Dissertations   Theses and Dissertations

2014

Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership During the Middle School Years

Karen R. Love
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the Education Commons

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TEACHER IMPACT ON SUPPORTING THE PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

DURING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

KAREN R. LOVE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a piece of work that focuses on parental involvement and engagement I want to thank all of the children and families that I have worked with in my career. I have learned from each of you the importance of developing a trusting relationship with you to provide the best educational environment for your children to learn and grown in. To the seven participants, thank you for sharing your stories with me. To my colleagues, especially the staff at Cameron Elementary School I thank you for your words of encouragement and your patience as I finished the final stages of this project.

To Dr. Adam Kennedy, you began this journey with me as one of my instructors, then as a committee member and finally as my dissertation chair. I am forever grateful to you for your patience, flexibility and guidance as we learned together on this journey. Your understanding of qualitative research was a life saver as you guided me through my Methodology chapter and how you challenged my thinking, encouraged me to look at the data in a different way and was to be there to answer any questions that I may have had. I appreciate your willingness to take on the responsibility as my chair half way through the process. I have learned so much from you and you inspire me to continue to grow as a researcher.

To Dr. Ernestine Riggs, you inspired me early on in my career with Loyola to constantly challenge my own ability. My interest in parental engagement began during one of our late night/early morning telephone conversations and I am grateful for that conversation. I appreciated the time and energy that you dedicated to this process. I am

delighted that you were able to see me through the end and I have learned more than just academics through this process. Thank you for sticking by my side when the going got tough.

To Dr. Tamiko Jones, you always know when to re-enter into my life just when I need you. Having you as part of my committee has brought such joy to my world. Your words of encouragement, positive outlook on life and insight into my topic are greatly appreciated.

No project of this size can be done successfully without the support of friends and family. To my Wednesday and Thursday night friends, I am grateful for your words of encouragement, the late night phone calls and conversations to keep me on track. To Dr. Lexy Wisteinberg, Dr. Carol Reid and Dr. Janell Hart, your words of wisdom, encouraging phone calls, and conversations are greatly appreciated. Thank you.

To my family, Amy, Vince, Austin, Gavin, and Keenan – thank you for always being there for me. Amy and Vince you are an inspiration to me. I love you both for teaching me the finer points of life. The two of you have been there for me every step of the way. You have taught me how to preserve through the largest hurdles to find the pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. The way you parent Austin, Gavin and Keenan have shown me that parental engagement in the middle school years is possible and makes the most sense for everyone. I have witnessed firsthand how advocating for your middle school child is so important to the development, social-emotional and educational success for the child. I am grateful for your friendship, guidance and sharing in their journey that I have taken.

To my other family – Alex, Kelly, Josh, Daniel, and Ethan. I love you guys.

Alex and Kelly you have also shown me the importance of parental engagement in a child's educational life. You have taught me how to engage with parents from diverse populations in a successful way. Josh I will always remember our time together when you were little exploring the city, enjoying the summer weather while reading tons of books and playing trains. You have taught me to look at each situation in a different way and to really listen to children because they really do have important things to say. Ethan your inquisitive nature, love for books and learning inspired me to keep going with my degree. I love how when you get into something (like hockey) you really get into it and learn all you can. Keep doing this it will take you a long way. Love you guys!

Finally to Daniel – I have always said that you should have been my child and your dedication to seeing me through this project is proof.   This degree would not mean as much to me if it had not been for you. As an infant I remember rocking you to sleep while reading to you my textbooks for class. You have inspired and encouraged me, while holding me accountable every step of the way. I feel honored that you were the first person to call me Dr. Love after my committee. Love you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parental involvement and towards engagement to support their children as they move into the middle school years of education. The design of this study was qualitative using in-depth interviews of seven middle school teachers. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system theory of human development was the theoretical framework for this study to examine the factors influencing the child's development during the middle school years. Examining the perceptions and experiences of seven middle school teachers revealed that the work of engaging parents in the educational process of middle school students can be challenging at times. Participants demonstrated that their perceptions and experiences did impact how they viewed parental involvement based on their understanding of culture and the needs of diverse families, especially if they were willing to challenge their own belief system when necessary. The findings of this study discovered that several well supported principles of parental involvement and engagement were evident. The consequences associated with lack of parental involvement/engagement were the missing key components of the theoretical framework and models of parental involvement. The participants that provided opportunities for engagement with parents made a real difference in the lives of children, especially in high need areas. Parental engagement cannot occur in isolation, administrators and community agencies also need to support the efforts of teachers. Teachers need to learn

how to support parents in providing social-emotional and executive functioning skills to

students. Finally, it is important for teachers to develop a learning agenda that includes

how to engage the culturally, generationally and socioeconomic diverse families that they

will be working with in order to support the educational success of their students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically research has shown that parents have actively been involved in their

children's elementary education since the inception of schooling (Culter III, 2000;

Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Janson, & Van Koorkis, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey &

Sandler, 1997; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Zhang, Hsu, Kwok,

Benz, & Bowman-Perrott, 2011). Until recently, it was commonly believed that parental

involvement decreased significantly as children became older, fewer parents volunteered

in classrooms, helped their children with homework, and did not attend as many school

activities (Constatino, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Based on the work of Constatino

(2003), it is estimated that there is a 50% decrease in parental involvement in secondary

schools than in elementary schools.

Research on parental involvement in the middle school has mainly focused on the

reasons and ways parents stay involved with their children through middle school and

high school (Crosnoe, 2009; Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007; Epstein et al., 2002;

Murray, 2009; Zhang, Hsu, Kwok, Benz, & Bowman-Perrott, 2011). Previous research

has documented that the transition from elementary to middle school is more difficult and

requires a different type of parental support (Crosnoe, 2009; Elias, Patrikakou &

Weissberg, 2007; Epstein et al., 2002; Murray, 2009; Zhang et al., 2011). While parents

of adolescents typically spend less time volunteering in the classroom and helping with

homework, researchers have found that parents with middle school and high school children are still involved with their childrens education (Crosnoe, 2009; Epstein et al., 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009). The difference is the type of parental involvement; parents of children in middle school and high school have a significant impact on the students' sense of confidence and well being, especially as it relates to transitions to secondary and post-secondary school (Crosnoe, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

For years, researchers have used the terms involvement and engagement interchangeably, however, these two terms have different meaning (Ferlazzo, 2009). Current researchers consider the term engagement to mean when parents take an active role in the instructional practice of their child's education so they can become better equipped to have meaningful dialogue, with the children and the school, to decrease the disconnect between the home-school relationships (Constantino, 2003; Garcia, 2004; Ridnouer, 2011; Weaver, 2007). When parents become engaged in their children's education they are supporting the work of the school by developing a caring and trusting relationship among school staff (Constantino, 2003; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Harris, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Ridnouer, 2011). Creating this positive school climate promotes high academic, social, and emotional development of children, which does require significant parental engagement in the schools (Constantino, 2003; Ferlazzo, 2011; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Rothsetein, 2004; Williams, 2002). The level of engagement by parents is often a direct correlation to the school's effort to secure and build a trusting relationship. The primary influence on parental involvement and engagement are specific school programs, and staff practice and attitude

towards parents (Eccles & Howard, 1993; Epstein, 1991). "Cultivating a welcoming atmosphere for parents, just as we create a welcoming atmosphere for our students means giving parents comfortable and significant ways to participate in the schooling process in the same way we give our students meaningful and appropriate work to help them master academic goals and classroom challenges" (Ridnouer, 2011, p. 4).

Purpose of Study

This current study aims to build on the research already completed by examining the impact teachers can have in supporting and encouraging parent engagement during the middle school years. Specifically, it seeks to identify how teachers support parents as they move from the traditional level of parent involvement (volunteering at school, attending school events, coming to parent-teacher conferences) and move towards a focused, parternship between teacher and parents to support their children as they move into the middle school years. Most previous studies focus on how and why parents decide to become involved in their children's education when developing a partnership between the home and school, very few focus on the teacher's aspect of this partnership (Epstein et al., 2002; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Feuerstein, 2000; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Depsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, & Clossen, 2005). There is also a lack of research compiled on the affects of parental involvement in middle schools and high schools (Davenport & Bogan, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2011).

Legislation

The practice of encouraging parents to become involved in their children's educational development has increased over the last 20 years with the importance of the home-school partnership being emphasized within the educational system as changes in legislation occurred (Culter, 2000; Epstein et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2011). Even dating back to the late 1800's these partnerships were developing where the parents were responsible for the moral development of the children and educators were responsible for the professional or academic development of the child (Culter, 2000). While each is of equal importance, educators need to do more than establish contact with parents one or twice a year.

Beginning in 1965, the federal government recognized the need to ensure that all children received fair and equal opportunities to receive high quality education that provided opportunities for each child to reach the minimum goals of their individual state standards and achievement goals. Thus the Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed (ESEA). When President Bush reauthorized this act in 2002 he renamed ESEA as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and included more stringent requirements for parental involvement (Culter, 2000). Schools now are responsible for implementing school improvement plans that include a parental involvement and education policy with the purpose to improve student achievement, school performance and to improve parent capacity for involvement (Davenport, & Bogan, 2005; U.S. Government, 2001). NCLB has accentuated the importance of parental involvemet by holding every school in the nation accountable for the academic achievement of all

students. This Act also provides parents with legal rights to know if their child's teacher is highly qualitifed (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). In order to qualify for this funding, a school must serve a certain percentage of families who fall under the United States government guidelines for being a low-income family, currently set at 40% (Culter, 2000; Henderson, 2002). They also have strict guidelines for the use of funds for curriculum improvement, enrichment programs, teaching and counseling staff, summer and parental involvement/education programs and tutoring programs for after-school.

With the government considering parental involvement as a priority, all Title 1 schools must have a program that encourages parental involvement to provide projects and activities that get parents and students actively involved in the educational process (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack, 2007). Researchers began focusing on developing a better understanding of factors that influence student achievement based on parental involvement to help school districts determine what components they should have to develop a quality parental involvement program (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazo & Hammond, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2011; Mapp, 2003; Pomperantz, 2007). No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has previously focused its efforts on promoting parental involvement at the elementary school level and student achievement. Involvement at the middle school and high school level still needs to be examined to provide all students with the same level of parental engagement to support student learning (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Feuerstein, 2000; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Jeynes, 2011; Smith, 2006). Some of the topics that have been considered for this age group include student

motivation, parent empowerment and a broader definition of parental involvement that disregards the needs of those that would benefit the most, ie low income children and their families (Crosnoe, 2009; Feurestein, 2000; Hill et al., 2009; Mapp, 2003; Murray, 2009; Pomerantz, 2007; Simon, 2001).

NCLB Definition of Parental Involvement

According to Davenport (2005), No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) uses the the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) standards for their definition of parental involvement. While the NPTA has been around for over 100 years, it wasn't until 1997 that the organization adopted a set of standards for parental involvement at school. These standards were developed based on the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University. The NPTA defines parental involvement as parent engagement that requires regular two way communication that is meaningful around academic learning and school activities. The standards also includes that it is the responsibility for teachers and schools to take the lead on parental involvement by inviting parents to the school (Cutler, 2000; Davenport, 2005; U.S. Government, 2011). NPTA's National Standards Implementation Guide (2009) defines family engagement as a family-school partnership that includes the following six standards:

1) welcoming all families into the school community;

2) having effective lines of communication that engage families and staff in regular two-way communication regarding student learning;

3) collaboration of home and school activities that support student learning;

4) empowering families as advocates to ensure that their own children are treated

   fairly and have access to learning opportunities to help them be successful;

5) a system developed by families and staff to be equal partners in the decision

   making process of all programs, policies and practices that affect all children

   and their families;

6) developing a collaborative school community with all stakeholders to extend

   learning opportunities, community service opportunities and resources to

   everyone.

NCLB continues to be a challenge, as most local, state and federal policies are

developed around a widely acceptable and broad definition of parent involvement that

disregards the needs of those individuals who would benefit the most (i.e., low income

familes, immigrant families) (Mapp, 2003). School reform research does support a

positive school culture, but it often does not include a component for families within the

school (Constantino, 2003). With changes in society and national problems such as

poverty, drugs, teenage pregnancy, high rates of student tardiness/absenteeism, drop-out

rates and truancy at a rise, and the integration of multiple cultures within schools that

have different family values it is important to find ways to meet the needs of all families

within schools (Davenport, 2005; Feurestein, 2000). Constantino (2003) stated "to begin

to address the academic needs of students, educational leaders must consider the

noninstructional influences that are predominate in those areas outside of the classroom

and how healthy and productive relationhips with the community in creating community

based schools will ultimately support the mission of the schools" (p. 36). When

community schools are created by combining academic and community resources in one building, schools are addressing the needs of individual communities and providing an effectiveness of this partnership, dependent on the ability of parents and teachers to work together to support student learning (Constantino, 2003; Davenport, 2005; Feurestein, 2000). Extensive research has shown that regardless of the age of the child, the racial/ ethnic, economic status or educational background, children who have parents involved in their educational development benefit as reflected in higher test scores, grades and graduation rates (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005; Ridnouer, 2011). These studies also indicated that students have higher attendance rates, are more motivated to learn, have better self-esteem, decrease in violent behavior, use of drugs and alcohol and students have higher enrollment rates in post-secondary education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Jeynes, 2007).

Parental Involvement Impact

Parental involvement has significant postive impact on students and reduces negative behaviors (Constantino, 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein et. al., 2002; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011). Researchers have discovered ways to improve parental involvement with parents of early adolescents. Eccles and Harold (1993) completed a study to find meaningful and age-appropriate opportunities for parental involvement in early adolsecent years. Their work provided opportunities to involve parents through keeping parents informed of school activities, deadlines and opportunities to link with outside resources. Reed (2007) on the other

hand, examined how to take parental involvement a step further and looked at how teachers engaged parents of early adolescent students. Reed found that parent-teacher conversations became very translucent with parents talking as if the two adults were close friends; provided both parties engaged in open communication and trusted one another, it ultimately resulted in better understanding the student. Several other studies supported Reed's findings regarding the importance of the home-school connections. These studies documented examples illustrating that when teachers engaged parents in rich conversations regarding the student, their home and community life, that the teachers developed to develop a stronger sense of support from the families; resulting in higher student achievement and attendance rate, less behavior problems in the classroom and a deeper level of respect and understanding between home-school (Feuerstein, 2000; Garcia, 2004; Jeynes, 2011; Weaver, 2007).

Parents are more likely to engage themselves if they believe that teachers and students expect or desire the connection (Constantino, 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011). Parents also become better equipped to have meaningful dialogue with their children and the schools (Constantino, 2003; Ridnouer, 2011). As students get older they learn to take cues from parents before others in regard to the importance of education. When parents talk to students about school during the middle school years they talk more about preparing for college. Research has shown that these type of conversations resulted in students being better behaved, more prepared for class, and making more positive choices both in and out of school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Simon 2001).

As children move from elementary to high school parents often feel more alienated from their child during this time because children want more independence and parents often feel less confident in the academic content (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Simon, 2001). Schools that service middle school and high school aged students need to be sensitive to the needs of their parents and provide opportunities for parents, students and staff to engage in conversations to reduce the disconnect between home and school (Weaver, 2007). Unfortunately, many middle school and high school teachers hold the misconception that adolescents do not need parental involvement. They discourage parent participation at school and view parental involvement as unimportant (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Flynn & Nolan, 2008). Constantino (2003) and Harris (2009) both found that when teachers understand the need to engage their parents in learning, they reinforce to both students and parents that 'parents matter'. This often results in parents engaging in conversations with their children to provide moral support, especially during transitional years in school. As teachers engage parents they are creating a relationship that is based on respect, mutual trust and a commitment to improve student learning.

Factors Influencing Parental Involvement

Given that the importance of establishing quality relationships, it is critical to understand what factors influence parents to become involved in schools. Constantino (2003) stated that the key to successful parental involvement is positive and effective communication between parents, teachers, students, and school personnel. The key partnership being between the parent and teacher. Schools and teachers need parents as much as parents need teachers to raise their children to become successful adults.

Numerous studies have illuminated how this relationship works. To understand how this relationship works effectively there has been the numerous studies on parental involvement. Over the last 20 years two universities have sponsored the majority of the research on parent involvement; Vanderbilt University and John Hopkins University.

Vanderbilt University, conducts research that focuses on the psychological aspect of family-school prelationships. There, Hoover-Dempsey has developed a strong theoretical framework that examines what intimidates parents from participating more in their children's education. Numerous studies have used Hoover-Dempsey's model to develop a deeper understanding of how parents choose the level to which they become involved in their children's education (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Flynn & Nolan, 2008; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Findings from these studies cite numerous reasons for a lack of parental involvement including parents feeling intimiated, lack of understanding the importances of their role, lack of self-efficacy, language barriers, pre-existing negative feelings about school from their own past, belief system that teachers don't care about them unless there is a problem, and/or when teachers need family members for volunteer opportunities.

While the work of Hoover-Dempsey helps us to understand the reasons why parents choose to become involved or not, Epstein has worked for over 30 years with John Hopkins University to identify essential components of quality parent-school partnerships (Epstein et al., 2002). Her work has been instrumental in moving parent involvement programs into family-school-community partnerships. The six components of her comprehensive framework for parent involvement has been investigated

extensively throughout the years. These components are (Epstein & Dauber, 1991;

Epstein et al., 2002):

1. Basic parenting obligations – parents provide positive home condidtions to

   include health, safethy, food, clothing and parenting skills. The school's

   obligation is to provide parents with workshops, outside resournces, printed

   materials and home visits to support parents in this process.

2. Communication – another basic obligation that relies on the school to develop

   ways to communicate between home/school, parent-teacher conferences and

   school programs.

3. Opportunities for parent involvement at school.

4. Opportunities for learning at home.

5. Opportunities for parents to develop leadership skills as they become involved

   in decision making, goverance and advocacy positions within the school

   community.

6. Opportunities for parents to collaborate with community organizations to

   improve school-home connections.

Successful parental involvement programs have utilized Epstein's components to

develop their programs. Most programs begin with the the "learning at home"

component (#4), as this is the easiest to initiate and most familiar form of parental

involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein et al., 2002; Harris, 2009; Joshi et al.,

2005). As parents become comfortable with this, teachers and schools can add other

components to involve parents.   The success of beginning a parental involvement

program using this approach is that it is a simple way to begin opening the lines of communication between parents and teachers (Epstein et al., 2002; Harris, 2009; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011). While Epstein takes a look at how to involve parents, the work of Hoover-Dempsey looks at why parents become involved.

According to Hoover-Dempsey (1995) the type of parental involvement must be developmentally appropriate to the cognitive need of parents and students. School adiministrators need to begin by removing potential barriers for parents to enter the school, provide opportunities for conversations between parents and staff to develop trusting relationships, provide incentives for parents to be involved and create strategies for parents that are meaningful (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Feuerstain, 2000; Hoover, 1995; Williams, 2002). By providing opportunities for staff to connect students' cultural background and home life they will raise consciousness and build commitment to parents and the school community that they need for a strong home-school-community partnership that is essential to the student's academic success (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Weaver, 2007; Williams, 2002). Historically, parents have been considered an integretal part of education. According to Cutler (2000), in 1853, a book was published by Charles Northend, an educator, to help teachers develop a better understanding of how to involve parents in their childrens' educational learning. School have asked parents to volunteer in classrooms, become room parents, be active members of fundraising committees, attend school events, and become involved in parent teacher organizations. Davenport (2005) described parental involvement as "an integral component in the educational environment. Student achievement and parental

satisfaction requires ongoing, well–planned series of activities involving parents in 'home and school based activities' to assist teachers and school administrators in the accomplishment of learning objectives and goals" (p. 35). Davenport's work is not only aligned with the works of Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey, but also a significant number of other studies that have shown that in order to build the connection between home and school, school administrators must meet parents at their comfort level in order to have a successful parental involvment partnership (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1991; Garcia, 2004; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Mapp, 2003; Williams, 2002). Even with the different opportunities that Epstein's model provides parents to become involved and Hoover-Dempsey documents the reason parents become involved in their children's education, extensive research as documented that the most prevelant factor that affects the level of parental involvementis when parents are invited by teachers and their own children (Epstein et al., 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Machen et al., 2005).

