in poverty with academic achievement. From that list, further research on specific practices would show evidence of common beliefs and strategies that produced positive results for student achievement. Table 5 displays many common recurring programs and practices, from the focus on the topics of early intervention and school practices.
Table 5 List of Effective Practices with Positive Impacts on Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>clear and focused mission</th>
<th>classroom management</th>
<th>tradition institutional practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>community and public support</td>
<td>strong leadership</td>
<td>intervention supports for struggling readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehensive, coordinated services</td>
<td>time-on-task</td>
<td>home-school-community partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>core knowledge</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>data driven instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiated instruction</td>
<td>student motivation</td>
<td>highly qualified teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>early intervention</strong></td>
<td>compensatory preschool experiences</td>
<td>empowerment from within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literacy and language</td>
<td>high expectations</td>
<td>proper use of assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional development</td>
<td>racial inequities</td>
<td>teacher preparation and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional learning communities</td>
<td><strong>school and classroom practices</strong></td>
<td>curriculum alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racial inequities</td>
<td>culturally responsive teaching</td>
<td>21st century skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Literature review

As information was gathered, I synthesized and closely analyzed it against the backdrop of the HCZ program practices. I organized my literature review based on three broad categories: (1) HCZ, (2) Early Intervention, and (3) School Practices. The HCZ focus included an overview of the history and purpose of the model as well as further examination of the programs and structures. The important principles for replication were also mentioned in this section. The Early Intervention focus highlighted successful literacy programs, early literacy and oral language, reading aloud, and quality preschool programs. A correlation of HCZ practices and early intervention practices was discussed in summary. The third and final category of discussion concerns involved school practices that relate to academic achievement. Teacher expectations, time-on-task, teacher expertise in literacy instruction, CRT, and intervention practices for struggling readers were analyzed against HCZ programs and practices.

These findings were discussed with correlation of the HCZ programs and practices in mind. The recurrent concepts, themes and issues were highlighted and referenced as they related
to the HCZ. Limitations of the literature review and discussion of the implications of the study was presented in addition to possibilities of further research opportunities.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

There is strong evidence in the literature to endorse programs that provide comprehensive, multifaceted systems of support for children and families living in poverty positively impacts academic achievement levels of students and improves opportunities for later societal success (Blankstein, 2009; Dobbie & Fryer, 2009; Edwards et al., 2010; Gandara, 2010; Lyon, 2001; Neuman, 2009; Tough, 2008). All of the studies and literature included in this review substantiate and accentuate these results. In addition, the literature concentrating on the HCZ reveals a clear connection to research based practices that effectively promote student achievement (Allington, 2009; Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Chenoweth, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006; Howard, 2001; Newman, 2003; Payne, 1996; Takanashi & Kauerz, 2008; White & Kim, 2009). Many studies discussed the complexity of education, society and cultural values as they related to student motivation and learning. One recurring concept across the literature was the importance of background knowledge and comprehension, which shows the necessity of building upon the experiences of students to make connections and increase understanding (Allington & Cunningham, 2007a, b; Hirsch, 2006; Payne, 1996). Different experiences render different perspectives from which to validate, expand and provide deeper understanding (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Howard, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Payne, 1996).

Racial inequity in American education remains, as was a prominent subject in much of the literature, and citing teachers are lacking in cultural understanding (Beegle, 2003; Crawford, 2007; Edwards et al., 2010; Gandara, 2010; Howard, 2009; Kunjufu, 2002; Neuman, 2008; Paige & Witty, 2010; Payne, 1996). Cultural diversity and culturally responsive teaching practices were prominent themes within the literature, citing the importance of developing deep understanding of perspective, plurality, respect, and inclusion as students and teachers interact.
within the context of society (Banks, 1993; Beegle, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Payne, 1996; Young, 2010). The HCZ literature highlighted the plight of African American students, as did the literature, pointing out familiar and disturbing findings of inequitable practices and policies leading to implications for change (Howard, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Kozol, 2000; Kunjufu, 2002; Payne, 1996; Tough, 2008). The HCZ has purposefully hired African American instructors and teachers in their programs, citing the sense of trust established within the parenting community from feeling cultural validation and understanding (Tough, 2008). Much of the literature involving cultural and racial issues implied the need for comprehensive involvement, participation and accountability of families, individuals, communities, schools and governments in addressing the issues.