The research of Ridnouer (2011) provides a foundation to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere for parents that gives parents significantly meaningful ways to participate in their childrens' schooling process in meaningful and appropriate ways. Harris (2009) identified three ways to engage parents: (1) for learning, (2) through learning, and (3) about learning. When schools engage parents for learning they are connecting with parents through activities, materials and information that they provide and on-line support (tracking grades, school website, etc.). In many communities the importance of engaging parents through learning is critical as parents often request parent education classes, study

groups, and classes to further their own education. Engaging parents through learning not only assists the parent but the community as a whole. Finally, some programs engage their parents about learning. This occurs when the teacher engages the parent in conversations/activities to assist the parent in understanding the subject matter, the learning process and the cognitive strategies that the student needs to succeed (Harris, 2009). Through the research of Harris (2009) six essential elements were identified for a successful parental engagement program. These elements are reinforced by the work of Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey, as they promote trust, communication and collaboration as the key to a successful program. Several of the essential elements from Epstein (2002), Hooever-Dempsey (2005), and Harris (2009) work include easy and simple steps that all schools can implement immediately. They include: (1) welcoming parents as volunteers; (2) providing opportunities for parents to learn effective strategies to help their children achieve academically, behaviorally; (3) social/emotional success; (4) keeping the lines of communication open between home and school; and (5) providing mutliple opportunities for parents to be full partners in decisions directly affecting students. While the work of Harris (2009) was focused more on elementary students, the essential elements are applicable to all schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study will draw on various aspects of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory on human development for the theoretical framework. Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner established a theory of human development which provides a framework of investigation of how people in a particular environment influence one another. When

Bronfenbrenner first started, it was called the human ecological theory, since it

emphasized the interactions between the person and his or her enviornment.

Bronfenbrenner was extremely self-reflective and continuously reassessing his theory.

In the late 1980's his theory changed to bioecological systems theory to include

biological elements (Brendtro, 2006; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Weiss,

Lopez, Kreider, & Chatman-Nelson, 2010). As a result of these changes, properties of

the person (disposition, resources and demand) become an important part of the theory.

These systems provide a conceptual framework of how the child's enviornment

influences his or her development (Keyes, 2002). It explores the intergration of

sociology and psychology and gives a working exploration of how different relationships

and enviornments affect human development, or in this case, the development of a child's

academic success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Tudge et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2010).

Within the bioecological system theory every level of the system is interconnected and

can influence each other. Parental engagement occurs in many different milieu – the

home, school and communtiy. Viewing the context of these interactions through the

lense of the bioecological systems theory provides an explanation of how issues (social,

economic, education, politics, race, cultural differences, etc.) affect how children

develop. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), life as a child is described in five

major environmental systems of interaction: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c)

exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (3) chronosystem. Within these five systems a

conceptual framework of a child's development is described as it relates to the

complexity of the multiple levels influence of their environment, and relationships.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory is the best theory to help us understand the importance of parental engagement, the influence that this engagement on children's development and the importance for teacher's to learn how to support parents through the process.

The microsystem consists of the immediate context (family, childcare, school, peer groups) that the child interacts with on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). The pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that are experienced in these contexts, shapes the person's development within the setting of this system. Examining how teachers and parents work together to influence a child's motivation is an example of microsystem (Stipek, 2010; Weiss et al., 2010). In the context of the microsystem, the concept of proximal processes can be used to explain parental engagement in educational programs, when considering parents as developing persons. When looking at parental engagement the process of engaging parents in activities offered by the school can develop the skills of parents and build their social network. When parent-teacher communication takes place on a regular basis it is more effective causing the proximal processes to be bidirectional since both parents and teachers should be active in interacting with each other. Parents with different personal characteristics will have different developmental outcomes from the interactions with teachers. As both parties engage in conversation with each other over time, they will learn about the personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and culture (Bowler, Annan, & Mentis, 2007; Swick & Williams, 2006; Tudge et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2010).

The mesosystem consists of connections and interactions between immediate contexts, such as individuals or settings within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). The mesosystem involves two microsystems interacting with each other. These interactions structure the context within the microsystem can foster the rules and acceptable behavior of individuals to help shape the ethics and expectations that are part of microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). Examples of mesosystem would include the ways teachers and parents interact to support student achievement and how afterschool programs and the school interact to develop routines and procedures when sharing physical sp ace (Weiss et al., 2010). Here one can see how the child is able to adapt to the different environments in their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, often teachers hear from parents that their child does not act out at home. This could be a result of the distorted performance that the child experiences between the home and school environmental demands. Within the mesoystem, socially organized executive functioning model is observed, which is "the cognitive processing that occurs when people manage, evaluate and respond to information and resources in their environment" (Davis-Kean, Eccles & Harold, 2010, p. 27). Examples of where executive functioning is apparent within school enviornments are when schools create schedules for students within the day and with long term projects in the classrooms, families act as executive functionaries when they establish routine at home (homework, chores, etc.). It is important for the mesoytem to teach students how to take in and share information, manage their time and resources with each other. According to Weiss (2010) this can be difficult if both the individuals (families) and institutions (school,

community) lack appropriate information and/or resources to make a positive influence on the child. When both groups (indidivudals/institutions) have access to the same information they are able to share goals with each other to evaluate the progress and identify problems within to support the child (Weiss et al., 2010). Within the mesosystem individuals have the opportunity to develop relationships outside of the home environment and develop a sense of belonging to a community. The social executive functioning model is important for middle school students as they learn how to manage information and resources available to teach them about the world and to help shape their growing knowledge and academic skills through the influence of the teachers, administrators, parents, siblings, extended family members, peer groups within various social settings (Davis-Kean, Eccles & Harold, 2010; Weiss et al., 2010).

The third system of interactions is the exosystem. The exosystem is the external enviromental setting that only indirectly interacts with the child. This system refers to the community and the established norms, standards and social relationships that shapes the child's interpersonal traits (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). An example of exosystem might be a parent's workplace. If a parent receives a schedule change at the workplace this change will have a direct impact on the child if the parent is longer able to be at home for bedtime routine. To understand a child's exosystem, educators are encouraged by Weiss (2010) to focus on family strengths, learn about community outreach programs, organize social events to promote building social networks within the school and respecting the culture of their families. As Swick and Williams (2006)

explain, "exosystems are the context we experience vicariously and yet they have a direct impact on us" (p. 372).

The macrosystem is the larger cultural context of a person's environment and has an affect on parental engagment in schools. Macrosystem consists of the cultural practice, belief system, political systems, ecomonic trends, school-welfare reform, and anything else that determines the resources, opportunities, constraints or current life of children and families (Bowler, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). Macrosystems are considered the overarching patterns of the three prior systems. Weisner (2010) discusses the importances of the connection between the macrosystem and ecocultural theory. He states "every cultural community provides developmental pathways for children within some ecological-cultural context" (p. 84). The developmental pathways are considered activities, daily routines, neighborhood and social relationships that help shape the life experience of the child. The ecocultural theory that Weisner (2010) refers to emphasizes the cultural influence on the development of the child, which schools can use as a framework to understand how the importance of the cultural community has an impact on parental engagement. In addition to understanding the ecocultural theory, Coll and Chatman-Nelson (2010) recognize the need to study the developmental competencies among ethnic and racial minority children with cultures. When cultural differences occur it can cause conflict for all individuals involved. For example when children learn one set of behaviors and attitudes at home (speaking their native language only), but are required to use a different set in school (only speaking English) this may cause conflict for the child, parent and teachers since

they are not on the same page. In addition, ethnic and racial minority families must also deal with more structural barriers to resources that may otherwise be available (Coll & Chatman-Nelson, 2010). To support parental engagement within the macrosystem, educators can develop an understanding of the cultural and structual barriers that affect all families within their school.

Bronfenbrenner has demonstrated major circles of influence that encircle every child (Brendtro, 2006). Family, school, and peer groups are considered to have the most significant influence on children unless the children has other support groups in places like church, clubs, mentoring programs, etc. In his later work, Bronfenbrenner (1986) expands his ecological theory to include the chronosystem, which takes into account the element of time; both in historical context and within an individual's life trajectory. The role of time plays a key element in the ecological theory within the chronosystem in understanding how time affects the why and how parents and families engage with the educational system (Boufard, & Weiss, 2010). Parental engagement occurs throughout the day, school year, across context and across developmental period (years). Educators that engage parents as their children transition through the various developmental stages, will use the relationships that they have learned to understand from the use of the ecological theory to support parents (Boufard & Weiss, 2010).

Microsystem

Immediate context that child interacts with -
family, peers, school, after-school programs

Mesosytem

Interaction and relationships betwen and
among microsystem context

Exosystem

Context that influences child indirectly
through interactions and relationships
within microsystem

Macrosystem

Influences on child based on resources,
opportunities and constraints presented
by political systems, social policies,
culture and economic trends.

Chronosystem – element of time for both individual life trajectory & historical context.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory on Human Development

Thesis/Questions

The overarching goal of this study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent involvement and towards engagement to support their children as they move into the middle school years of education.

The questions raised for this current research study include:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent invovlement and towards engagement?

2. Do middle school teachers descrie an ability to challenge their own belief

   system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership regardless of race, culture,

   ethnic and social ecomonic status of their families? If so, how does this

   happen? If not, why not?

In order to address these research questions, a phenomenological interviewing method will be used to gather a rich dataset of the perceptions and experience of how six middle school teachers substantiate their parents as they engage in the educational lives of their middle school children to increase student achievement. Purposeful sampling will be used for interviews among staff of different charter schools located throughout the city of Chicago to gather data for this study. Once data is collected, coding will take place to identify themes to answer the research questions posed by this study.

Definitions

Culture: shared patterns of behavior, communication (verbal and nonverbal) and cognitive constructs that are learned and understood within a certain group of people to identify the members of a culture group while distinguishing them from another group.

Parent: primary caregiver of the child, to include but not limited to, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin.

Parental Involvement: the amount and type of participation a parent has within their children's schooling; parental involvement includes family involvement. Parental involvement activities include interaction between home and school. Involvement activities include attending school events, going to parent-teacher conferences,

communicating with the teacher, attending sporting events and volunteering in the school.

Parental Engagement: parents' attitude toward their children's learning; showing an interest; providing children with moral and academic support; parental engagement includes family engagement. Parental engagement activities includes all activities that a family member would do to be involved and includes advocating for the child, being involved in committees and organizations that provide family members with opportunities to take on leadership skills and positions. Parental engagement also includes providing family members with opportunities to collaborate with community agencies to support the growth and development of students and the school.

Programs: structured activities that have been created by a school or district to involve and/or engage parents in their children's education.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In today's globalized economy, it is essential to provide all students a quality

education to ensure that they receive the necessary skills to be successful in life. The

educational outcome for each student must include not only the academic skills and

knowledge to compete in the future labor market, but also, to provide the necessary skills

and knowledge to provide students with a personal sense of efficacy for working and

living independently (Constantino, 2003; Davenport, 2005; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009;

Hoover, 1995; Jeynes, 2011; Ridnouer, 2011). With the increase of high school dropout

rates, poor attendance rates, and an increase in low standardized test scores we have seen

an escalation of education reform to the point of it being a federal government policy

priority (Culter, 2000; Davenport, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2011).

Historical Prespective

Views of parental involvement in U.S. education are linked to the history and

early objectives of public education. The practice of parental involvement goes back to

the early American settlers, the Puritans and Pilgrims, who believed that children could

reach their fullest potential only when the home, church and school worked together.

(Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011).

During the rise of the common school movement, educators Horace Mann, and

Henry Barnard worked dilegently to convince parents that they could trust their children

in the hands of the school, as teachers were going to treat each child as their own, incorporating their own maternal qualities with the children (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011; Price-Mitchell, 2009). At the same time Johann Pestalozzi, a Swiss man was examining the maternal role of school. Pestalozzi's work emphasized that when teachers incorporated maternal qualities in the classroom, not only would they become better teachers, but the school itself would become a place of refuge for the student; and then the student will grow into a person who is capable of being successful in life, academically, socially and morally (Jeynes, 2011). Pestalozzi and Mann believed it was extremely vital for schools to partner with parents to build trusting relationships that emphasized academic studies while reinforcing family values and morals (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011). Mann was so impressed with Pestalozzi's work that his approach was adopted in the common schools in the United States because Mann believed that upholding the moral values of parents and society was the responsibility of the schools (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011). Teachers who maintained the maternal role in the classroom were more likely to become true partners in the parent-teacher partnership that Mann was working intensely to create within the common schools, especially since parents against the common school movement felt strongly about maintaining the maternal role that was evident in successful private schools (Jeynes, 2011; Reese, 2005).

In the late 1800's America began to witness the beginnings of industrialization and urbanization resulting in less parental involvement in the schools. At the same time Mann began emphasizing the need for teachers to be treated as professionals and advocating for a more standardized sytem for teacher preparation programs and core

curriculum (Culter, 2000; Gatto, 2001; Jeynes, 2011). With this new vision for the

common schools, Mann initiated actions to create schools more as professional

organizations allowing individual states to create agencies to control local schools.

Mann's vision for the common school led to the development of a public school system

by 1860 through the efforts of the school administrators at that time (Hiatt, 1994). Under

Mann's leadership, teachers began to view themselves as professionals who knew more

about education than parents (Jeynes, 2011). Unfortunately, this movement under Mann

resulted in several dilemmas for parental involvement. Teachers wanted to be respected

as professionals and were reluctant to develop partnerships with parents, while parents

were beginning to feel that schools were becoming increasingly impersonal and they

began to feel as if their views and input were unimportant (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011).

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries parental involvement became more

difficult with the increasing degree of industrialization in America (Culter, 2000).

Schools began to distance themselves from parents, as teachers received more training at

becoming the educational specialists in society. For many the belief was that parents

were not qualified to make contributions to the curriculum decisions of the school (Hiatt,

1994; Jeynes, 2011). By the 1920's parents were considered to be "dumping" their

parental responsibilities on the school since schools were assuming more and more of the

traditional family functions of learning (Cutler, 2000; Hiat, 1994; Jeynes, 2011). The

work of Dewey supported this thinking as he saw industrialization distinguishing the

primary role of families and that schools needed to assume some of the responsibility that

was previously reserved for families (Boisvert, 1998). Dewey argued that it was not the

responsibility of schools to support present values of families but to teach children to think for themselves. He further argued that classroom learning activities needed to be connected to real life experiences that allowed for the child's natural curiosity to lead the learning process (Boisvert, 1998; Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011). Dewey's ideas provided some families with relief from thinking that schools were trying to replace the role of the family.   For other families, they continued to believe that the common school movement and Dewey's ideas continued to undermined the concept of parent teacher partnerships (Boisvert, 1998, Jeynes, 2011).

By the 1920's parent education began in various forms. There was over 26 major parent programs that emerged to meet the needs of middle-class parents who wanted to learn more education and/or health education (Berger, 2001). Parent cooperatives were also being established in several locations across the nation. Membership in the Parent Teacher Organization grew from nearly 190,000 in 1920 to almost 1,500,000 in 1930 (Schlossman, 1976). In November, 1930, the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection was held with over 4,000 specialists in attendance from various educational associations and organizations for the purpose to study the possibility of including parent education as part of the public education instructional system. It was the hope of the professionals that by including this component into the public education system that parents would learn strategies to include child-rearing techniques, increasing parental self-efficacy, understanding social and economic issues that may affect their ability to support their children in the public schools (Berger, 2001).

While the nation was consumed with World War II in the 1940's, the development of parent education continued with support being provided to families through various agencies help parents learn how to deal with the emotional and social health of children resulting from the effects of the war (Berger, 2001; Culter, 2000). By the 1950's teachers typically held the view that parents should be supportive of the teachers and school. Despite the role that urbanization and industrialization had on parental involvement, by the early 1960's, parental involvement within most families was still strong.

This continued until 1963, when the American divorce rate began to rise. This along with more women entering the workforce meant that there was less time for parental involvement in the schools (Tyack, Anderson, Cuban, Kaestle, & Ravitch, 2001; Jeynes, 2011). During the 1960's, education in America was also going through major changes with the Civil Rights movement. Parental involvement was considered an important part of helping ethnic minorities adopt the values of the dominant race of the white middle-class with the Civial Rights Acts of 1964 (Price-Mitchell, 2009; Tyack et al., 2001). In 1964, the first federally funded legislation, named Project Head Start was incorporated into educational legislation. Project Head Start was for disadvantaged children in the inner cities and in 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was introduced which required parents to serve on school advisory boards and to participate in classroom activities (Hiatt, 2010; Jeynes, 2011).

In 1966, sociologist James Coleman was commissioned by the U.S. Office of Education (Civil Rights Act of 1964) to write a report regarding issues of racial relations

and equality. The The report titled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* helped set in

motion the massive busing of students to achieve a racial balance in public schools. This

report better known as the Coleman Report was published stressing the importance of

considering family factors more significant than school variables, that influenced school

outcomes (Coleman, 1988). To many researchers, this was considered the turning point

in understanding the importance of parental involvement (Cutler, 2000; Jeynes, 2010,

2011; Price-Mitchell, 2009).

In response to the Coleman Report by the 1970's there was an increase in federal

support programs for parents with an emphasis on the connection between home and

school on the basis that these interconnections between systems were as important in

child development as the activities within them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The increase in

these programs resulted in the emergence of parental involvement research, which grew

from three realities. First, single parents need more guidance on how to become involved

in their child's education when resources and time are limited. Second, even when

family structures are intact it does not mean that parental involvement will take place.

Families with two biological parents still need guidance in ways to increase their level of

involvement. Third, teachers are faced with a growing complexity of family stituations

with regard to structure and work, resulting in needing support as to how to adapt to the

overabundance of unique circumstances that they face each day (Jeynes, 2011; Lindle,

1990).

With the need to shift thinking about the relationship between parents and

schools, the emergence of research in parental involvement suggested the dominance of

family influence in two types of research: family structure and family functioning

analysis (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2010, 2011; Price-Mitchell, 2009). As the number of

family structure transitions (divorce, dealth, marriage, extended family living in one

household) that a given child endures in their lifetime increases, research has shown the

negative impact it has on the academic achievement, psychological and behavioral needs

of the child to be successful in life (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991;

Feuerstein, 2000; Hoover & Sandler, 1995; Jeynes, 2011; Price-Mitchell, 2009). Family

functioning also influences the level of parental involvement. The variety of variables

relating to family functioning beyond family structure are indicative to the likelihood of

parental involvement. When families are actively engaged in supporting student learning

there is a postive impact on parental involvement. Families build higher levels of trust

with each other and educators, develop effective communication skills, establish stable

daily routines, have clear and age-appropriate expectations for school expectations,

behaviors and manners, and motive all family members to be lifelong learners (Jeynes,

2011; Weiss et al., 2010). Research has shown that when family members are engaged in

illegal drug use, nicotine addition, alcoholism, promiscuous and disloyal sexual behavior,

etc, these are often indications of dysfunctional behavior and have a negative impact on

parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brussle,

1992; Jeynes, 2011; Lareau, 1987).

For years, researchers did not agrressively study parental involvement for two

reasons: (1) the percentage of parents in the first half of the twentieth century who were

actively engaged in their children's education was high, and (2) the assumption that the

correlation between parental involvement and family structure was high (Jeynes 2011).

The reality is that often in one parent households the focus is on providing for the day to

day needs of the child. Also in certain highly urban areas, it is often difficult for a single

parent to have the time to provide a sufficient level of income and be available to the

child for afterschool, evening, and sometimes weekend activities (Jeynes, 2011; Reay,

2000).

In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), otherwise known as the "War on Poverty" agenda.

ESEA was designed to focus federal funding (Title 1) on poor schools with low achieving

students by closing the skill gap in reading, writing, and mathematics between children

from low-income households and those children who came from middle-class households

(Berger, 1991; Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011; Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). The

establishment of Head Start in 1965 provided opportunities for parents to be involved in

their child's education in a way that they never had before. Parents had the opportunity

to be involved in the the classroom and also on committees that empowered parents with

opportunities to offer insight into what their desires and needs were for themselves and

their children (Berger, 1991; Hiatt, 2010; Jeynes, 2011). Another change that occurred in

the 1960's was that educators began to change their views from culturally deprived to

diverse cultures (Berger, 1991; Reese, 2005). There began more emphasis on supporting

the whole family through creating programs that provided services for social concerns,

educational opportunities, health concerns and developing skills to support parents in

career development (Berger, 1991; Jeynes, 2011).

With the success of parent involvment in the decision making process of the Head Start program, similar federally funded education programs were developed. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 Education of All Handicapped Children Act, now called Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was developed. Various amendments to this and others laws were made to increase the level of parent involvment in programs that were financially supported by the federal government because of the need to increase the parent-school partnership (Berger, 1991; Culter, 2000; Hiatt, 1994; Jeynes, 2011; Reese, 2005).

During the 1980's the need for parental involvment in schools was considered of great importance with many schools developing parent-school collaboration models (Berger, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2011).

The Coleman Report not only raised the question that teachers may not be as supportive as they could with parental involvement, it also questioned if the lack of two biological parent families had contributed to the achievement gap that continued to spiral. The Coleman Report resulted in educators and researchers realizing that parental involvement and the achievement gap were directly linked together and it was the responsibility of both parents and educators to improve parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2011). This was considered so important, that it was the drive of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Culter, 2000; U.S. Government, 2001).

In 1994 the federal government passed two more important laws relating to education. Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) which was a reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA. Along with IASA, came the Goals 2000 Educate

America Act. These two laws together focused on the needs of all students and provided a focus on teaching and learning (Culter, 2000; Jorgensen, 2003). With a more concrete focus on teaching and learning the federal government supported state and local efforts to provide a challenging standards-based education and assessments. Now that school reform efforts required school districts to provide standards-based curriculum, the testing industry and educational marketplace began to shift towards standards-based assessments. Over the next four years large scaled assessment programs were designed, tested and implemented to provide districts with minimal lag time between the actual testing date and the date when results would be available with various score reports that would display and interpret norm-referenced and criterion-referenced data (Culter, 2000; Jorgensen, 2003). The result of this four year process was a dramatic reauthorization of ESEA; otherwise known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB marked the beginning of a new era of accountability, parental involvement, local control and funding that would work. Based on NCLB, federal funding became directly tied to accountability expectation. If a student was not learning at an adequate rate; by law it was the responsibility of the school to learn why. If a school was not performing up to par, options and support were now available (Culter, 2000; Jeynes, 2011; Jorgensen, 2003).

The main goal of NCLB has been to increse student achievement, with the secondary goal to bridge the gap between the home and school. Parental involvement was the critical key component added to the NCLB Act during the term of President Bush (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Under the administraton of President Obama

the NCLB Act has been intensively scrutinized and examined to determine if this federal

program is meeting the needs of our students. With approximately one quarter of our

students not finishing high school today it is imperative that we find new ways to make

sure that our children are prepared for the economically challenged future (Harris, 2009).

President Obama repeatedly talks about the importance of a "cradle to career" pipeline.

In a press release dated September 23, 2011 regarding NCLB flexibility, President

Obama again stressed the importance of this pipeline when he discussed the importance

". . . that schools can't do it alone. As parents, the task begins at home. It begins by

turning off the TV and helping with homework, and encouraging a love of learning from

the very start of our children's lives" (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-

office/2011/09/23/remarks-president-no-child-left-behind)

In today's society where education is more focused and streamlined on data,

NCLB and Title 1 requires school districts to develop a parental involvement plan to

share the data with parents in everyday language while bridging the gap between home

and school (Davenport, 2005). To create a positive school climate that promotes high

academic development for children, schools must require significant parental

participation (Lawson, 2003). As Garcia (2004) states "schools that promote

collaboration with parents have been found to exhibit improved teacher morale, higher

rating of teacher's by parents, greater support from families, higher student achievement,

and a better reputation in the community" (p. 293). A true partnership between home and

school is only possible when both parties have rich and frequent interactions that are built

upon trust and honesty (Constantino, 2003; Garcia, 2004). The attitudes and beliefs of all

parties involved need to be considered and respected. Davenport (2005) reported how one community in Michigan developed a new charter school with an African centered curriculum where a parental community involvement model was emphasized. In this study, data was collected through interviews, observations, surveys and focus groups. The charter school had an inclusive focus of the town. The PTO (parent-teacher organization) was instrumental in developing teams of parents, school staff and community members to plan projects, educational events, the assessments for students and parents.   Parents and community members were involved in every aspect of the development of the school, from the layout of the building to every aspect of the instructional day to make sure that the school transformation was Afrocentricism. The principles of the school were established by the students, parents, staff and community members. The outcomes of this study documented that discipline issues decreased, student academic growth was on a rise, and all levels of respect increased from respecting self, others and the environment (Davenport, 2005).

School districts vary in the type of parental involvement programs and activities that they provide. A study by Sheldon (2002) investigated the demographic characteristics, parental beliefs, parents' social networks and parental involvement behaviors of 619 families within one urban and one suburban school district. The key results from this study supported the importance of school districts to develop well-planned activities for parents to do with their children either in school or at home and to develop social networks with parents for the purpose of developing a positive school climate where parents engage in conversations with each other to encourage parental

involvement, especially by connecting with isolated parents (Sheldon, 2002). By incorporating these strategies and activities within a parental involvement program, school will develop the bond to connect the home, school and community together (Davenport, 2005; Sheldon, 2002).

In response to the extensive amount of research that demonstrates the benefits of parental involvement, federal and state government have focused their educational reform efforts to include improving the level and types of parental involvement in the schools. According to Davenport (2005), NCLB uses the definition of parental involvement based on the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) standards which include placing the responsibility of teachers and school staff to take the lead on parental involvement by inviting parents to the school, which is based on the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein (Cutler, 2000; Davenport, 2005).

Decades of research has shown that parental involvement increases academic grades, attendance, leadership skills, enrollment in post secondary education opportunities, graduation rates, higher self esteem among parents and students, and more positive attitudes in school (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Mapp, 2003; Pomperantz, 2007). School districts encounter difficulty when defining what parental involvement looks like and how to involve all parents. Based on the new requirements by NCLB, today's parents must move beyond their traditional ways of involvement and take on new roles within the school community. This shift has a significant impact not only on how parents interact with school staff, but also how school districts interact and welcome parents. While NCLB has given us the

framework of what parental involvement should look like in our schools, it fails to provide us with the guidelines to determine if school districts have been sucessful in this process. One of flaws of the NCLB is that the focus is on parental involvement to help close the achievement gap without considering how to effectively involve all parents in this process. School districts looking at the researcher of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler will gain better understanding why parents choose to become involved in their child's educational life (Anderson, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). School districts trying to develop a framework for how parents become involved in their child's education life will benefit from examining the research work of Dr. Epstein (Anderson, 2007; Epstein, 2005).

Work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler

The work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) defines the three primary constructs and how each effects parental involvement: (a) the parents' belief system that it is their role to be involved in their children's education, (b) their personal sense of efficacy comes from being able to relate to experiences of others, their own direct experiences in other types of involvement opportunities that have been successful, and (c) the demands and invitations from others, to include receiving verbal encouragement from others to become involved. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theortical framework for their model is based from several different psychological theories that suggest that parental beliefs and the social contexts that they live in may influence the parents' decision regarding their level of involvement in their children's education (Ice & Hover-Dempsey, 2011). However, many believe that SES is a strong indicator of the level of

parental self-efficacy. Jeynes (2007) completed an meta-analysis of 52 studies around parental involvement. For the purpose of Jeynes' study parent involvement was defined as parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children to include areas like parental expectations, attending and participating in school functions and activities, the level of communication between parent and child; homework assistance and the style in which parents demonstrated. The results of this meta-analysis indicate higher student achievement outcomes are a result of parental involvement even across all races, cultures and social economic status (Jeynes, 2007).

The level and type of parental involvement between working class and the middle class was examined by Laureau (1987). The purpose of this study was to examine the type of parental involvement requests made by school staff and the quality of interaction between teachers and parents. The findings by Laureau indicated that the most significant difference between the level and type of parent involvement was determined by values parents placed on their children's educational success, the differences of the mesosystems and macrosystems in place within the community. The importance of parental involvment is providing opportunities for all regardless of their occuptional class or parental education level. Several research studies have demonstrated the lack in ability to connect student background, homelife and SES to the level of parental involvement (Anderson, 2007; Feuerstain, 2000; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997).

Extensive research validates the works of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler in regards to the three primary constructs (Feuerstein, 2000; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ingram et al., 2007; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Parents' role

construction and self-efficacy are important factors in parental involvement, though the

key factor is to discover ways to involve parents. Anderson (2007) documented a study

that examined the relationship between parents' role construction, their sense of self-

efficacy and their involvement between home and school. The study, which focused on

teacher invitations to increase parental involvement, was conducted using three different

fourth and fifth grade classrooms in a large school district. The results of this study

indicated that parental involvement, role construction and self efficacy may not be the

best identifiable factors to determine the direct effect of at home involvment. The

strongest indicator of effective home and school involvement behaviors was when

teachers actually reached out to invite parents to become involved through various modes

of communication (verbally, in newletters, via student reminders) (Anderson, 2007).

Flynn (2008) conducted a study of 144 principals of elementary, middle and high school

to gain a better understanding of their percption of communication practices between

teachers and parents within their schools. The results of this study supported the need for

school staff and teachers to increase communication between home and school to include

opportunities for parents and families to become involved in their child's education.

Work of Joyce Epstein

Joyce Epstein has worked with Johns Hopkins University to work with other

researchers and educators to learn how schools, parents, students and community partners

can develop and maintain effective parental involvement programs and partnerships

within schools and communities. Epstein's research resulted in a framework of six major

types of parental involvement (Constantino, 2003; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009). This framework has been used to help educators develop comprehensive parental involvement programs (Epstein et al., 2009). Each type of involvement includes different levels of participation, provides unique challenges, and different levels of results for students, parents and the school community. The six components of Epstein's framework are (1) parenting; (2) communicating; (3) volunteering; (4) learning at home; (5) decision making; and (6) collaborating with community (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Type 1: Parenting

Epstein's first component is parenting, defined as providing positive home conditions to include; but not limited to health, safety, nutrition, clothing, and basic parenting skills. Parenting provides information and activities that assist families in understanding child and adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. As a result, parents feel supported from school and other parents; develop an understanding and build confidence of parenting skills; are able to share knowledge and challenges of parenting with other parents; develop understanding of child and adolescent development and respect other families and school staff (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005).

Epstein (2009) explains the benefits for students within this type of involvement include:

- improved attendance in school;

- pomotes respect for parents and teachers;

- develops the awareness that families and schools are working together for the student;

- an awareness that school is important;

- balance is provided for student to complete chores, homework, school related activities and family related activities;

- positive habits begin to form in personal qualities – beliefs, values are being taught within the family and supported in school;

- positive interactions with parents, student feels they are important and valued at home.

The obligation of the school consists of providing parents with workshops, outside resources, printed materials and home visits to support parents in this process (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Schools can also provide parents with parent education courses and/or training courses (i.e., GED, family literacy, financial support, college application processes). Challenges for schools include providing all parents with these opportunities, not just those they think want it or need it. These type of supports need to be linked to clear, concise and usable information to all parties in their native language to make sure that communication is linked to children's success in school (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1992). This type of involvement enables families to share their knowledge about their own culture, background and individual children's needs and talents with teachers and other staff members (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein

& Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Smith,

2006). Staff members are able to understand family backgrounds, cultures and goals for

their children, and develop a respect for families' strengths and efforts; and develop an

awareness of own skills and ability to share information on child development to support

student success in school (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al.,2009; Epstein

& Dauber, 1991; Smith, 2006).

Type 2: Communication

Communication is considered another basic obligation with the purpose of

designing effective forms of communication between home and school about children's

progress and school programs (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009;

Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Involvement in this area may include; phone calls home by

staff; parent-teacher conferences; language translators for meetings as needed; weekly or

monthly student folders with student work; parent handbooks; copies of class syllabus,

newsletters; impromptu conferences when parent picks up student at end of day; and

parent information on internet safety, bullying, etc. As a result of effective

communication parents are provided with a clear understanding of school policies and

programs; have opportunties for interaction with teachers, opens door to communication

with school, teachers and students; monitors student performance and provides effective

responses to student problems (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009;

Epstein & Dauber, 1991).   Children also benefit from this component by providing

opportunities for students to make informed decisions on courses and programs available;

develop awareness of their own role in partnerships; provide their own understanding of

school policies relating to student success: attendance, behavior, student conduct and academic success; along with an awareness of own progress and actions that they needs to take to improve (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Smith, 2006).

When schools utilize Epstein's communication component staff had increase opportunities to elicit and understand family views on student performance and programs available to increase student progress; develop an appreciation and an increase use of parent networks; develop an awareness of their own ability to communicate openly and clearly with families; and increase diversity. Epstein (2009) states the requirements for success in communication includes; providing all forms of communication in parent's native language; consider parents who do not read well or need large print when sending printed material out; review all material for readability, clarity, form and frequency (including all forms of communication in print and nonprint form); establish clear two way channels of communication from home to school and from school to home; and to review quality of major communication on a regular basis.

Type 3: Volunteering

The third component involves parents volunteering at school. This includes

providing opportunities for parents to volunteer to support the school in various

capacities. Parents are recruited and provided all necessary training. Examples of

volunteering opportunities include: becoming a class parent; parent safety patrol, recess

or lunchroom monitors; classroom or school volunteer; special events volunteer for

holiday celebrations or fundraisers; offer to make phone calls from home, provide office

support, parent room volunteer, etc. (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al.,

2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor &

Pryor, 2009; Smith, 2006). Benefits for parents include further understanding of

teacher's job; develop increase comfort level in the school and to realize that families are

welcome there; develop self confidence about their own ability to work; further their own

education and leadership skills; and also gain specific skills while volunteering that may

lead to a job (Epstein et al., 2009). By volunteering at the school parents are modeling an

awareness of skills, talents, occupations and contributions of parents and other adults;

students develop skills and are given opportunities to practice communicating with adults

in various roles and they also may receive extra tutoring and mentoring by the adult

volunteers (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber,

1991).

Teachers and other staff members also benefit from parents volunteering at the

school level. These benefits include, but are not limited to; an awareness of parent talents

and skills; an increase communication with parents and students; opportunities for greater

support provided for individual students within classroom; develop a greater

understanding of new ways to involve parents and families (Constantino, 2003; Epstein,

2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). According to Epstein (2009) for

schools to have successful volunteering opportunities they need to provide flexible

schedules for parents to volunteer; recruit all parents so that everyone has the opportunity

to decide if they want to share their time and talent; provide training, match time and

talent with school needs, and recognize efforts of the parents.

Type 4: Learning at Home

The fourth component in Epstein's model of parental involvement is learning at

home. Many research studies have documented that this component is considered the

most effective and easiest way to involve parents (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009;

Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 200; Joshi et al., 2005: Smith, 2006).

Learning at home requires teachers to provide parents with ideas and information

on how to support their child at home to increase student knowledge and engage parents

with activities that can be completed at home to assist students' own learning to enhance

the learning that is taking place in the school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Schools may

need to provide information to assist the parents with these activities. For some schools,

the activities may begin as very detailed homework assignments given to the students and

the parents are just asked to sign off. Other examples include; summer learning activities

within the community; calendars with activities for parents and students to do at home or

in the community; information for families on knowledge and skills needed for students

in each grade level by subject; and information on how to monitor homework. As parents

become comfortable with this, teachers can increase the activities to involve parents more. The success of beginning a parental involvement program using this approach is that it is a simple way to begin opening the lines of communication between parents and teachers (Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009). Providing regular and timely information to students and families regarding graduation requirements, grades, credits earned, and information on planning for next steps of education for students (high school and post secondary education), are all components of a sucessful learning at home involvement component of Epstein's theory. Other examples include; developing and following an interactive homework schedule that gives students responsibility for discussing important parts of their learning with parents; coordinating family friendly home-school linked homework activities; and involving families in all important curriculum matters (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Smith, 2006).

Parents who include this component in their repritore of parental engagement strategies will develop an awareness of their child as a learner; appreciate the work and skills of the teacher; promote discussion with the child of school, homework and classwork; gain knowledge of how to support and help their child at home with homework and classwork; and develop a more thorough understanding of the instructional program each year and the expectation of students within a given grade level (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Smith, 2006). Benefits for the

student include an increase of self confidence in their ability as a learner; greater success in completion of homework; developing a more positive attitude towards school work; viewing parents as partner in learning; showing gains in skills, abilities and test scores are linked to homework and classwork; and having a better understanding the instructional program each year and expectations of student (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The benefits for teachers include understanding the role, responsibilities, and abilities of families outside of school, respect of family time; greater sense of satisfication of parental involvement and support and as the teacher engages more with the parent about the homework process, and the homework becomes better designed to meet the needs of the student (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Type 5: Decision Making

In this component families are provided with ideas and information on how to support their child at home to increase student knowledge, and engage parents in the learning process (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Examples include parents/family members actively involved in parent teacher organizations and/or local school council (LSC); participation on committees like safety, advisory, curriculum; network with other parents regarding school related events and linking them to possible resources; work with independent advocate groups; and participate in district and/or state level committees for family and community involvement (Epstein,et al., 2009). For this type of involvement to be successful schools

and/or the school district need to provide training for families and their representatives to prepare them to become school representative leaders; involve students and parents in decision making groups; and develop a parent leader group that represents all racial, ethic, socioeconomic groups of the school (Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2009; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Pryor & Pryor, 2009; Smith, 2006).

The fifth component provides parents with opportunities to develop leadership skills as they become involved in decision making, goverance and advocacy positions within the school community. This happens as parents become active members of the school's parent teacher assocation/organizations, school committees, etc. Benefits also include developing an awareness of parents' voice in school decisions; have feeling of ownership of school; share experiences and develop connections with other parents; develop an awareness of school, district and state policies; and have input into the policies that affect their child's education (Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2009). Students of these parents also benefit by developing an understanding that the student and family have rights that are protected; an awareness of representation of families within the decision making process; and that their parents value education (Epstein et al., 2009). Finally, teachers and staff members develop an awareness of parent perspective with policy development and decisions; and they view family representatives as an equal partner in the decision making process when parents have leadership roles on committees (Epstein et al., 2009).

Type 6: Collaborate with Community

The sixth component of Epstein's model was actually added in 1998 to include ways parents can collaborate with community organizations to improve the school-home connections. Parents develop relationships with these organizations to support students academic, social-emotional and health through services and resources that the local agencies and government groups can provide to stengthen family practices, student learning and development, and school programs (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 1991, 1992; Epstein et al., 2009). Families are provided with ideas and information on how to support their child to increase student knowledge, and engage parents in the learning process. Examples of this type of support include; participation as alumni in school programs; becoming student mentors as students plan for high school, college and work; support integration of services between school and community; provide service to the community to promote school and student achievement (recycling, art, music, working with seniors); and advocate for community activities that would benefit the school (Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2009). Parents benefit from this type of involvement by becoming aware of role the school has within the community; the contributions that the community makes to the school; are able to inteact with other community members; becoming aware of community resources; and have the ability to utilize these resources to meet the family needs. Students benefit by becoming aware of careers and options for future education and work; increase their own skills and talents through extra curricular activities; and learn to utilize resources within the community that has specific benefits to student individual needs (Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2009).