The HCZ is providing comprehensive, correlated and targeted supports to students and families within the specified zone through parenting classes, high quality preschool and school environments, after-school programs, drug prevention and rehabilitation counseling and services, foster care prevention services, and community building programs. Particular emphasis is placed on developing strong family environments where children are nurtured and provided with learning opportunities, quality school environments where students are provided with effective instructional supports for academic achievement, wrap-around services and supports including medical, social, family, and educational. It is apparent that strong leadership is in place, financial support has been obtained, and lives are being changed (Canada, 2010; Dobbie & Fryer, 2009; Edwards et al., 2010; Tough, 2008). The evidence of the literature review implies that the practices of the HCZ are aligned with current research and appear to have positive results for the children and families involved.
Limitations

Because multiple factors are involved in the success of the HCZ and student achievement, it was impossible to completely investigate in depth the chosen topics. While much of the literature dealt with the Black-White achievement gap, it is common knowledge that African American students are not the only population of students who struggle in the classroom (Beegle, 2003; Edwards et al., 2010; Gandara, 2010; Neuman, 2009; Tough, 2008). Another limiting factor in truly evaluating the progress of the HCZ is the lack of empirical research on the program. Because of its relatively short tenure as a successful program, little independent empirical research is available on classroom practice and specific teacher data. The information from the HCZ website was informative, but needs to be evaluated with caution as it has been internally generated. The fact that the HCZ receives generous amounts of private funding could be considered by some as difficult to replicate. The narrow scope of 100 blocks, while ambitious, does not equate with the scale of national education populations in need. It might be important to mention the charismatic nature of Canada, who stands at the helm of this organization. His vision, connections, and style appear to be an asset to the HCZ, but that kind of leadership is not a given in every community.

While much of the HCZ information revealed positive practices and programs, there was very little discussion on specific instructional practices within the classroom. Tough (2008) made reference to direct instructional approaches as well as a broad exposure to content through a rich curriculum. Future research should examine specific teacher practices surrounding instruction and the ways that culturally responsive practices impact student success and promote effective teaching.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The literature reviewed shows specific and targeted areas where instructional leaders can play a role in the implementation and planning of support programs promoting student achievement among students living in poverty. While recognizing that the HCZ is a model of successful programming, it is important to remember the specific cultural needs within individual communities. The most significant finding from the literature is the comprehensive scope of support necessary for providing children with the systems for success. Newman (2009) pointed out seven essential principles that are essential for improved cognitive and social development of children. They include: (1) actively targeting the neediest children, (2) prevention is the key—early intervention, (3) providing intensity (time), (4) hiring qualified professionals, (5) coordinating services, (6) providing compensatory instruction, and (7) practicing accountability. These principles are incorporated within the organizational practice of the HCZ as they have embraced the holistic approach to education. Schools are a crucial part of the equation, but not the only contributing factor in student success.

The HCZ model of comprehensive supports for children in poverty provides examples of strategies and programs for the purpose of empowering individuals to break out of the cycle. The focus of early intervention, family inclusion, and community participation highlight the necessity of coordinated efforts to ensure successful implementation and sustainability. The scale of the project is rather small in comparison to entire school systems, yet offers useful insight to programs within more traditionally funded educational models. The focus of the 100 block area has evolved over a 20-year time frame, has struggled with failure, and relied on data to successfully be the program that it is today. As we look at replication of services and supports for children in poverty, we must keep in mind the extensive commitment, garnered support, and
focused mission of the HCZ organization as we collaboratively work within communities for similar success.

The importance of early intervention has been shown by the repeated emphasis throughout the literature review. The fact that early experiences influence literacy acquisition and cognitive development highlight the need for communities to embrace this educational reform with high priority. Family supports must be included in this reform, as much of the learning experiences of young children fall within these contexts. Compensatory high-quality preschool experiences with extended scheduling would significantly contribute to the cognitive opportunities of young children. The front-end expense of early intervention supports would be offset by increased student achievement. The literature supports increases in student achievement as having positive impacts on trajectory paths for individuals. These increases lead to less remediation, less delinquency, lower crime rates and incarcerations, higher academic proficiency, higher educational attainment, higher wages, and higher levels of community involvement and participation. In other words, this front-end priority of supports is vital for healthy communities.

Teachers and school leaders must begin to examine personal beliefs and practices as they honestly evaluate their roles in the promotion of equitable opportunities for all students. Teachers need to be engaged in culturally responsive practices where learning environments encourage authentic, consistent and extensive reading and writing experiences, have high expectations, and monitor instruction according to data collected. Educational understanding of preventive intervention and remediation programs is necessary in providing programs of effective instruction for language and literacy learning. Comprehending the concept of generational poverty and its impact is crucial in understanding the urgency of equipping children to break out
of that cycle. We must be willing to modify current traditions of practice and policy in favor of those evidenced in the HCZ literature producing positive results for children in poverty; specifically extended scheduling and compensatory instruction. Teachers and educational leaders must be willing to work collaboratively, attend to current research and focus on student achievement. By observing Canada’s leadership, it is apparent that his focus has been wide in scope and high in expectation. Leaders must embrace the possibility of success and participate in comprehensive programs to make it happen. They must be willing to do whatever it takes to help children on their way to productive adult lives within the global society of tomorrow.