Teachers benefit from the involvement of parents within the community as well. As teachers they become aware of community resources to enrich school curriculum; develop partnerships with community resources to utilize services, volunteers, etc and also have the ability to make knowledgeable referrals to families of services available to them within the community (Contantino 2003; Epstein et al., 2009). Epstein (2009) identifies the requirements for this type of involvement to be successful to include; developing clear roles and responsiblities between staff, parents and community members for all collective activities; informing parents of community programs for students and parents; matching community contributions with the goals of the school; providing equity of opportunties for students and families to participate in community programs and to integrate child and family services with education.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Wstat and Policy Studies Associates completed a study that showed schools with parental involvement have higher tests scores than schools without parental involvement by 40% (Ridnouer, 2011). The benefits from parental involvmental not only have a positive effect on students but with parents, teachers and the school communities as well. Schools vary on the level of involvement, how they inform and involve their parents is often due to the type and variation of parents. Until now the majority of research conducted has been on the type of parental involvement and which parents typically become invovled. Research is lacking to provide a clear understanding of factors that encourage parents to become involved in their children's education and how teachers can support this partnership (Feuerstein, 2000; Pomparantz, 2007). Previous research has

Table 1

Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009)

Type	Purpose
1. Parenting	To assist parents in establish basic skills necessary to establish home conditions conducive to support student learning at each grade level. To assist schools in understanding the needs of families.
2. Communicating	To develop effective lines of communication between home-school to provide information regarding student progress and school programs.
3. Volunteering	To provide volunteer opportunties for parents in and out of school to support school goals. This includes providing recruitment, training and scheduling that promotes parent involvment in a variety of ways.
4. Learning at Home	Provide opportunities for parents to helPrp their child learn at home through homework activities, enrichment and intervention activities. This includes providing parents with opportunities to learn about the curriculum and related activities to support student growth.
5. Decision Making	Encourages parents/families to become involved in school decisions, advocating for student rights through participaton in school level committees, teams, councils and other parent organizations.
6. Collaborating with Community	Encourages parents/families to become engaged with community resources and services for students, families, the school and community. Provides opportunties for parents to become a liason between the school and community organizations.

identified three key themes that have been identified as positve outcomes of parental

involvment programs; a focus on building relationships between home-school-

community that is based on trust and collaboration; recognizing respect and addressing

family needs as cultural differences; and when the program has a philosophy of building

partnerships that builds shared power and responsibility (Harris, 2009; Ridnouver, 2011).

There is concurrent research that identified four major themes that consistently emerged

from research when parental involvement programs failed. These themes (Anderson,

2007; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Ridnouver, 2011; Rothstein, 2004) include:

1) family needs are not be adequately addressed within these programs;

2) a history of negative school interactions of parents and that teacher's did not
   understand the culture of the community resulting in possible unrealistic
   expectation of students, parents and their ability to be available or involved;

3) parents and educators differ on their definition of parental involvement;

4) lack of time and economic resources for parents.

It is vital that teachers have a deep understanding of the cultural background of

their students, families and the community where they work (Anderson, 2007; Eccles &

Harold, 1993; Garcia, 2004; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011). Without this

understanding parents and educators can differ on their definition of involvement and

miscommunication can occur leading to all adult parties involved not being on the same

page (Anderson, 2007). Garcia (2004) conducted a survey study in South Florida with

119 teachers from 59 different districts to investigate the relationship between teachers

levels of self-efficacy and the degree of family involvement as reported by teachers. The

results of this survey and other studies revealed that teachers do not feel that they were

supported in their college classes on how to involve families (Eccles & Harold, 1993;

Ferrara, 2005; Garcia, 2004). New teachers in particular reported resistance in

communicating with parents out of fear that they see parents as a threat; they lack an

understanding of how to communicate with parents; and lack strategies on how to

engage paents, especially at the middle school and high school level (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Ferrara, 2005; Flynn, 2008; Garcia, 2004).

When teachers fail to develop a rich understanding of the cultural background of their students and school community, they lack the understanding of how to relate effectively to parents. If the teacher and/or school develops a negative viewpoint of parents due to lack of understanding this negative viewpoint will carry over into the classroom as well (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007). When this happens: (a) often parents begin to feel that staff and administration do not care about them, (b) in rare cases the parent may be banned from the school for security reasons that the parent does not understand, (c) parents may think that the staff talks to them in a patronizing manner, (d) parents don't feel as if the staff is trying to relate to them due to language barriers, and/or (e) the level of trust needed to have a healthy family-school partnership is not happening because of the difference in race, culture or class (Reed, 2007). The same can be true when parents hold negative beliefs around education. When this happens they are less likely to become involved at the school, which results in their own child developing a lower ability to succeed due to lack of motivational development (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Ritblatt, Beatly, Cronon, & Ochoa, 2002).

Based on another study, Williams (2002) developed seven basic steps to build the connection between home and school in an elementary setting. These steps include: (1) removing practical barriers by providing childcare for young children and even providing transportation to those needing it; (2) recognizing the need for contributions and provide

incentives by providing food at meetings, raffle prizes, acknowledging parents

achievements and contributions; (3) listen to parents' needs; (4) change organizational

process to increase parental engagement by working with parents to provide training for

both parents and staff; (5) build on family culture by working with staff to develop a

better understanding of the specific cultures within the school and utilize parents

experiences within the classroom and school; (6) know the specific populations within

the community and tailor strategies and activites for needs of parents (fathers,

grandparents, military, gay, etc); and (7) help parents build the necessary parenting skills

to support their children (Williams, 2002). By developing these steps, Williams was able

to provide school districts with seven simple ways to begin moving from parental

involvement to parental engagement.

Parental Involvement vs Parental Engagement

Ferlazzo (2009) states "engaging parents in school is to assist them in developing

and harnessing their own energy" (p. 2). An extensive amount of research regarding the

difference between involvement vs engagement has been completed to help define the

difference between the two. These differences are outlined in Table 2 (Constantino,

2003; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011).

Table 2

Involvement vs Engagement

	PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT CHARACTERISTICS	PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS
Purpose	To support students by supporting school programs and priorities	To support student by developing partnerships with parents to strengthen families and improving local communities.
Opportunities for Parents	School staff determine the type of opportunities for parents to be involved and try to "sell ideas to parents. Parents are seen as volunteers	Type of opportunities come mainly from parents thru developing a trusting relationship with staff. Parents are seen as leaders in the school whom encourages others to get involved
Opportunities for Staff	Staff provides information to parents like status of child's progress, resources available.	Staff members help parents organize ideas based on needs and priorities of the community. Both parents and staff become more involved with their child'student by asking target questions to each other to be more self reflective.
Opportunites for School Administation	School administration develops school mission and vision without input from parents	School administration involves parents in developing the school mission and vision
Opportunities for Community	Limited opportunities for involvement. Usually seen when schools/parents ask for help through donation of gift cards, products for family events, security from police, etc.	Involvement is critical as the partnership between parents, the community and the school work together to address community wide issues that affect students.

To understand that parental involvement of any kind is a step towards parent engagement (Constantino, 2003; Ferlazzo, 2009; Reed, 2007). For efffective parental engagement to occur there needs to be a solid connection between home and school. This relationship is based on teachers' and school administrators' understanding the parent and their needs, priorities and the fundamental knowledge of the families and communities they serve which is developed through trust and open communication (Ferlazzo, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011). Schultz (2006) identifies this fundamental knowledge or "Funds of Knowledge" as a way to demonstrate the possible ways to bridge the gap between the school and community. Extensive ethnographic research was completed by Schultz (2006) in homes of students to develop a reciprocal relationship between home and school. In order for this research to occur, teachers had to release themselves as the role of teacher and expert and, in turn become the learner and researcher, as they came to know their students and families in a new and disctinctive way.

In their book, *Funds of Knowledge*, Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) share examples of their own experiences as researchers in their research project. By providing parents with a way to share their family background, traditions, and history; teachers were able to focus on the practices within the households, as they learned more about the household histories, resources, knowledge, natural skills and the support systems that families have available to them. By participating in these interviews teachers were able to become engaged with the parents in what became a sustained relationship throughout the years (Schultz, 2006). The research project described in this book also provided teachers the opportunity to step back and become more reflective and inquisitive about

their own practice. The teachers involved in this project found themselves looking for ways to include cultural learning experiences, family histories, and even trade skill jobs like carpentry, electrical work, and plumbing into their classroom lessons to bridge the gap from home to school (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). As teachers utilize this knowledge in their planning, they were incoporating Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory on human development. This was accomplished by utilizing the knowledge that they learned about the immediate interactions that students had with family members, siblings, and peers within their microsystem and within the mesosystem as teachers learned about the connections and interaction within the settings and individuals of the indivduals within the child's home and community (Brendtro, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Weiss, 2010).

Funds of Knowledge are an ideal way to move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Moving a school from a parental involvement focus to a parental engagement focus is not as simple as legislation makes it seem. The difficulty with NCLB in today's society is that schools districts are more focused and streamlined on data surrounding teaching and learning, and not on supporting school with creating school-family partnerships to assist with improving student achievement. In Section 1118 of the NCLB the focus is on how school districts need to address parental involvement (Epstein, 2005). However, it does not provide clear structures and processes that are needed in order for districts to be successful. According to Epstein (2005) and Taylor-Dunlop (2009), NCLB provided school districts with parental involvement guildelines that include the need for:

1. A multilevel leadership plan that is implemented to provide opportunities for parents and educators to be actively involved in school improvement plans, increasing student achievements, curriculum, instruction, assessmets and other areas of school management.

2. Recognize that parental involvement programs need to provide opportunities for shared responsibilities between educators and families. This includes providing parents with access to student test scores in their native language and in terms that parents can easily understand.

3. Provisions for parental involvement programs that include all families regardless of race, social-economic status, ethnicity, native language, etc.

4. Opportunities for parents to become full partners in children's education that includes being on advisory committees and being part of the decision making process.

Parental engagement is multifaceted involving various parental practices and behavioral patterns (Harris, 2009). This process must begin at the classroom level as teachers examine their own belief systems and how they may influence the level of parental engagement in their own classroom. When teachers examine their belief system on parental engagement they need to be aware that their belief will influence their attitudes towards parents and the parent belief systems as well. This in turn affects the specific teacher parent interactions. Researchers (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Ferlazzo, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Rothstein, 2004; Williams, 2002) have identified the

following variables that teachers need to consider when examining their own belief systems:

- Social and psycholgical resources available to parent to support demands on time, mental and physcial health, social networks.

- Parent's efficacy beliefs.

- Parent's perception of their child (how they view child's option for their present and future, their abilities socially, emotionally and academically.

- Parent's assumptions about their role in child's education and role in education achievement of child.

- Parent's attitude toward school and their history of involvement in child's education.

- Parent's ethnic identity and general socialization practices.

Parental Engagement in Middle Schools

". . .the entry into middle school is one of the most difficult. During this period, it is crucial for schools and families to work together in order to establish a constructive framework that can foster positive development" (Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007, p. 540). Parents often believe that they can help their elementary school age children more effectively, resulting in more active parental engagement during those years (Deslandes, 2005; Jeynes, 2011). Most studies on parental involvement and parental engagement generally focus on elementary school students while parenteal engagement is just as important in middle school and high school for different reasons (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Epstein et al., 2002; Feuerstein, 2000; Green

et al., 2007; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Jeynes, 2011; Smith 2006). A common theme found in the research of parental engagment was that any type of parental involvement or engagement must be developmentally appropriate to the cognitive developmental needs of the child; this was especially true during the middle school years (Constantino, 2003; Crosnoe, 2009; Davenport, 2005; Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Hoover, 1995). For elementary school students this type of engagement might be to volunteer in the classroom, help with homework or even read to/with their child. For middle school and high school students it might include attending a sporting event, participating on a school committee, discussing current and future school options with their child, checking grades on line, monitoring that homework is completed, etc.

The level of parental engagement is often affected by the characteristics of the student and parent (Eccles & Harold, 1993). As students transition from elementary to middle school, parents often become less confident in their knowledge of the academic content and don't want to confuse their child by giving them the wrong answers with homework. This is often the main reason for a decrease in parental support in the middle school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009, Jeynes, 2011). Yet, the need for parental engagement during the middle school years has been documented as making a tremendous difference not only in the academic success of students, but in the social emotional areas as well. Students are more self-confident, feel school is important, less distruptive, more prepared for class, make more positive choices in and out of school, and have increase rates of attendance not just in school but also at school related events (Constantino, 2003; Deslandes, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Rogers &

Renard, 1999; Simon, 2001; Witmer, 2005). The positive effects of parental engagment

in the middle school are vital to the academic and social-emotional success of teenagers.

Researchers in England became particularily interested in parent engagement in

secondary schools and in 2006, launched a qualitative research project called 'Engaging

Parents in Raising Achievement' EPRA with the goal to support parents to help their

children learn, especially parents considered hard to reach. A unique feature of this

research project was that students, parent and teachers were all subjects of the project.

By investigating the views of all three, researchers were able to learn how parental

engagement effects all parties. The study revealed that there was no clear cut barrier to

parental engagement, however, when schools included a parent education (parenting

skills, leadership skills, decision making skills, etc.) this resulted in all parties benefiting

from adding this component (Harris, 2009). The study concluded that the development

of the student-parent-school partnership was vital to the success of the student.

Constantino (2003), as well, describes the importance of the parent-school

partnership with students in middle school and high school. It's not only important to

develop this partnership but to engage students, parents and teachers to develop an

educational program that is built around students to prevent them from falling through the

academic cracks. Educators must learn how to work with parents to teach them how to

listen to their child's needs, desires, attitudes and opinions and to infuse the idea of

becoming lifelong learners. As students enter into their middle school years parents need

to promote academic, social and emotional skills with their child (Deslandes, 2005; Elias,

2007; Jeynes, 2007; Murray, 2009; Smith, 2006). Parents can help their children by

working with them on goal setting, time management, developing persistence and tolerance and learning how to ask for help while checking that their homework is completed and reviewing their agenda/assignment books (Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Smith, 2006).

Harris (2009) reported that adolescents often took cues from their own parents before others about the importance of education and that adolsecent parents felt that besides offering academic support to their child, that they were equally responsible for providing moral support during the middle school years. Parents also felt that their role in their child's education was equally important in that they were able to provide moral support. The positive relationships that parents develop with their child at home while developing a healthy sense of competence is internalized and used in other settings like school (Murray, 2009). As Harris (2009) states "For many children home and school are two different worlds. But if there can be some congruence of support from the parents, school and teacheers, then students are more likely to see the benefits of learning" (p. 17). Parents are able to help bridge the gap between the two different worlds by talking to their child about what they are learning in school, some of the struggles they are facing, talking about future career and school plans, developing conversational and listening skills during family dinners, and sharing some of their own life experiences from childhood (Elias, 2007; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2006).

Studies in middle school settings have shown that when parents valued education, they were more likely to become engaged in their child's learning. As parents develop a more supporitve and helpful style of parenting they found that students highly valued the

moral support parents gave and felt that parents became better rolel models for them.

Parental expectations were explicit, they were more understanding while building

confidence and helping their child find and develop social, emotional and academic

competencies to face the challenges ahead of them (Constantino, 2003; Deslandes, 2005;

Elias, 2007; Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2007, 2011). Eccles and Harold (1993) found that

adolescents not only needed their parents for support but also nonfamilial adults in their

lifes that can provide a positive impact in their lives and play an important protective role

that teachers can provide. This still holds true today, especially when teachers take the

time to connect with student, become familiar with the students' language, culture and

their home community (Harris, 2009; Murray, 2009; Reed 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Schutz,

2006).

Studies have shown that the teacher is responsible for developing ways to engage

parents in a trusting relationship to foster healthy relationships between the home and

school (Connors, 1994; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Schutz, 2006; Witmer, 2005).

Teacher's ability to understand and support the student is dependent on their ability to

contextualize the school's neightborhoods (Witmer, 2005). Ridnouer (2011) reports as

teachers understand and appreciate the student and their families they will be able to

increase their ability engage with parents to learn about their culture, social context and

daily life experiences. Reed (2007) and Schutz (2006) both suggest that teachers need to

begin seeing the family and community as one to have successful school communities.

Researchers have discovered that when teachers work with family and community

members to develop a supportive network of resources and individuals middle school

students will benefit socially, academically and physically from these partnerships the most since teenagers need nonfamilial adults in their lives that can provide a positive impact and play the important protective role that family members may not be able to provide (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hoover, 1987; Murrary, 2009; Weaver, 2007). There has also been documentation that these outside relationships are beneficial since the teenage brain is wired to engage in interactions and activities with others (Weaver, 2007). As teachers develop these relationships they are more likely to become advocates for both, students and parents. By understanding the student, parent and community more they learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the family, their interests, their everyday habits and rituals.

The difficulty in developing these vital relationships is that they take time, months maybe even years. In fact, according to Eccles and Harold (1993) and Flynn (2008), many middle school and secondary school teachers view parental involvement as unimportant and discourage parents' participation. They hold the misconception that adolescents don't need parental involvement at this age. This may be in part due to lack of strategies on how to engage parents, especially in the middle school and high school classrooms (Ferrara, 2005). There is evidence to suggest that when schools make sincere efforts to engage parents and community members (at all levels of schooling) that the outcome is positive (Harris, 2009).

During the 2006/07 academic year a research project, engaging parents to raise achievement campaign (EPRA) was undertaken to encourage schools to look at their traditional practice with parents and examine how they can extend this practice to try new

and innovaite approaches to engage parents to have positive impact on student learning

and achievement (Harris 2009; Harris & Goodall, 2007). During the 12 month qualitative

research project using 100 different secondary schools. Telephone survey's were

conducted to determine if parents felt welcomed at they school. The results of the survey

concluded that 29% of parents felt very engaged; 35% wanted to be more involved; 75%

wanted to be somewhat more involved; 84% felt school wanted them involved; 94% felt

school was welcoming and 16% felt they were seen as troublemakers at the school (Harris,

2009, p. 21). Students were also interviewed to learn more about their perceptions of

parental engagement. Students who report feeling supported both from home and school

tend to; do better in school, are more self confident, feel school is important, are less

disruptive, have higher test scores and are more likely to go on further in their education

(Harris, 2009).

The research findings from the engaging parents to raise achievement campaign

(EPRA) project emphasized that often it is not the parents that are 'hard to reach' but it is

the schools (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Parents, teachers and students agreed that parental

engagement is a positive aspect of education, but often they differ in the purpose of

engaging parents; especially between involving parents in the school itself and engaging

in learning activities at home. Harris and Goodall concluded that "parental engagement

in children's learning in the home makes the greatest difference to student achievement.

Most schools are involving parents in school-based activities in a variety of ways but the

evidence shows this has little, if any, impact on subsequent learning and achievement of

young people" (p. 277). When educators make every attempt to understand families

about their concerns, beliefs, how they define their role in the school and by providing

parents with mulitiple opportunities to share this information that the outcome is positive

(Harris, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011).

Educators and schools that have been success in engaging parents of middle

school students have high levels of confidence in their ability to teach are more likely to

involve parents at various levels (Hoover, 1992). Educators can be successful in

enegaing middle school parents in several ways. Evidence provided in several studies

provided examples of what teachers can do to increase parental engagement in the middle

school classrooms (Elias, 2007; Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hoover,

1995; Ridnouer, 2011; Schutz, 2006). The following includes strategies have been found

to be effective in securing middle school engagement:

- Providing opportunities for effective two way communication that includes
  clear and frequent lines of communication regarding policies, programs and
  student progress;

- Asking parents to share their hopes and dreams for their child;

- Asking how they want to be involved in their child's education;

- Assisting parents in networking with others (bring a friend or neighbor to a
  school event);

- Providing parents with information sheets on ways and who to communicate
  with;

- Provide phone calls with positive messages that include invitations for
  opportunities to come to school;

- Teach parents how to utilize agenda books;

- Home visits;

- Provide opportunities for parents to actually do the activities that students are being asked to do during a parent workshop;

- Use evidence-based resources to help them integrate the development of social and emotional skills in their curriculum and daily classroom routines;

- Projects that student and parent will complete together that are cross-disciplinary and stress the importance of everyday life. Parents are given the opportunity to voice ideas for these projects;

- Various school and community projects like School-Community Gardens and Family Service Learning Projects;

- TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork Program, where teachers develop homework assignment that require interaction with parents (Epstein, 2001).

The challenge is to learn how to engage all parents when it is ultimately the parents decision to become involved in their child's education. Adolescents from traditional families and well-educated parents report more affective support then students from low income familes and untraditional families (Deslandes, 2005; Harris, 2009). However, engaging parents from low income housing and less educated parents is of greater importance due to the signifcant increase in the amount of learning that would be possible (Harris, 2009). Parenting behaviors can directly impact children's educational achievement and their cognitive development (Bakker, Denessen & Bris-Laeven, 2007).

Research conducted by Hill (2001) concluded that poverty and educational opportunities were vital in understanding parental involvement. Families considered at poverty level often have to work two jobs to meet the basic needs of the family, resulting in little time to interact with the children and be involved in their school (Culp, Hubbs-Tait, Culp, & Starost, 2000; Hill, 2001; Ricciuti, 2004). The physical and emotional stress, along with the frustration, that parents in low income families may face can result in these families ignoring the mental and emotional needs of their children and only focusing on the basic needs of food and shelter. The economic hardship that is placed on these families often result in hostile living environments to include an increase of negative parental behaviors and emotions, and a lack of positive relationships among family members. This often transfers to the child and is revealed in poor cognitive development due to lack of parent involvement (Attaway & Bry, 2004; Hill, 2001). Research indicates that these families are less likely to be involved in their children's education due to lack of time, lower expectations regarding achievement, and the inability to support homework completion due to lack of knowledge of the subject area on the parents part (Constantino, 2003; Hill, 2001; Ricciuti, 2004).

The study by Miedel and Reynolds (1999) provided further evidence of the long-term relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, especially in low income families. Over 700 low income parents of eighth graders were interviewed about their involvement while their children were in preschool and kindergarten. The results of this study found that the more activities that parents reported taking part in, the better their children did in reading. This resulted in a higher rate of students being promoted to

the next grade and less were likely to need special education services (Miedel &

Reynolds, 1999). This was confirmed by the teacher ratings of parent involvement as

well. Miedel and Reynolds reported three implications from their study: parent

involvement is an important part of successful early intervention; the implementation of

early parent involvement programs can promote future family-school relationships; and

parent involvement programs can be a protective factor in overcoming risk conditions

like poverty and low school achievement. The authors did indicate that while parent

involvement will not increase children's IQ scores, they can help parents learn how to

monitor their children's educational progress and how to intervene if their children get in

trouble at school (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Williams (2002) discusses several ways to increase the level of parental

engagement in school. They include: (1) removing practical barriers, like lack of

childcare and transportation so that parents are more at ease to come to school events; (2)

recognize the contributions of each individual and provide incentives to parents; (3)

change the organizational process from involving parents to engaging parents to increase

the importance of working as partners; (4) provide training for both parents and staff on

what parental engagement looks like and sounds like; (5) help parents build leadership

skills; (6) build on cultural strengths by helping staff members develop an understanding

of how specific cultures impact parents' experiences with school and their willingness to

take on roles of leadership; and (7) tailor engagement strategies to specific populations

within your school. Out of these seven items the most difficult and time consuming items

are building on cultural strengths and tailoring parental engagement strategies to specific

populations. Thes two areas require staff members and parents to be open to looking within themselves, raise their own level of consciousness and to make a commitment to change.

According to Ferlazzo (2009), when schools engage their parents they are leading with the parents' self-interests in mind, which moves the school towards developing a genuine parttnership. Maybe the time has come for all schools to begin shaping their expectations around the cultural expectations and interests of the families instead of asking families to shape themselves around the schools.

Need for Current Research

To move schools from parental involvement to parental engagement educators must learn how to develop the meaningful relationships with parents and families that will result in higher academic achievement for all students. Teachers want to develop these relationships but often find it difficult to do when so much of their time and energy is already devoted to planning, analyzing data, making sure that students are on target with their instruction and are meeting their performance targets (Ferrara, 2005; Flynn, 2008; Garcia, 2004; Harris, 2009). While studies have shown that teacher practice relating to parental engagement and involvement accounts for more variances than parent variables; teachers readily admit that they do not feel that they have adequate training/ education on how to interact with parents, especially in middle school and high school (Epstein, 1991; Ferrara, 2005; Garcia, 2004). The teacher may be frustrated, confused and ambivalent. New teachers especialy show resistance to communicating with parents (Flynn, 2008; Garcia, 2004). This is often out of fear that they see parents as a threat,

they lack a clear understanding of how to comuunicate, they believe it is the parents

responsibility to connect with the teacher and they do not undertand their role or the

parents role in education (Flynn, 2008; Harris, 2009). Connors and Epstein (1994)

conducted a study where a survey was completed by teachers to determine what level of

support teachers felt they received from families. The results showed that an alarming

90% of teachers involved in this survey felt that family involvement was essential to

student success, however, teachers believed it was the parents responsibilty as to how and

when they should be involved in their child's education. Just as teachers need to

communicate with students in culturally relevant ways, teachers also need to

communicate with parents in the same way (Constantino, 2003; Jeynes, 2011; Reed,

2007; Ridnouer, 2011).

Based on the review of literature, it is evident that there is a gap in the research on

how middle school teachers engage parents to support the educational life of the middle

school student. Much of the previous research conducted on parent involvement/

engagement has focused primarily on either elementary schools or a combination of

elementary and middle schools. The conclusion from the research conducted reveals that

when schools, families and community groups work together to support students,

children tend to do better in school, stay there longer, and like school better (Anfara &

Mertens, 2008; Epstein et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2011). The majority of research that has

been done has been on the impact of parent involvement and the different types of

parental involvement programs available to elementary schools, with very little known

about how teachers develop this important partnership with parents at the middle school

level (Garcia, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2011). To close the gap

between the lack of research regarding how middle school teachers can engage parents it

is important to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in

    supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent

    invovlement and towards engagement?

2. Do middle school teachers descrie an ability to challenge their own belief

    system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership regardless of race, culture,

    ethnic and social ecomonic status of their families? If so, how does this

    happen? If not, why not?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and methodology of this study. The intent of this study is to explore how middle school teachers support parents as they move from traditional forms of parental involvement towards parental engagement to support their children as they move into the middle school years of their education. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parental involvement and towards engagement?

2. Do middle school teachers describe an ability to challenge their own belief system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership regardless of race, culture, ethnic and social economic status of their families? If so, how does this happen? If not, why not?

Research Design

This study investigates the deeper understanding of parental engagement in the middle school years through the experience of seven middle school teachers from charter schools of the same governing board across a Midwest metropolitan city using phenomenological interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rudestam & Newton,

2007). Using the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system theory on human development for this study, requires studying the interaction between the person and his or her environment. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) recommend a qualitative design when a concept or phenomenon needs understanding. The phenomenological approach was selected to gain insight into the experiences of middle school teachers and how they support their parents as they engage in the educational lives of their middle school children to increase student achievement. Using this qualitative measure provided optimal opportunity to seek answers to the research questions that stress the importance of how social experiences are created, and give meaning when capturing the experiences and perceptions of the teacher's partnership with parents in the teacher's own words (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Turner, 2010; Wolcott, 2001).

Research Instrumentation

Qualitative and quantitative researchers have relied on interviews as a basic method to obtain data, whether it is to acquire a simple point on a scale or to obtain a rich, in-depth account to understand the experiences of participants and the meaning they make of their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, the interview process is critical, as participants share their own life experiences in response to the researcher's interview questions (Gubrium & Holstein 1998; Kvale, 1996).

Phenomenological interviewing is appropriate when the phenomenon in question is something that the individuals have in common (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Generally, qualitative studies using an interviewing process use structured or

unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews provide "the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p 75). In structured interviews, the goal is to gather data that is codable in nature based on the pre-determined themes/categories using closed-ended questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002). Another type of interviewing process combines components of both structured and unstructured; this is the semi-structured interview process. Kvale (1996) describes the semi-structured interview as "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 5). Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of unstructured, open-ended interviews with an agenda to produce focused, qualitative textual data using interview guides (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2005).

Using open-ended questions that were based on the study's central theme before data collection provided the researcher with opportunity to obtain specific information and provided opportunities for comparison across cases to gain a more thorough understanding of the topic (Seidman, 1991). The use of semi-structured approach allows for a more relaxed, friendly conversation than a data-gathering interview. Utilizing a protocol of a few open-ended questions based on the study's central focus that remains open and flexible, as in the semi-structure approach, the researcher has freedom to ask clarifying questions investigate further a concept that has emerged from the interview. The semi structured interview protocol serves as a foundation that the interview is built

from, while allowing flexibility to ensure that the participant's story is fully shared (Flick, 2002; Seidman, 1991).

For this study, the researcher interviewed seven middle school teachers to learn what their perceptions and experiences were in supporting parents/families as they moved from basic forms of parental involvement and moved towards parental engagement. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher learned from participants how their individual perceptions affect how they interact with parents/families and how their experiences have provided opportunities and ideas, they have implemented in their own classrooms to engage parents in this partnership to increase student achievement in the middle school years. Using the semi-structured interview technique provided more detail with opportunities for further prompts if necessary for clarity and in-depth understanding by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002).

Parental engagement has been a topic of interest to educational researchers for years (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Mapp 2003; Pomperantz, 2007). As identified in the review of literature in Chapter II, one of the missing links in this research is how middle school teachers engage parents to support the educational life of the middle school student. By using a semi-structured interview process with an interview protocol, this study was be able to gain background material to better understand how Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory of human development applies to parental engagement and phenomena of a true parent-teacher partnership in the middle school years (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

For this study, the researcher used Kvale's (1996) nine types of questions to create the interview protocol. These nine types of questions; introduction, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting questions, along with silence, will give the participant time to "tell their story" in a way that will give the researcher valuable information for the analysis (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2005). An interview protocol was used for each of the interviews to ensure that the same information was be collected from each interview. While the protocol included open-ended introduction and structuring questions, the researcher used other questions from Kvale's nine types of questions to explore, probe, and to ask additional questions to clarify and expand on a particular topic.

Kvale's question types were used during Seidman's (1998) three-phrase qualitative interview style to provide the researcher with opportunity to learn how the participants' perceptions of parental engagement in the middle school were based from their own personal experience. The first phase of Seidman's qualitative interview is to focus on the participant's life history. During this time, the researcher developed a rapport with the participant while gathering basic information and background knowledge using Kvale's introduction and direct type of questions (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1998). Next, the researcher moved into the essence of the interview phase, the details of experience. The researcher asked the participants to reconstruct their experiences with parental engagement by sharing their story. The third phase of the interview process was when participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. According to Seidman (1998) this third phase, reflection on the meaning, is the most ciritcal phase

since it builds upon the first two phases and the intention is to learn how the participants make sense of their own experiences, how it relates to other aspects of themselves and their own lives. During this phase of the interview process, the researcher learned more about how the participants own perceptions of home, family life, culture, race, and social economic status affects how they interacted with parents.

Research Participants

Qualitative research is about developing an in-depth understanding of specific individuals, rather than studying the general characteristics of a large number of individuals across specific variables. Non-random sampling can be extremely useful in qualitative research where the goal is to learn more about a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is used to increase the usefulness of information obtained from small samples. The goal to using purposeful sampling is to allow the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of the population of interest. For this study, the author used purposeful homogeneous sampling to learn more about how middle school teachers engage parents.

The researcher was sampled seven middle school teachers in various schools across a major metropolitan city with diverse neighborhoods. The seven middle school teachers interviewed were selected from various schools within one governing charter board in a Midwest metropolitan city. The schools are located in various communities within this city, where at least 60% of the students come from low-income families. The student population in each school ranges from a minimum of 85% African American, Latino, and Asian to 100% African American. Nine of the 11 schools are elementary K-8

buildings. One school has students from 3rd-9th grade and the other school has a student

population of 7th-12th graders. Approximately 2.7% of the teachers hold a provisional

teaching certificate. The selected schools were required to have at least 60% of their

students coming from low income families, student populations needed to include at least

three different ethnic groups with one being Hispanic and the other African American.

The researcher also looked at schools where the staff populations were predominately

Caucasian.

The researcher asked permission to distribute invitations to teachers to participate

in the study by contacting principals of the eleven charter schools. If interested, teachers

were asked to contact the researcher for further information. Any teacher that contacted

the researcher, regardless of agreement to participate, were asked to invite other middle

school teachers that they thought might be interested in participating, to contact the

researcher, which is known as snowball sampling.

Data Collection

Before agreeing to participate, the researcher gave a verbal overview of the study

along with the expectations for participant and the researcher. At the same time,

participants were informed that the interview would be audiotaped. Upon agreeing to

participate in this study, an email was sent out the participant confirming the day and

time for the interview. The participant received the informed consent form through email

to review that included information regarding the audiotaping. The researcher worked

around the participants schedule by scheduling a time and place convenient for the

participant. Interviews were taken place at an agreed upon time via telephone since

participants were most comfortable participating in this format. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Based on the participants schedule all interviews were conducted in one sitting by telephone. Once the interview time was established, a confirmation email was sent to the participant, which included a copy of the Consent Form. To avoid deception during the interview process all participants were fully-informed.

Prior to the actual interview, each participant mailed the signed consent form back to the researcher. At the beginning of each interview the researcher began by thanking the participant for volunteering to participate in this study. The researcher also confirmed that the participant had signed and returned the informed consent form, indicating that they would be audio-taped and that the tapes would be destroyed a year after the study was completed. A random number was assigned to the consent form and written on the form. The form was then placed in a separate manila envelope (which was stored in a separate locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's home office).

From that point on, the randomly assigned number was the only identifying factor associated with the participant for the remainder of the study. Before the actual interview began, a reminder was given to the participant that at any time they were uncomfortable and wished to take a break or stop the interview all together, that their wish would be honored and respected. The participant was reminded that the interview should take approximately 60 minutes, that a break could be taken at any time; and also that the interview could be completed in two sessions if needed. The principal investigator

reminded them that if they did decide to stop participating in the interview that they would still receive a gift card, as a token of appreciation for their time given to the study.

During the interview, the researcher noted nonverbal cues, and voice tone of the participants' to be included as part of the data collected. Each interview was conducted until the researcher felt that a saturation point had been reach and when the participant felt that they had fully expressed their ideas, thoughts and feelings regarding parental engagement. Each interview was concluded by asking the participant the following two questions: "Do you have any questions that you would have liked me to ask that I did not ask?" and "Is there anything else that you think we should have talked about?" to address issues of authenticity in qualitative research. Upon completion of the interview, the principal investigator thanked the participants for their time and informed them that the gift card would be mailed the next day.

Data Analysis

Analyzing qualitative data involves interpreting the data by forming an impression, and then reporting the impression in a structured format. Thematic analysis in its simplest form is a way to categorize qualitative data. Researchers review their data, make notes, and begin to sort their notes into categories or themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). A theme is essentially a cluster of categories that contain similar meanings from the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Identified as a data analytic strategy, thematic analysis helps researchers move their analysis from a broad set of categories to discovering patterns to describe and interpret these patterns as themes about a phenomenon. Using thematic analysis allows for collecting data from a problem or

situation to be examined, analyzed and described in a systematic way that interpretations

and meanings can be made (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Many researchers use thematic

analysis as a way of getting closer to their data and developing a deeper appreciation of

the content, making thematic analysis flexible based on the intentions of the research and

process of analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Data analysis was completed through thematic analysis. When transcribing

individual interviews, the researcher only used the participant's previously assigned

number to identify their quotes. Transcripts were read, synthesized, analyze, and

organize into categories. By using thematic analysis, the researcher will be able to focus

on identifiable themes and patterns that emerge. Once all data was collected and

transcribed, the researcher organized the data by maintaining a file for each participant.

Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading of all

interviews to gain understanding of content. The researcher read each transcription at

least three times. The first reading was to become familiar with the content. The second

reading was to identify themes and patterns that begin to emerge. During the third

reading, the goal was to be able retrieve specific quotes to support the themes. Each

theme or pattern was coded so responses could be categorized appropriately. Once all

transcripts were read multiple times, excerpts of each transcript relating to individual

categories were filed under the appropriate category for coding the data. As the

categories or themes were developed and assigned a code, the researcher further analyzed

the data to develop an understanding of how middle school teachers' work with parents to

develop an engaging partnership with them to improve student achievement was linked to

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory on human development (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2005).

Researcher as Instrument

An integral characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher as the primary

instrument for data collection and analysis (Kvale, 1996; Merriman, 2009). Merriman

stated that the human instrument in qualitative research provides many benefits including

"the ability to be immediately responsive and adaptive . . . to expand his or her

understanding through verbal as well as nonverbal communication, to process

information immediately, to clarify and summarize material, . . . and to explore unusual

or unanticipated responses" (p. 15). A good interviewer must be an expert in the topic of

the interview as well as in the technique of interviewing and human interaction. As a

teacher and instructional coach in elementary/middle schools, the researcher has always

believed that one of the missing links in student achievement in the middle school grades

is parent engagement. As a teacher of primary grades, the researcher had taken courses

on how to create parent-teacher partnerships, and how to engage parents in student

learning. As an instructional coach, the researcher has had the responsibility of working

with other teachers, often those with less experience. The researcher has observed first-

hand how middle school teachers struggle with finding ways to engage parents in their

students' academic learning. Working with students, teachers, administrators and parents

has given the researcher an opportunity to learn about human interactions. The

researcher learned about the experience or stories of the participants using individual

interviews.

Ethical, Reliability and Validity Issues

According to Walford (2001), the ethicality of any research should be examined

as the process unfolds, to make sure that the researchers' own views and beliefs will not

have an influence of the interviewees. Confidentiality is the primary concern for this

study, and no detrimental procedures will occur for the sake of the data collection.

Original names and schools were removed from the transcripts, using pseudonyms in the

final report, and all research data was stored in a locked file cabinet that was accessible

only by the researcher. The researcher contacted each participant directly by email and

phone to discuss with them the research study and set up a time for the interview that was

convenient to them. Each participant signed an informed consent that explained the

rights of confidentiality and options to withdrawal at any time.

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are two factors that the researcher

should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing and judging the quality of

the study (Patton, 2002). This required the researcher to develop a trusting relationship

quickly with the participants to create an interview climate that would provide

opportunities for the researcher to better understand how the participants understand and

made meaning of their own experiences with parental engagement. It was important for

the researcher to accept the participants' descriptions as they recorded; this in itself is a

factor affecting validity. As the researcher wrote up the findings of this study, the ability

of the researcher to capture the participants own experiences of the phenomenon so that

the reader can relate to these descriptions through their own experiences was the final test

of validity and reliability (Kvale, 1996). The researcher used various coding techniques

to ensure greater validity and reliability to the study. While analyzing data, the researcher used data to bear weight of interpretation by making sure that all themes were supported by the data to provide explicit and clear judgments with the use of quotes, phrases, and consistent terminology of the individual participant (Patton, 1990; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). By looking for repetitions of words, phrases and concepts within and across transcripts, the researcher was quickly able to identify themes from the data. With a diverse group of participants, searching metaphors, transitions and connector words were helpful to grasp meaning of the interview and to identify cultural schemas in the text that assisted the researcher in identifying themes, especially themes that related to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory on human development. Finally, the researcher looked for similarities and differences by comparing entire transcripts.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how middle school teachers support their students' parents through both traditional parental involvement and parental engagement. This qualitative study was accomplished by using phenomenological interviewing to address the following two questions:

1. What are the perceptions and of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent involvement and towards parent engagement?