The plethora of literature examining educational issues is often overwhelming, inconsistent, and biased, but one aspect rings true; literacy acquisition opens doors of opportunity. It seems likely if the general public understood the cost of illiteracy in our country alone, they would be supportive of preventive measures that could effectively decrease the economic burden of lost earning capacity, remediation programs, and incarceration costs, to name a few. The HCZ is a perfect example of an organization comprehending the magnitude of making a positive difference for generations to come, focusing efforts on strengthening families, supporting children and promoting education.

It stands to reason that, we as a nation should pay attention to the results that are occurring within the HCZ to strengthen our efforts to improve the trajectory for thousands of children in poverty. After all, its success has implications for the national success and beyond. The time has never been more perfect for reform and commitment to converge; with government support, public awareness, and empirical evidence coming together to change lives for the better (Edwards et al., 2010).
This social experiment has certainly given merit to a vision of creating a “safety net woven so tightly that no one would fall through” (Tough, 2008, p.5). The longitudinal study currently underway involving the HCZ will be interesting to follow as it will reveal useful information (HCZ, 2010). The HCZ and all involved serve as an inspiration by doing “whatever it takes” to help children see a future filled with hope and possibility. This model of commitment and vision shows us that it can be done. Schools and communities should take notice, realize the capacity that we have as a nation to get this right; as Paige and Witty purport this as the “greatest civil rights issue of our time” (2010, p. 185). Time will tell the HCZ story, but it appears that they are on a successful journey, with many exciting chapters ahead. It is time for others to begin the journey as well, focusing on the generational implications of bright futures, healthy communities, and contributing citizens. The call to action has been given, and it is up to all to respond. Malcolm X presented a clear and explicit message about the importance of education when he said, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare today” (as cited in Paige & Witty, 2010, p. 184). Often our response to action leaves us with more questions to explore.

Questions for Further Research

As this study addressed structure and school practices, other question present themselves. The following questions could be used for greater evaluative research into the success of the HCZ and similar programs. (1) Is it possible to sustain achievement gains within an organization that lacks a strong leader? (2) How experienced are the teachers within the HCZ, and what kind of role do they have in decision making and curriculum implementation? (3) How alike and how different are the classrooms and practices of the HCZ with other high performing regular funded schools?
As the programs addressing the needs of the populations of students in poverty are examined, literature will be informed correlates existing among successful programs and practices will be developed. With the current interest in the HCZ from a national perspective, these correlates will be useful for addressing multiple questions and concerns for those seeking informed data on the subject.
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National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC.


APPENDIX
HCZ PROGRAMS

Baby College (1,300 participants over the past six years)
- Considered the “essential” component of the HCZ
- A nine-week parenting workshop to expectant parents and those raising children up to three years old.
- T. Barry Brazelton, noted pediatrician and child psychologist, collaborated in curriculum design.
- Lessons include five subject areas
  1. brain development
  2. language and literacy acquisition: reading, singing, playing with child,
  3. discipline: (most controversial) physical/nonphysical ways of discipline, discipline versus punishment
  4. health (immunization expectations)
  5. asthma and lead
- After completion, participants join organized monthly meetings

Three-Year-Old Journey Program
- Saturday classes for parents of HCZ Promise Academy lottery winners
- Teaches child development, parenting skills, and building language skills

Get Ready For Pre-K
- A six-week summer session for new Gems students
- Goal: help future Gem students become familiar with the school schedule before school begins in the fall

Harlem Gems (three sites/200 children)
- Pre-k program
- Extended day: 8:00-6:00 pm
- Extended year: September-August
- 4:1 child-to-adult ratio
- Rich curriculum includes English, Spanish, and French
- (Harlem Gems: Head Start: max 20 students/ one lead one assistant, 3 Peacemakers)
- (Harlem Gem Universal pre-K [UPK]) 20 students, one lead teacher with master’s certification, one bachelor’s, three Peacemakers, two sites)

Promise Academy Charter Schools
- Created in 2004 and 2005 PA1 and PA2, have done so well that Harvard economist Roland Fryer concluded that the students had actually closed the achievement gap
- Extended day (8:00-6:00), extended year (September-August)
- 2009: 3rd graders from both schools were 100% at or on grade leveling the statewide math program. At PA I the 3rd graders were 94% on or above grade level in English and Language arts, at PAII 86% on or above grade level.
- Reading and math coaches, social workers, psychologist, chef (healthy, local food)
- Saturday school encouraged
Harlem Peacemakers
- funded in part by AmeriCorps
- trains young people who are committed to making their neighborhoods safe for children and families
- 86 Peacemakers-working as teaching assistants in seven public schools, serving 2,500 students

The Fifth Grade Institute
- Is a Peacemaker-free after school program designed to prepare students for Middle School
- Goals: improve academic performance

Promise Academy Middle School
- Began with 100 6th graders in 2004, most of whom were below grade level in 2009
- 87.3% of the 8th graders were on or above grade level in math the N.Y. state exam.
- Extended day/extended year wide
- “Wrap around services” such as free medical care, dental care, and nutrition

Academic Case Management
- Support for students 5th-12 grades
- Each student is assigned a staff person who works with public-school staff to monitor the student’s academic and developmental progress.
- Each student has an individualized plan and the case managers find assistance for them when necessary.