2. Do middle school teachers describe an ability to challenge their own belief system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership regardless of race, culture, ethnic and social economic status of their families? If so, how does this happen? If not, why not?

This chapter is outlined by presenting the participants of the study, and a description of the process of collection and analysis of the interview data, including coding procedures and the process of developing themes. Following this is a presentation and analysis of the interview data, including the content and themes revealed through this analysis.

Participants

The seven middle school teachers selected were from three different charter schools within one governing charter board in a Midwest metropolitan city. School One has a population of 534 students with 63.5% of the students coming from low income households. Out of the 534 students, 62.4% are Hispanic, 13.1% White, 6.7% Black, 4.5% Asian and 13.3% are considered 'Other'. The school also has 13.1% of the students considered English Language Learners and 9.4% receive special education services. Academically, this school is considered to be a Level One school, which is considered the highest academic level by the district (CPS, 2014). Approximately 85% of the staff is White, 7% African American and 7% Hispanic. Participants also noted that approximately 30% of the staff is Jewish. The staff is young, with the average years of experience between 6-7 years and approximately 85% of the staff are female.

School Two has a population of 397 students with 98.2% of the students coming from low income households and located on the south side of the city. From this population, 51.6% are Hispanic, 48.1% Black and 0.3% are considered other. The school has a 26.7% English Language Learners population and 11.8% of the total number of students received special education. Academically, this school is considered to be a Level Three school, which places this school on probation by the school district (CPS, 2014). The majority (90%) of the staff members are female. The average years of experience for staff members is between 4-5 years. Approximately 80% of the staff is White, 10% African American and 10% Hispanic.

School Three has a population of 495 students with 95.6% of the students coming from low income households. Within the student population 91.1% are Hispanic, 7.3% Black, 1% White and 0.6% considered other. The school also has a 37.2% English Language Learners population and 17% of the total number of students received special education services. Academically, this school is a Level Two school, which is considered the second highest academic level by the district (CPS, 2014). At this school the majority of the staff is young with average years of service between 2-3 years. Ninety-five percent of the staff is female and 95% are White, with the remaining 5% a combination of African American and Hispanic.

The school principal, a parent from the school and/or another staff member, recommended participants for this study. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher contacted the participant via email asking if they would like to participate in the study. Initially, all interviews were to be conducted in person however, due to the time of the year (holiday season) participants were reluctant to participate because of time restraints. Several weeks went by with no actual interview being scheduled. Therefore, the researcher suggested that the interviews could be done over the phone and still be taped. Participants were more willing to participant once this became an option. Prior to anyone being interviewed, the participant had to send back the signed consent form to the researcher. When the signed consent form was received by the researcher, then an interview date and time was set up. At the beginning of the interview, each participant provided some details regarding their own education and teaching experience, to include, how many years he/she taught; subjects and grades taught their own education

and their experience with teaching in diverse populations. Finally, participants reflected

on their course work and/or professional development relating to parent-community

partnerships and/or culturally relevant teaching. At the end of each interview,

participants were thanked for their time, and also asked if they could recommend a

colleague from any of the charter schools that met the qualifications to be a participant in

this study.

Table 3 introduces the participants and basic information about each. The

following section describes each participant and his/her background.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

	Years of Experience in School Setting	Current Grade/Subject Teaching	Degree	Time Spent Teaching in Low-Income Diverse Population
Participant #1	10	7th/8th Grade Science	Master's	85%
Participant #2	2	7th/8th Grade Reading	Bachelor	100%
Participant #3	7	7th Grade Humanities	Master's	100%
Participant #4	10	5th/6th Grade Humanities	Master's	70%
Participant #5	3	6th Grade Math & Science	Bachelor	100%
Participant #6	1	7th Grade Reading 7th/8th Grade Science	Bachelor	100%
Participant #7	3	7th/8th Grade Reading	Bachelor	67%

Participant #1 taught for over 10 years, mostly Art. For the last three years, Participant #1 has been teaching Art at school 1 and this year 7th/8th grade Science. Participant #1 has a Master's Degree in Art Education with an endorsement in Science. 85% of teaching time has been with diverse populations in public schools, and Participant #1 has no course work or professional development in parent-community partnerships or culturally relevant teaching.

Participant #2 has a Bachelor's degree with two years teaching experience. This participant as only been at their current school for one year and currently is the 7th/8th grade Reading teacher. Participant #2 has always taught diverse populations and has some professional development in the area of culturally relevant teaching at the current school.

Participant #3 has a Bachelor's Degree in Public Relations and a Master's Degree in Education. With seven years of experience within a 100% diverse school setting, Participant #3 has been a teacher's aide, Director of Operations and for the last two years a teacher. Participant #3 currently teaches 7th Grade Humanities. This participant has not had any course work or professional development in parent-community partnerships or culturally relevant teaching. However, in the role of Director of Operations, Participant #3 had the responsibility of tracking parental involvement within the school.

Participant #4 has over 10 years of teaching experience seven were teaching diverse populations in low-income area schools. Participant #4 spent five years teaching bilingual education in another state and has been at the current school for one year teaching 5th/6th grade Humanities. Participant #4 holds a Bachelor's Degree in

Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in Child and Adolescent Development. With no specific course work on parent-community partnerships, this participant did have several discussions on culturally relevant teaching within several courses.

Participant #5 currently teaches 6th Grade Math, Science and Reading. This participant has been at this school for three years, with the first year as a teacher's aide. Participant #5 holds a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education has always taught in low-income schools with diverse populations and has not had any course work on parent-community partnerships or culturally relevant teaching.

Participant #6 is a first year teacher teaching 7th grade reading and 7th/8th grade Science. This participant holds a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and is familiar with culturally relevant teaching. While in college, Participant #6 was actively involved in community projects for education classes where they also talked about the importance of parent-community relationships.

Participant #7 has taught for three years, two at the current school and one at a suburban school. This participant currently teaches 7th/8th Grade Reading and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. Two of the three years have been teaching in a low-income diverse population school. Participant #7 has attended professional development on parent-community partnerships but has no formal training in culturally relevant teaching.

Development of Codes and Themes

The development of codes and themes actually began during the first interview. As the researcher was listening to the participants tell their stories, connections were

being made between their experiences and what other researchers have reported on about parental involvement and engagement. As the interviews continued, common words and phrases were noted across the participants' retold experiences. These similarities and differences prompted the researcher to question participants more when they were telling their stories so that a deeper understanding of their experiences could be recorded. For example, by probing Participant #3 while talking about what strategies used to work with parents that were reluctant to get involved initially to talking more about specific strategies that were used, the researcher learned that when Participant #3 works with parents starts at their zone of proximal development was important.

Each of the interviews was conducted a week apart, giving the researcher an opportunity to focus on each participant individually. Within 48 hours of each interview the tapes were transcribed, providing an opportunity for the researcher to digest what was said and to see if there was a need to contact the participant again for follow up questions. Once the interview was transcribed, the transcript was read for clarity; then it was read a second time to look for all units of meaning. Once four interviews were transcribed, all four interviews were read in one sitting to identify instances of shared content, ideas and/or experiences to develop the themes. The units of meaning were communication, responsive to parent needs, home activities, community/culture, and involvement versus engagement. Next, samples from transcripts were placed into these five units. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to begin to examine the data for sufficient evidence to support emerging codes. The first set of codes identified were "I think parents/students," "I believe parents/students should," "teach the parent," "work with

them," "start where they are," "administration support," "talking with/to,"

"communication," "teaching/coaching parents," "those parents," and "conversations

with."

While interviewing the last three participants, many of the original codes

continued strengthening the data being collected. By the time the last interview was

completed, the following codes were added: "working together," "same page," and

"community building." Once all the interviews were completed and transcribed, all the

transcripts were read together to gain a sense of the overall tone of the stories. By doing

this, the researcher was able to identify themes that were emerging more clearly than

before. If there was evidence of codes within four different participants then a theme,

was identified. To prevent bias during the data analysis of this study, the researcher had

to be careful to stay objective when obviously the researcher was some thoughts about

what the data was telling her based on her own teaching experience in high needs

communities and diverse population school.

<div align="center">**Themes**</div>

Nine themes were identified through data analysis. In the sections to follow, each

theme will be explored with supporting evidence.

Relationships Emerge from Concerns about Students

Each participant talked about interactions that they had working with a diverse

student and their family to create a trusting and engaging parent-teacher partnership only

when there was a concern, rather than when being proactive or preventative. Participants

showed concern for the well-being of the student in the stories that they told. For

example, Participant #6 talked about how working with one parent and student so that

everyone was on the same team when the student started having trouble in class.

> *an one of my student's mother is actually currently working in the office. I mentioned about parents volunteering earlier because of her. He is one of those students that is rambunctious, he likes to have his voice heard all the time. I get it, because I was that kid too. So his mom is actually working in the office, who I now see every single day. She has made it really easier for her to check in. She will ask how he is doing. I went to her and talked to her about his acting out. She was so supportive. I asked if she could have a conversation with him. She said absolutely, no problem. Let me know what you need. I said great. I went back to the student and said listen, I talked to your mom in the office and she knows what's happening. She knows that you are going to fix it and we are going to be talking to help you. I made it very clear to the student that we are a team and that everyone is going to work together – his mom, him and I. His behavior is so much better now because he knows that he is now accountable for his behavior. Getting everybody on the same team is what it is all about.*

Participant #6 related that the utilization of consistent support was dependent upon the

students' mother volunteering at the school every day. Participant #6 also spoke about

how style of communication, which the participant described as *"direct, but very clear,"*

helps when developing relationships with parents.

Participant #1 described finding a way to connect with her parents when they

came to her looking for support. One story that was shared was about a family who was

in the middle of moving when the student had a science fair project due and the parent

reached out to Participant #1 for support because she was afraid that her son would fail if

he didn't turn in a completed science fair project (they didn't have a printer available to

print out his project). Participant #1 talked about how being open with communication

was key and *"letting parents know that I am there for the little things, I want to learn*

what's going on, their (the parents) concerns."

Several participants talked about how their relationships with families did not end when the school year ended or even when the student graduated from the school. Participant #4 talked about the lasting impact that they had on one family when working with them to get their child back on track academically, at the cost of the child not being able to play sports for a semester. Participant #4 described *"at first she (the parent) was not thrilled about him being pulled out of class, but like I told her she would hopefully see results and that would help him in the long run. It would open doors for him."* Participant #4 knew the risk the parent and student would need to take to get the student back on track and that they was willing to work with the family to make sure that this happened. At the end of the success story with this family Participant #4 said that the parent *"still sends me emails about once a month to let me know how he is doing, she will bounce ideas off of me if he is stuck on homework. It was totally worth the rocky start at the beginning."*

Family Roles Changing

Many participants talked about how family roles begin to change when student move into the middle school years. In some cases, it is that the middle school students become more independent and take on more responsibilities because of becoming more independent. Participant #6 made a valid point that *"as the maturity level increases of the student the parent involvement decreases."* This participant thought this was because parents felt that, as their child gets older and more mature that they can assuming the responsibility and becoming more independent with their school work. At the same time, Participant #1 talked about how *"once students get to middle school there are*

expectations that they students are already going to know what they are supposed to be doing and I feel like parents don't keep an eye on them as much as they need." Teachers and schools are promoting students becoming more independent as they prepare for high school. Participant #7 talked about how at their school they are talking to their 8th graders about *"accountability, respect and becoming independent learners not just in academics but in other areas as well."* The participant continued to talk about how when working with one student the conversations to the student about being *"accountable for their own learning since they will be going to high school next year and that how she (the student) is going to be a grown adult soon and needs to learn to take on this responsibility."* Several of the participants pointed out that when given the direction of what to do, parents were eager to help their child. So does the parent not want to get involved or do not they know how to be involved with their middle school child?

Several transcripts included examples of when the student has to grow up too soon due to circumstances that are beyond their control. Participant #2 had a variety of teaching experiences, some positive and some negative. Participant #2 shared how if they kept students afterschool to tutor them, they would walk them home so that they did not have to worry about *"students having to walk three to four blocks by themselves in a rough neighborhood, I didn't want to have to worry about them getting into fights or gang involvement."* Participant #2 talked about working at a school where they felt that the middle school students were forced to grow up very fast and the hardship that this placed on the students because *"they're in charge of their younger siblings because once the kids turn 18 in these low SES homes they move out or they are living with their*

friends. I see that a lot with my student's from last year." Participant #6 also talked

about how their middle school students were taking on more responsibility at home. The

participant said

> *I see that more and more middle school students are actually being the parental figure to the younger kids. They are the ones responsible for getting them up, dressed and eating breakfast each morning. They are the ones responsible for like, I had one of my students tell me that he couldn't do his homework until after he made dinner for his siblings. So it puts them in a different position.*

Like Participant #2 and Participant #6, Participant #7 shared a similar story where

one student is responsible for a younger sibling, and this student is also on the basketball

team and leaves school later than most. Participant #7 shared how they felt responsible

for his safety so

> *on days when there is a basketball game and it is dark outside, I always make sure to watch him and his sibling walk to the corner and wait for the bus. I wait until they get on the bus before I leave. It is important for him to know that someone knows and is making sure that they are safe getting home.*

School Administrators Shape the Perception of Teacher's View of Parental Involvement

The theme of Administration support is evident in the stories that participants

shared. Participants that felt supported by Administration shared successful interactions

with parents and those that did not have Administration support did not have as many

success stories. Participant #2 said it best, *"I didn't feel successful, when administration*

was not on my side and definitely not the parents." Participant #2 also talked about

working in a school that was closing and how the school administrations made a huge

difference in their interactions with parents:

I didn't want to work 100 hours a week when I didn't see anyone else moving forward. It was difficult because we all knew by the middle of the year that the school was closing and there was no support to keep working with parents.

Participant #2 also shared how there was no accountability at this school on the parents, students or staff if they did not work together. Participant #2 spoke about how at Park (pseudonym) School there is a sense of accountability for interacting with parents. This participant said that staff are required to enter all parent communications within their on-line communication program for attendance, grades, etc. and that they are required to log at least one entry every quarter for parent communication for each student. They further explained, *"the entry needs to include some form of parent communication. Whether that is me copying and pasting a text conversation, email conversation or paraphrasing like a transcript of a phone or in person conversation."*

Participant #4 talked about an experience where they felt that "*communication can backfire,"* especially without the support of Administration. Participant #4 was telling the researcher how they sent home progress reports every 2-3 weeks for any student that had missing assignments and/or was currently receiving a D or F in class, as a way of being proactive. The participant shared

I had a parent whose child was doing fine at the beginning of school but once school got rolling, she stopped turning in work. So three weeks later, the parent received the first progress report and after talking to other parents, this parent found out that some of the other parents had already gotten one so she thought I wasn't treating her daughter fairly and reported that I was discriminating against them. So when we came together with the principal to explain this you didn't get one because as explained in my syllabus that my policy states that I only send home progress reports if you child is receiving a D or F and/or has missing assignments and your daughter was getting higher than that and no missing assignments at the time. Mom still wanted me to provide her with one when everyone else got one regardless, was the deal even though I said that well, I have 125 kids and that would mean that I would need to do 125 progress reports every

few weeks. And she was indifferent with my reply so I was told by administration that if I wasn't going to do 125 every three weeks, then I can't do it at all just because of the fact that this mom was upset.

Participant #4 also spoke about an experience where they were working with a student who was falling behind in class and the parents were reluctant to get help for the child. Participant #4 talks about how, *"I was advised not to meet with them the parents as often. I was told to make sure that an Administrator was present when we met just because they were so against everything that I was talking about."*

Participant #5 and Participant #6 both work at Village City (pseudonym) School where they believe that they have great parental involvement at their school due to the support from Administration. Participant #5 talked about how

> *our principal is always promoting parent involvement. He says to be very active with the parent. Our principal is always a positive figure, like we will have a taco day where the parents can come to participate with the entire staff or like the dance. It's not only academics but social events to become more like a family.*

Participant #6 had similar experiences to Participant #5 regarding support from Administration. She expressed how she was

> *privileged to have a school that has excellent parental involvement, not just in the lower grades but in the middle grades as well. This is because Administration encourages parents to be in the building and in contact with teachers all the time. I have 7th and 8th grade parents emailing me every day wanting to know how they can help.*

Participant #6 continued to share her experience at one of the social events that her Administration set up.

> *We had a Fall Festival where everyone was there, parents, teachers, students, community members, and staff members. It was so much fun, everyone liked to dance. The kids were there but so were the parents and everyone started to dance even the parents. They were teaching me how to dance to music I never had in my life. It was a blast to see people asking each other to dance, encouraging each*

other. It was something I had never seen before, everyone was hanging out with each other, and parents were smiling and waving. They were being friendly and teaching each other. Even if I didn't know who they are, every single person that I walked into was friendly. When everyone you meet is friendly it is easy to be friendly to them.

When Participant #6 was asked how this event supported her instruction in the classroom, she said

it really helped with one student in particular. I didn't really know his father very well but after that event I felt more comfortable talking to the parent. He actually is now volunteering in the classroom on a weekly basis and is loving it. Not only is his son benefitting from having him in the classroom, so are the other boys. We just finished a unit on electricity and the father was amazing how he was able to share his experience as a handy man.

Teacher Perceptions of Communities and Culture Influence Their View of Involvement

Participants discussed how the communities that they worked in influenced their experience with parents and students. As they described these experiences, they talked about how the culture and the communities they worked in played a role in how they responded to parents. For example, Participant #1 talks about how

understanding cultural tendencies help with my teaching and understanding middle school students. Some communities tend to be louder and on top of this, middle school students tend to be loud and energetic, so I can't expect my middle school students to actually be quiet all day. I also know that when dealing with students that there are certain points you don't confront them. You need to just back off, rationalizing or reasoning with them will just make them fight harder. There is also understanding cultural norms, like at my current school we have a large Hispanic population and I feel like students are very religious and it is not bad but with their science fair projects it has been interesting that I have to not broach certain topics because I could get a lot of ripple effects with that.

In another story Participant #1 talked about working on a diversity committee when they

were discussing topics that they could have school wide discussions about when the topic

of

> *LGBT came up and they thought it might be a little too much for the whole school and maybe we could do it just for the 8th graders. I don't know, we do have a more conservative population and we might get a lot of backlash from parents because we have already had a few students that have come out and their parents have been like it is against the faith and stuff like that.*

Participant #1 also shared how knowing the diversity of cultures in the school

help with academics as well. The participant talked about

> *at my old school parents felt that anything lower than an A would not be acceptable. It is interesting because I have done a lot of world traveling so knowing that in the eastern cultures there is a lot of focus on Math and Science. In my current school most parents want to focus on Math and Reading but in my old school, my parents were more Asian and so they wanted a good grade in Science. So just knowing what the priorities of the parents and cultures are help.*

Participant #2 talks about the different types of experiences they had within

various communities. The participant talked about the frustration they experienced with

the last school. The participant shared with the researcher how they learned about the

community they were working in. At the last school the participant shared that they

didn't know the community very well, they

> *only knew what I read in the paper and listening to NPR every day and hearing about the negative and positives that go on in the community every day. Talking to the kids is the biggest way. I mean to be honest there wasn't much to get to know because what I know was it was a violent community and I just needed to keep myself abreast of what was going on in the community and listening to NPR was very helpful.*

Participant #2 also shared that what they did know about the community was

> *there were only a few businesses in the neighborhood of the school and they had bullet proof windows. It was hard to stay late knowing that my safety could be at*

risk, and I don't like saying that. It wasn't exactly a welcoming community to me, so I didn't do too much to get to know the community.

Participant #2 talks about how the struggled at their last school with parent involvement, stating

> *one of the biggest hurdles to get through teaching in low socioeconomic income area (previous school) was that we didn't have parent involvement. There were times when I went to student's house to tutor them and the parents would be drinking alcohol, doing illegal drugs, and that opened me up to the fact that I think the parents obviously do not take a role in their children's lives. About 90-95% of the kids did not have working phone numbers or that they were constantly changing. Often I would go to call a parent to learn that the number was disconnected, not working, etc. It was difficult to keep track of their new phone number.*

Participant #2 explained that many times when going to student homes that *"if a parent was even home, they wouldn't even acknowledge that I was there. If I said hello to the parent, thank you for welcoming me into your home, I would get no response most of the time."*

Participant #2 also talked about a program that the Principal brought to the classroom and how this program helped in selecting text to use in the classroom. The participant also talked about how this Arts and Writing program helped them get to know the kids and the community more since

> *the kids got to write out skits and they were to focus on their community. The kids focused on the people in their community. Like homeless people, people just known on a specific block or a store owner. It was cool because we got to know their community more and they had an outlet for discussing what was going on in their community.*

When talking about the current school, participant #2 said that they

> *feel like I could walk around the community. I go to all the local restaurants; it is definitely a way to get to know the neighborhood. Just talking to parents is a helpful way to get to know the community. I also subscribe to the alderman's*

newsletter and I get to know a lot about what is going on in the neighborhood as well.

Participant #3 has always worked at their current school, Park (pseudonym) School. This participant began their career as a teacher's assistant and then became the Director of Operations and now is a teacher. Participant #3 talks about how being at the school for so long has given them an advantage as a teacher because they know so many families. When asked about how the participant learns about the community where they works and where their students live, Participant #3 explained that

> *the difficult part is that kids come from all over the place, not just the neighborhood where the school is. I find that talking to the kids is the best way. We talk a little bit at the beginning of the year about their home life, siblings, etc. I listen to them, which I think is the best way to learn about them. They (the students) are totally willing to share about themselves, so I think that listening and having discussions is the best way.*

Participant #3 also discussed how using information obtained from the students to select materials for the class was helpful. The participant described how they were listening to a conversation after reading an article about immigration. Her students were talking about their families and heard *"well my brother applied for the Dream Act. So I asked if all of your brothers and sisters applied. You learn things like well they are all illegal but I am legal."* Participant #3 describes the classroom as *"a really cool environment. We are close and can have these kind of open discussion about their families, community life and other things."*

Participant #4's stories say more about the community they work in and less about the culture. This participant talks about how they get to learn about the community

in general besides just asking other staff members. The participant described for the researcher how they

> *drive around the neighborhood, once in the morning, once in the afternoon and then once on the weekend. I take notes of what I see and I take pictures. Then I just asked the kids if they know where the photo was taken.*

Participant #4 also talks about how they have students fill out an information sheet at the beginning of the year. The participant asks students to

> *tell me where they live, not with their address but with details. They tell me how they get to see, what they see as they walk to school. Other questions I ask are things like 'What does your living space look like?' 'Do you have a yard?'*

Participant #4 said that they also ask students to describe for where they do things on weekends or what parks they like to go to. The participant stated that this information is used more at the beginning of the school year to get to know her students and the community.

Participant #6 talks about using different resources to get to know the community that they work in; including the other teachers in the building and staff members. The participant tells the story of how they have a

> *pet bearded dragon and she (the dragon) is actually living at a students' house and she doesn't live too far away. So actually, one of the custodian workers and I walked her (the bearded dragon) down the street with the dad and student to their home. It's not just a community that I know about it's a community that is very welcoming. If a teacher is new there our parents are going to try to teach you about the community so that you know what's going on.*

Participant #6 continues to talk about how welcoming the community is. The participant explains that *"every person that I encounter has been friendly shaking your hand, saying hello, and want to show you their community. I think because I am a teacher in the community, I'm considered an authority and given the utmost respect."*

Like many other participants, Participant #7 begins to get to know about the community that they work in by asking other staff members and parents where different places are located. The participant also talked about how

one of the things I think is small but has a big effect is that we (the teachers) go out to eat around the neighborhood and the students will say 'oh, do you go to this restaurant on such and such corner'. The students are impressed that we do things in their neighborhood.

Participant #7 talks about taking walking field trips to use the resources that are in the community.

Participant #7 explains the differences in the two communities that they have worked in. The participant talks about when working in the suburb about how everyone lives in the same neighborhood, while in the city the students come from different neighborhood. Participant #7 explains how at this school

it's hard sometimes because they (the students) all come from different places. You know a lot of kid's parents pick them up, some take the CTA bus and then another group of kids are picked up by a different parent or adult who takes them home until their own parents pick them up. It's been a learning curve for me getting to know where everyone is going, learning why some of the kids are acting the way they are. But when you get to know the kids you learn which students to push in the morning, which students would rather write versus verbalize things in helping them learn to grow up.

Participant #7 also talks about how they use the information about the community and the culture to help determine how much homework to give and how it transforms the instruction in the classroom. Participant #7 explains that

it definitely changes my vocabulary immensely. Even now I check myself to not just say parent or father or mother. I flip my verbiage and say whoever is at home or your guardian, grandmother, grandfather. In the suburbs I could tell students that something needs to be posted on line by 4:30pm but here I have to

make a not that I need to change my time because some of the kids don't get off the bus until 4:45 or later. I am so conscious of what my students are doing afterschool that it has changed the way I say everything inside of the classroom.

Another aspect of the difference between teaching in the suburb and where Participant #7 teaches in the city is when the participant talks about the culture and family dynamics. Participant #7 discusses how

it was easier for families to be involved and engaged in the suburban schools. A lot of the parents at my current school work 2-3 jobs or work at night so it is such a different dynamic. The want and the need to be involved may be the same but in reality it is much more difficult for parents and families in the city. It makes communication more difficult because they are only available when I am with their student.

Teachers View on Involvement versus Engagement

Participant #4 talked about how they perceived parent involvement as when parents *"read the notes that are sent home, attend the parent conferences a couple times a year that they are supposed to, and sign anything that needs to be signed."* Participant #4 said that parent engagement is

not only signing the D or F that the teacher wants them to sign but asking why they (the child) got the grade. I expect our parents to check their children's grades on line, and look to see if you notice that your child is not turning things in or if their grade is slipping. At that point I need you to be engaged. Ask your child, contact the teacher, and come in to find out what is going on. It is just going one step further to make sure that everything is running as smoothly as possible instead of going through the motions.

According to Participant #5 *"parent involvement is broader like the big picture and parent engagement is more tangible."* The participant continues to talk about how parent involvement is about *"reading notes that go home"* and parent engagement is *"doing something together in the community or in the classroom, for example participating in our recent High School Night."*

Participant #6 said that parent involvement is *"when students sit at their desk and parents are looking over their shoulders checking their homework"* and parent engagement is *"when students are sitting at their desk with the parent sitting next to them with a pencil in their hand and helping their child do their homework."* Participant #6 goes further and talks about how she believes that

> *a parent can be involved but not engaged, but I don't think it can be the opposite. If you are an engaged parent you are participating with your child. If you are involved, yes, you are there asking them about it (their homework) but you are not doing it with them.*

Participant #6 was then asked by the researcher if they thought it looked different in the classroom and the response was

> *I think parents are involved because their kids are there. I think in the middle school involvement is just signing off on papers but engagement is more. Engagement is when they (the parent) email the teacher, ask the student what they need. Engagement is when parents are working with their kid instead of being in charge of their kid.*

When Participant #2 was asked if there was a difference between parental involvement and parental engagement, their response was *"I don't see a difference. Maybe I should but I do not. I think that they should go hand in hand. It is the process for parent and teacher relationships."*

Participant #3 defines parental involvement as *"volunteering in the classroom or being physically present at school"* and defines parental engagement as *"knowing what their child is doing in the classroom. Showing an interest in what their student is doing, is quick to respond to me if we have a problem and is willing to help."*

According to Participant #7 parental involvement is "*when parents just come to activities at the school. This could be sitting in the back of the classroom, watching your*

child give a speech or watching them play a sport." To Participant #7, parental

engagement happens when

> *you (the parent) have to not only be there but you have to know what is going on,*
> *what is happening. You have to be able to answer back. The whole point of*
> *engagement is that you are conversing with someone. Whether that be with your*
> *child or the teacher. To be engaged is to take involvement one step further. You*
> *need to be able to ask and answer questions regarding their child.*

Participant #1 defines parental involvement as *"parents doing what they need to*

be doing not necessarily because they want to." She defines parental engagement as

when *"they (the parents) have a passion for the school life of their child."* Participant #1

gave an example of parental engagement when

> *Dad learned that his son was going to look up a Science Fair project and just*
> *copy it but then the Dad got really involved and said that they were going to do*
> *the project together. The Dad said 'my son is going to learn from it' but also he*
> *is going to have fun. So they worked on the project together and they have a*
> *discovered a new hobby to do together.*

Teaching and Learning from Types of Interactions with Parents

Throughout this study participants told stories that provided multiple types of

interactions with parents. Parents have asked for assistance with supporting their child

academically. Participant #1 tells a story of when they were teaching Art that a *"Dad*

was taking a more proactive role in making sure that his son turned in his work. I would

email him when things were due and tell him this was a big part of his grade."

Participant #1 also stated that had parents reach out for help with homework. The

participant talked about how *"one parent asked if I would allow their child to come to*

school early to print out their paper because their printer wasn't set up yet."

Participant #2 talks about how they worked with a student and parent to help the student develop socially-emotionally. Participant #2's story started with talking about how they had a 6th grade boy:

> *who had burn scare on his neck from getting hot coffee or tea thrown at him by his mom. So he (the boy) had a lot of animosity towards her and he lashed out at school. He got in fights at school and basically had a lot of pent up rage. He never really had any male teachers and he opened up to me sometimes. He (the student) told me why he was so upset with his mom and that he couldn't tell her because she was sick right now. I started talking to him and he would break down and cry sometimes with me because he had no one to let his emotions out. One day I had a conversation with him about it, 'so have you ever thought about talking to your mom about all this anger that you have or all this ill emotions that you feel"? Eventually I got him to do that and it helped out a lot at home. I also called mom up and told her that he was struggling at school. He was failing in reading and that he just come to school angry every day and just wants to get into fights. The fights definitely lowered in intensity and he wasn't as angry at school after we had those conversations and his mother was happy about that because she regretted doing what she did when she was younger. She also told me that her son was starting to help out around the home more and they started talking more at home to each other.*

Several participants told stories of when they had to teach parents how to be parents. Participant #3 tells a story where they had a student with impulse control issues and that the parent was

> *extremely lost in how to handle things at home. He (the student) was acting out at school and at home and the parent was punishing him. We (the school) tried to tell him (the parent) that things aren't working and we need to find another way to work with him (the student). They (the school) worked out a plan where at the end of every day a note went home describing what happened that day. The Dean wrote on the note, the Dad would write back. The Dad was responsible for talking to the child. The child reported that many times now the Dad doesn't even look at the note until after the child has explained what happened during the day. His (the student's) behavior has taken a 180 degree turn for the better. The Dad now asks the child how was his day, they actually have conversations now where in the past it was just a lot of yelling. They talk about what needs to be changed instead of punishment.*

In another story that Participant #3 talks about having to "*get the parent on board. It's trying to get her (the parent) to understand that we are trying to work with her and that we don't expect her to do more than she can. We are taking baby steps.*" Participant #3 continues to explain how "*you can have parents who say they don't have time for it (helping their child) but I found that these parents won't go look for stuff to do with their child but if it is provided for them, if it is in front of them they will help their child do it.*"

Participant #7 talks about the types of interactions that they have had with parents as being very direct. The participant stated that it is

> *the responsibility of the teacher to know how to work with kid and to tell the parents this in a nonthreatening way. I think sometimes parents get a call from the teacher and think well I'm doing the best I can. I don't know what else to do. And that's not the way they should be feeling. Clearly something is going on and it's my responsibility as a teacher, I'm the professional, I went to school and I'm supposed to know how to work with your kid. That's not your job as a parent. You have other things to worry about, so here are things that you can improve on to help your child do the best that they can, the best that they are capable of.*

Like Participant #7, Participant #6 talks about being very direct with parents during interactions. Participant #6 expressed how they interacted with parents at community events, parent-teacher conferences and on a "*daily basis when parents are picking up their student which helps me a lot. I learn about the community and students as I observe parents interacting with each other. It gives me insight on how to interact with them.*"

Participant #4 shared that they would go to community events, like their sporting events just to "*talk to the parents, see how things are going and to let them know I am interested in what they do outside of school. We don't talk about school during that time,*

I think it helps build the relationships." Like Participant #4, Participant #5 goes to

community events and social events at the school. Participant #5 talks about how

> *the social events help to become more like a family. I am like a social butterfly at these events. I say hello to everyone. I think I can give the parents an insight of what we do at school. It shows them that we care about their kids, we are here after hours. Like those nonacademic events really build the sense of community among parents and staff. It shows the caring factor.*

Participant #5 continues to talk about how participating in these events has helped

to get to know some of the parents that the participant does not usually see. Participant

#5 also disclosed that by attending these events they learned *"that they (the parents)*

really do care. That they want to come and see what their child's world is."

Effective Activities to Engage Middle School Parents

Participant #5 described a High School Night that they hosted for the middle

school students and parents as

> *a big hit that the parents and kids are asking me when the next one will be. We set up each grade level in their own classroom and all the parents came. I had this like web quest type activity that I created so they (parents and students) went to this website that had these awesome tips of must do's for high school. Each parent and child had a computer and they had to research different high schools to learn what they needed to better themselves on for the high school that they really wanted to get in to.*

Participant #7 said that they are always looking for ways *"to get parents to come*

in and not only volunteer, but to come read a story to the kids, or even run a center in the

classroom." Participant #7 talked about how

> *I credit myself on being an open teacher so when new ideas are suggested I say yes to try new things.   I had a set of parent come to me this year when we started a literature unit on characterization and the parent had suggested for the students to create 3D models of the character using mixed media (the parent was an artist). He took care of the entire project himself once the students got through*

the analysis in their small groups with me. It was great! We had it displayed in the main office for an entire month.

Participant #5 uses different opportunities to interact with their parents. One day when a parent was looking for her children after school, Participant #5 said that they

prompted her (the parent) to come see the progress that her son made on his NWEA test. I took her over to the computer to show her the score. We then began talking about how he was doing in his other classes, so I taught her how to look up his grades on line. She (the parent) had no idea that she could do that.

Participant #3 told a story of one assignment that they gave to their students which required family member to become active participants of the assignment.

I had each student interview a family member or adult that they knew well. The had to learn from these adults about where they grew up, what type of activities they did, general information so the student could get a better sense of what it was like to live at a different time. The students had to give a speech which they were to invite the class the day they gave the report. It was really interesting to hear the speeches.

Conclusion

Participants for this study shared stories relating to their perceptions and experiences with parental involvement as they worked with their students' parents to develop trusting parent-teacher partnerships. Through the analysis of the data the researcher identified seven emerging themes: relationships emerging from concerns about students; family roles changing; school administrators shapes the perception of teacher's view on parental involvement; teacher perceptions of communities and culture influence their view of involvement; teachers view on involvement versus engagement; types of interactions with parents; and effective activities to engage middle school parents.   In Chapter V, the researcher will interpret the data; provide connections between the

literature review and the emerging themes. Finally, recommendations and suggestions

for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to ascertain from middle school teachers their perception of parental involvement in the middle school grades and how they have supported parents as they move from traditional forms of parental involvement towards parental engagement to support their children academically and socially as they move through the middle school years of their education. Chapter V begins with an overview of the study, interpretations, recommendations and conclusions generated from this study. In addition, Chapter V provides a connection between the conceptual framework and the themes presented.

Overview of Study

This study analyzed the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers as they support parents as they move from parental involvement to parental engagement. The study also examines the teachers' ability to challenge their own belief system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership. Seven middle school teachers were interviewed from three different charter schools in a metropolitan school district. Through the data analysis of the seven interviews, nine themes were identified. The nine themes developed provide support to answer the two research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent involvement and towards parent engagement?

2. Do middle school teachers describe an ability to challenge their own belief system to provide a rich parent-teacher partnership regardless of race, culture, ethnic and social economic status of their families? If so, how does this happen? If not, why not?

Findings and Interpretation

Through the analysis of data collected seven themes were identified: relationships emerge from concerns about students; family roles changing; school administrators shape the perception of teacher's view of parental involvement; teacher perceptions of communities and culture influence their view of involvement; teachers view on involvement versus engagement; teaching and learning from types of interactions with parents; and effective activities to engage middle school parents. The findings are discussed as they relate to the extant literature and conceptual framework for this study. The interpretation of the findings are based upon the themes and how they address the research questions of the study based upon the perception, experience and belief systems of the participants in the study.

Middle School Teachers Definition of Parental involvement versus Parental Engagement

According to Ferlazzo (2011), parental involvement implies "*doing to"* in contrast, engagement implies *doing with*" (p. 10). It is important for schools and teachers

to engage parents through a variety of opportunities, types of materials and information to connect with parents in meaningful ways to enhance student learning (Harris, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011). Researchers also identified that the type of engagement must be appropriate to the cognitive developmental needs of the child, which for this study, would be middle school students (Constantino, 2003; Crosnoe, 2009; Davenport, 2005; Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Hoover, 1995). Typical parental involvement activities at the middle school level include attending sporting events, parent-teacher meetings, open houses and volunteering at school events. For middle school students the types of engagement opportunities that teachers should be offering to parents include participating in school committees, talking with their child about future education plans, monitoring homework and grades, and promoting their child's social-emotional growth (Epstein, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Harris, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011).

In 2009 the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) defined parental involvement as a system of regular two way communication that is meaningful around academic learning and school activities. It also places the responsibility on teachers and schools to lead the way on involving parents to the school (U.S. Government, 2011). The NPTA made significant changes to their definition on parental involvement. First they changed the term parent to family to meet the needs of the change in family structure. They also expanded their definition to provide clearer guidelines of what is expected and to move schools from involving parents to engaging them in the school process by developing family-school partnerships. NPTA's National Standards Implementation

Guide (2009) defines family engagement as a family-school partnership that includes the following six standards:

1) welcoming all families into the school community;

2) having effective two-way communication between families and staff;

3) collaboration to support student learning through home and school activities;

4) empowering families to become advocates for their children;

5) provide opportunities for families to be equal partners in the decision making; process of programs, policies and practices within the school;

6) develop a collaborative school community.

The NPTA's definition of family involvement was developed based on the work of Joyce Epstein from John Hopkins University (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2009; U.S. Government, 2011). Epstein's research resulted in a framework for parental involvement that included six different levels, and the last two supported the movement from involvement into engagement (Constantino, 2003; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009).

These six levels include parenting skills, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making opportunities, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). While transcribing the interviews for this study, it was apparent that the majority of interactions between teachers and parents could be classified under Epstein's framework of parental involvement. The participants in this study defined parental engagement as being actively involved in their child's education. They shared attending school events, helping with homework, and communicating with the

teacher on a regular basis. These are all examples of Epstein's (2002) first four components of her parental involvement framework. The missing components to the participant's definition were opportunities for parents to develop leadership and community building skills to be a partner in the decision making process within the school community which is what prevents the participant's from moving parents into a partnership of true engagement (Epstein 2002; Harris, 2009; Ridnouer 2011).