The Renaissance University of Community Education (Truce) Fitness and Nutrition Center
- Offers free classes in karate, dance and fitness
- Participants learn about health and nutrition
- Receive regular academic assistance
- Focus on developing middle school youth and also includes programs for high school students: job skills and college preparation
- Video production with own cable television show, newspaper reporting (Harlem Overhead w/ 25,000 circulation)

A Cut Above
- After-school program-middle school (Serving those not at the PA)
- Academic assistance
- Leadership development
- High school and college preparation.
- Weekly discussions and activities centered around lifetime decision making, values, communication and critical thinking
- Resume building, and interview techniques
- Social etiquette, conflict resolution, and community service
- Each child is assigned a student advocate who works with teachers, counselors, and parents
Boys to Men and Girl Power
- Gender specific social development programs, run by Peacemakers
- Provide guidance and support for leadership within the community
- Goals: prevent drug use, reduce gang involvement and school violence
- Leadership focus: civic responsibility
- HCZ staff, teachers, private consultants provide sessions including discussion of reading materials, workshops, films, team-building, trips and community service projects.

High School: Promise Academy Charter School
- Began in 2008, with 9th grade and 10th grade in 2009/10
- Each year will introduce another grade through grade 12

Employment and Technology Center (ETC)
- Teaches computer and job skills to teens and adults
- Serves 280 students and 90 percent of the 2008-09 high school seniors were accepted into college
- Focus: active participation and ownership of decisions, building technology skills, developing critical thinking and expressing creativity
- Interdisciplinary approach to arts and technology education

Learn To Earn
- Afterschool program-high school juniors and seniors improve their academic skills, prepare for college and the job market
- Provides job training and summer employment opportunities
- Participants receive training in job skills, conflict resolution, social development and financial planning

College Preparatory Program
- Year round academic enrichment to approximately 900 Harlem youth
- Utilize services of the ETC, including the academic advisors, college counselors and tutors
- Primary goal: encourage young people to consider college as an option

The College Success Office (HCZ has about 600 students in college and the class of 2009-2010) received 6.3 million dollars in scholarships.)
- Supports students who have graduated from high school and HCZ programs with college entry and support during college years
- Places students in summer and winter-break internships
- Creation of “campus connectors”: upperclassmen who act as mentors and advisors to incoming students
- “Campus advisors”: college staff who support for HCZ students

Family, Community and Health Programs offer support for children and families living outside of the HCZ. These are the strategies that Canady refers to as the “never-too-late” strategies and they include the following (Tough, 2008):

Beacon Community Centers
- Use school buildings as community centers
- Offer after-school programs, nights and weekends
- Youth and adult focus-from education to arts and recreation
- Summer day camps
Community Pride
- Organizes tenant and block associations, assisting several hundreds of tenants convert their city-owned buildings into tenant-owned co-ops
- Creation of sense of ownership and pride

Single Stop
- Initiated as a tool to reduce poverty within zone’s 100 block area
- Weekly stops at different areas offering clients access to assortment of useful services: financial advice, advice about securing public benefits, legal guidance, domestic crisis resolution
- Confidential one-on-one sessions

The HCZ Asthma Initiative
- Works closely with asthmatic children and families so they can learn to manage the disease and lessen its effects. (31 percent of children w/asthma compared to 4-6 percent national average)

The Obesity Initiative
- Includes a comprehensive program designed to help children and families reverse the trend toward obesity and its corresponding health problems

HCZ FOSTER CARE PREVENTION:
The Family Development Program
- Specializes in access to mental health professionals who collaborate with caseworkers to support therapeutic interventions.

The Family Support Center
- Specializes in providing crisis intervention services and referrals
- Promotes advocacy
- Educates groups on parenting and anger management

The Midtown Family Place
- Based in Hell’s Kitchen - provides counseling, referrals and advocacy
- Offers after-school and summer programs for children 5-12
- Conducts a literacy program
- Provides a food pantry

Project Class (Clean Living and Staying Sober)
- Specializes in providing referrals to drug and alcohol programs
- Creates, implements, and monitors drug treatment service plans
- Offers program Baby Initiative: intensive program to stabilize families who are at risk of losing their babies.

Truancy Prevention
- Works with families of children at risk
- Conducts workshops on domestic violence and on parenting, including a group for teenagers