Moving from Parental involvement towards Parental Engagement through Epstein's Framework

Epstein's first component is parenting, which is defined as providing information and resources to support parents with understanding the development of children and adolescents in the home setting (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Eptein & Dauber, 1991). At the basic level, participant's interactions could describe under this area of the framework including speaking to parents about the importance of homework and attendance. One of the themes that emerged from this research was the types of interactions with parents. Within this theme, several participants shared experiences when they actually had to parent the parent. Parenting is a skill that, as we saw, many parents struggle with. Participant #6 understands the importance of this type of interaction. During the interview participant #6 shared how the responsibility as a teacher was to know how to work with a child and that it was their job to provide the parents with things that they can improve on to help their child do the best they can. Like Participant #6, Participant #3 was able to see the importance to connect with parents in a nonthreatening way to help both the parent and student be successful. The experiences

they described provided an understanding that these two participants perceived parents as a key person in the life of the student, but one that may lack the skill level to support their child. When this was the case, Participant #6 and Participant #3 felt that it was their responsibility as the educator to provide the parent with the skills needed using baby steps in a nonthreatening way. Participant #3 also spoke about "*how if the parent had the materials in front of them, they would help their child. It was important to take baby steps with the parents so that they can feel successful in the process.*"

Epstein's first type of involvement is useful in providing students with the awareness that schools and families are working together for the student (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009). Five out of the seven participants provided examples of how they worked with parents to promote this message to students. Participant #4 demonstrated this when speaking about how they worked with a parent and student to bring the student's grade up. The student was on the basketball team for a community team but he was failing Reading. Since the team was not associated with the school, they had no requirements about grades, so he was still allowed to play. After several parent-teacher conferences, the parent and Participant #4 decided that the student would sit out for the first part of the season to bring his Reading grade back up. The student was not happy but realized that he had no choice. Participant #4 shared how this happened two years ago, yet the participant still hears from the student and his mother about how well the student is doing and how grateful they are for to the participant.

Participants shared experiences that were aligned to Epstein's first level of involvement; "Parenting" also demonstrated understanding of the importance of learning

about the student's home life, the family backgrounds, cultures and goals for each child. Participants were able to share their knowledge of child development, their own skills set as it relates to education to help parents work with their child to be successful (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Each participant in their own way did learn about the family backgrounds of their students through conversations with students, family members, and other staff members. Some participants went a step further to learn even more about their student's home life and cultural beliefs when they engaged in activities that took them outside of their own classroom. For example, Participant #6 described how walking a pet bearded dragon down the street with a student and his parent. Participant #6 shared helping set up the tank in the student's room, and eating dinner with the family. Participant #2 shared doing home visits for the purpose of providing tutoring services, and all seven participants shared attending various sporting events to get to know the families and students on a more social level.

The second level of involvement outlined in Epstein's Framework is Communication. Involvement at this level includes designing effective forms of communication between home and school for the purpose of information parents of the progress a student is making in school and different school programs that are available (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This is the one area of involvement that each participant clearly understood. They were able to provide various forms of communication to all parents in their native language. Participant #7, Participant #5, and Participant #6 all worked in a school with a high level

of English Language Learners and they spoke about how they were very consistent in providing translation for all forms of communication. Participant #7 also shared how parents taught them some Spanish. The participant said that *"it's fun to learn from the parents and they love it when I speak a new phrase or word to them in Spanish. I think it makes them feel proud."* Everyone benefits from effective communication and it is a basic obligation for all teachers (Constantino, 2003). All seven participants felt comfortable talking about the different ways that they communicate to parents. Participant #2 and Participant #4 did talk about how they did not always feel successful when reaching out to parents. Participant #2 shared the struggles in communicating with families that did not have working phone numbers. The participant stated that "*the biggest hurdle was I would say 90-95% of the kids, their phone numbers were constantly changing. It was really difficult to keep track of their working numbers."* Participant #2 also shared having to send notes home 7-8 times before getting a response, so *"I just started walking the student home, hoping to find an adult there to talk to."* Participant #4 shared being frustrated when one parent did not understand the severity of his reading difficulty even after being provided numerous examples of how low he was. After speaking with her administrator, the participant was actually advised to have an administrator present when meeting with the parents. In the end, Participant #4 described feeling sad because *"there was not much progress, he just floated along."* Participant #4 admitted being young when this experience occurred and stated, *"to this day I don't know if I handled it correctly."* Participant #4 also gave a second example of how when providing parents every three weeks with unofficial progress reports if a student was

failing and how one parent was not happy when they didn't get them on a regular basis.

Participant #4 shared that the syllabus was very explicit regarding this policy; the parent

did not agree with the policy and brought it to the attention of the Administration. In the

end, Participant #4 had to agree to either send home progress reports to all 125 students

or not send them home at all.

From analyzing the data of this study, it is clear those participants who had

positive relationships with their students' parents also reported that they communicated

effectively on a regular on-going basis using various forms of communication. These

types of communications were considered effective and appreciated. Those participants,

like Participant #2 and Participant #4, who did not have successful experiences in

communicating with parents, also shared more feelings of frustration and negative

relationships with parents.

The third type of involvement described by Epstein is called "Volunteering."

Simply stated this type of involvement is when parents are given opportunities to support

the school in various capacities. The benefits of this type of involvement are important to

all stakeholders as described in the literature review. All of the participants in this study

said that they believe volunteering is beneficial for the students and parents; however

only one participant actually shared an experience when they had a parent volunteer in

the classroom. Several other participants did talk about how parents volunteer in the

school. Those participants that shared having parents volunteer in the school had strong

administrative leadership that valued parents and welcomed them into the school. The

level of involvement at this level in the middle school is often limited as documented by research (Connors, 1994; Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2007, 2011; Ridnouer, 2011).

Component four of Epstein's framework is called "learning at home." This is considered the easiest and most effective way to involve parents of any student (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferrara & Ferrara 2005; Joshi et al., 2005; Smith, 2006). The literature review documents benefits of this component and participants of this study have shared that it is a simple way to connect home and school. Participant #1 talks about a successful parent-teacher-student exchange while working on a science fair project. Participant #1 shared that while this parent was working with his child on a science fair project that the father and son decided that they would do the project together. The result was that the father and son discovered similar interests and began working on a hobby together. At the middle school level, this type of involvement can be difficult for parents, as they become less confident in their academic content knowledge, and parents not having a clear understanding of how they can help their child be successful (Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Murray, 2009; Smith, 2006).

Supporting the component "learning at home" was a strength for the participants in this study. Each participant told a story where they supported learning at home, either in the area of academic or social-emotional skills. Participant #3 shared helping a parent learn how to support their child through teaching organizational skill so that the student would remember to bring their homework home and back to school. As Participant #3 said, it is still a work in progress but the parent feels like they are helping the child.

Participant #3 also shared working with a parent so to provide the emotional support that the child needed to be successful. Participant #3 stated *"we (parent and child together) talk now almost once a week about his progress and mom asks what she needs to do at home now."* These are examples of how parents can help their children become successful lifelong learners. Research has documented that working with middle school students to set goals, teach time-management, develop organizational skills, reviewing homework or agenda/assignment books are all ways that parents can support the learning at home component of Epstein's framework (Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Epstein, 2001).

The fifth component of Epstein's framework is called Decision Making. In this component parents are encouraged to become active members of the school community through participating on school committees and/or parent-teacher organizations so that parents can increase their student knowledge and to learn more about the learning process in their school (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). There was little evidence that this component was promoted within the classroom. Within the interviews, only one teacher acknowledged the importance for parents to learn more about the learning process within a school. Participant #7 shared their experience with a parent volunteer in the classroom. The participant gave the parent the opportunity to teach a project from beginning to finish. Participant #7 shared how the parent talked to the participant about the character analysis that they would be required to do prior to working with him and his ideas for the project. Participant #7 showed faith in the parent by giving him the opportunity to learn how students process information. Five out of the

seven participants did share that many parents are active members of the school community, just not active in their specific classroom. There is currently no research to connect this phenomenon to.

Epstein's sixth component is collaborating with the community. Teachers and schools can provide parents with resources and information on how students can get involved within their community to increase their student learning. This component also provides parents with resources and services within the community to support their families and their students (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 1991, 1992; Epstein et al., 2009). Participants did not talk about ways that they provided resources or information to parents or students. The only reference was when Participant #4 worked with a parent who had a child in a community basketball program. Based on the research for middle school parent partnerships, this component would be essential for teachers to learn more about since it has been documented that when parents have a supportive network of resources the middle school student benefits academically, socially and physically from these partnerships. Part of the reason is the importance of unfamiliar adults as role models in lives of middle school students as they provide a positive impact on students (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hoover, 1987; Murray, 2009; Weaver, 2007).

Research has documented the importance of parental involvement at the middle school level (Crosnoe, 2009; Davenport, 2005; Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2011). Constantino (2003) stated that the importance of the parent-school partnership in the middle school years is to develop a partnership that will give educators the opportunity to teach parents how to listen to the child's needs, desires, attitudes and

opinions as they assist them in becoming lifelong learners. Other researchers stated that middle school parents need to help their child learn not just academic skills but social and emotional skills as well (Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Murray, 2009; Smith, 2006). Based on Epstein's framework for parental involvement, the participants of this study were able to provide examples of experience providing the basic components of parental involvement by providing parenting skills, two-way effective communication, a limited number of examples of volunteering at the classroom level and learning at home opportunities. Teachers need to find ways to positively engage with parents to promote the academic and social-emotional success of teenagers. As Ridnouer (2011) has reported, it is important for the teacher of middle school students to understand and appreciate the student and their family to increase the level of engagement with parents. Researchers suggest that teachers be open to learning more about the family culture, daily life experiences and social context to prove the student and parent with a supportive community network of resources (Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Schutz, 2006). Some of the participants in this study have been successful in learning about the students' family culture and daily life experiences due to the persistence of their administrator; while other participants have shown a lack of understanding the students' family culture. This understanding of learning about the family culture and daily life experiences is directly related to understanding the theoretical framework for this study.

Re-examining the Theoretical Framework for this Study

The theoretical framework selected for this study drew upon Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system theory of human development because it provides an explanation of

the ways in which home, school and the community interactions and individual

relationships effect the development of children and the importance of understanding

how these interactions are helpful for teachers as they support the parent (Bronfenbrenner

1979, 1986). Throughout the analysis of the data for this study, examples of the different

systems of Bronfenbrenner's theory emerged as participants told their stories. The

researcher used Bronfenbrenner's theory to examine factors influencing the child's

development. Many of the themes that emerged from this study are aligned to

Bronfenbrenner's theory and, as was identified above, aligned to Epstein's framework for

parental involvement.

In identifying opportunities for parental engagement in the microsystem, it is

important to look at how the different groups (parents, teachers, school, community) play

a part in the daily interactions with the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010).

Most of the participants work was focused on the microsystem and they described having

some impact there. The participants in this study did an excellent job of engaging parents

within the microsystem. This was identified in the themes of relationships emerging

from concerns about students; school administrators shape the perception of teacher's

view of parental involvement, and types of interactions with parents. Within these

themes, participants shared how their interactions with parents played a role in the daily

interactions with the child. When Participant #6 shared having a conversation with a

parent, who also volunteered in the office, the participant described how this conversation

made a difference in the behavior of the student. When the student realized that both

mom and Participant #6 were going to hold him accountable for his behavior he began to make the changes that were necessary for his personal growth as an individual.

Participant #3 also shared a story where a student was acting out at home and school. While working with a parent, Participant #3 taught the parent the importance of listening to the child before responding. Through constant communication between the parent and Participant #3, the student was able to get his needs met, which was to spend quality time with his Dad, and he began to act out less. In order for this to happen, Participant #3 had to listen to the parent and student's concerns, teach the parent how not be so reactive and how to become an active listener. The parent needed to learn more about the developmental needs of his child in order for this change to occur. Participant #6 and Participant #7 said it best when they expressed how it is the responsibility of the teacher to know how to work with the kids and to then tell the parents this in a nonthreatening way.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) second system is the mesosystem, which involves the connections and interactions between two microsystems. Within the mesosystem, it is important to look how the cognitive processing occurs when executive functioning happens (Davis-Kean, Eccles & Harold, 2010; Weiss et al., 2010). Providing opportunities to expand executive functioning skills in the classroom is a key component in the mesosystem. The type of communication that is needed between home and school to support learning through executive function is critical to the success of the student, which is why it is important for both microsystems to have the same information (Weiss, et al., 2010). The theme "family roles changing" documented the challenges that

participants of this study have witnessed in developing the mesosystem. Participant #6 shared how it is a challenge to get parents to understand that middle school students need to become more independent and take on more responsibilities for their own learning. Participant #7 shared how while working with the 8th graders and their parents on the importance of being accountable for their own learning since next year they will be going to high school and that they will be responsible for remembering deadlines, due dates, etc.

Many participants also indicated that many middle school students are becoming more independent and taking on more parental responsibilities which have made it difficult for students to learn and practice executive functioning skills that are necessary skills for lifelong learners (Weiss et al., 2010). Participants #2, #6 and Participant #7 discussed how many of their students were responsible for the care of their younger siblings, often resulting in the middle school students not having time to complete homework, school projects, etc. Without an adult role model to support the middle school student, they can often struggle to learn goal setting, time management, how to deal with stressful situations, self-confidence and healthy relationships (Constantino, 2003; Ferlazzo, 2009, Hill, 2001; Ricciuti, 2004; Ridnouer, 2011). Besides these few examples, participants did not provide many other stories that related to the mesosystem where they worked with the parent to develop the executive function skills that students will need to be successful in life.

Bronfenbrenner's exosystem connects the external environmental setting and how it indirectly affects the student (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). Weiss (2010)

encourages educators to learn about community outreach programs, focus on family

strengths, respect the culture of their families and to organize social events that will

encourage building social networks within the school and community. Participants of

this study shared experiences that can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's exosystem. These

experiences were identified under the themes of family roles changing, School

Administrators Shape the Perception of Teacher's View of Parental Involvement Shape

Their Involvement and cultures, communities and ethnicity play a role in teacher's

perception of parental involvement.

In particular, the experiences shared by Participant #5,#6 and #7 relating to how

their school administrator shaped their perception on parental involvement fits into

Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem in a positive way. At their school, the principal provided

opportunities for teachers to engage in social activities with family members and

community members that provided teachers with the opportunity to learn more about the

families, their culture and the community. Participant #6 shared one experience where

the school had a fall festival and how the parents were teaching the teachers how to dance

to the music that they never heard before. All three participants shared the level of

respect they receive from the students and parents. The participants identified that the

culture and community in which they were working in had specific needs, mainly that

children respect the adults and that everyone was part of one family. This was inferred

by the participants many times when they said "our parents" and "our community".

Participant #5 described an event that was planned for all 6th-8th grade students and

parents to provide information about high schools. This event was a great way to provide

an opportunity for parents to learn more about the resources that were available to help their child get into the high school that was their first choice.

The theme of family roles changing plays a major part in the exosystem of the participants from this study. Participants shared having to make adjustments to homework and project deadlines due to the fact that many of their students have to take public transportation to get home and/or the fact that they have other family obligations to attend to after school. Participants also shared how many students do not live within the community where the school is located. Since the schools involved in this study were all charter school that did not have attendance boundaries. This makes it more difficult for students to get to and from school. Participants shared how some students ride with other families, some take public transportation and how some students go to a friend's house until they can be picked up by their family member later in the evening. All of these situations are examples of how the exosystem plays an indirect part in the child's life. The child has no control over the situation but is directly affected. Several participants shared how they have had to be more thoughtful in their planning of projects and homework knowing this about student transportation issues. Participant #7 went a step further to identify that they had to change her vocabulary when talking to students. The participant made note of how many students live with parents, versus aunts/uncles or grandparents. Participant #7 shared having to be conscious of what the students did afterschool, which changes the way certain items inside the classroom were done. In one story that Participant #7 shared how in the previous suburban school students come afterschool to get help with school assignments that they were struggling with.

Participant #7 said now, that does not happen because so many of the students have other commitments or need to catch the bus to get home.

Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem consists of the larger cultural context of individuals. This encompasses cultural and structural barriers that affect all families (Bowler, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weiss et al., 2010). Participant #2's experience at their first school provided an excellent example of how the macrosystem can influence the impact a teacher's perception on parental involvement. Participant #2 reported witnessing first-hand the structural barriers that affect racial minority families living in low social-economic settings. For each theme relating to Participant #2's experience in their first school the stories were not success stories but stories of frustration and failure. This is an example of how the outcomes of the macrosystem can have a negative impact on students and teachers.

Participant #6 reported experiences which stood in direct contrast to Participant #2's. Participant #6 transcript analysis revealed examples of each theme as well. Participant #6, however only described positive experiences when working with students and parents. Participant #6 talked with excitement in their voice, shared positive relationships with families and shared various partnerships that were developed with parents. According to Participant #6, parents are partners at the school; they share information with teachers, come to school events and also are in constant communication with teachers. The difference between Participant #2 and #6's experience was that they worked in diverse settings with families who face a lot of challenges making it difficult to form the partnerships. Participant #2 does not describe any real success stories at their

current school. So it appears that the experience of Participant #2's first school has left a lasting impression on how the participant views parental involvement and parental engagement in general.

Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem examines the element of how time affects parent's decision on how and why to become involved in their child's education. The theme about middle school represents a time when family roles change, which is a key developmental period when involvement must be rethought.

The stories that participants shared in this study provided evidence that Bronfenbrenner's theory of bioecological system theory of human development provides an important link to supporting middle school teachers as they move parents from traditional forms of involvement to more engaging partnerships. Participants that took interest in the students' home life, their community and culture had a more positive and successful experience in developing trusting relationships with parents. The next section will explore how the perceptions and experiences of the participants played a role in how they supported parents in the parent-school partnership.

Perceptions and Experiences of Middle School Teachers in Supporting Parents/ Families as They Move from Traditional Forms of Parent Involvement and Towards Parent Engagement

The perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers are a key factor in developing a trusting relationship with parents (Reed, 2007). One way to develop trusting relationships with parents is for teachers to be open to new experiences, especially as it relates to learning about different cultures, race and social-economic

status so that teachers develop a rich understanding of the background of their students and the school community (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007). The themes from this study were emerged based on the experiences and perceptions that the participants shared when working to develop trusting relationships with parents. The following section will document how the themes relate to the first research question.

School Administrators Shape the Perception of Teacher's View of Parental Involvement Shape Their Involvement

Research documents that administrators who provide opportunities for their staff to connect with students and families to learn more about their cultural background and home life are supporting that the home-school-community partnership is essential to the academic success of the school (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Weaver, 2007; Williams, 2002). One of the emerging themes from this study was how school administrators shape the perception of teacher's view of parental involvement. In this study, the support that participants perceived on receiving from their administrator shaped how they viewed parental. For example, Participant #5, #6 and #7 all worked at school three where they spoke highly about how the administrator was very active in providing opportunities for staff, families and the community to interact. All three participants described their experience with parents as positive and engaging. Participant #7 shared how a parent volunteered to support the literature unit on characterization by suggesting that each student create a 3D model of a character from the story using mixed media. He took complete responsibility for the art project during their independent reading time. The participant recounted how the parent shared his career as an artist and

how he learned this craft back home in Mexico from his grandfather. When Participant #6 shared how their pet bearded dragon was living at a home of one of the students and the participant describe how they learned so much about the student and his home life. All three participants shared how their experiences shaped how they perceive parents. Participants consistently provided examples of how teachers and parents worked together to develop a trusting relationships where both parties enjoyed working and learning together for the best interest of the student.

Participant #2, on the other hand, had an experience at their first school that left them with a negative attitude towards parents and school administration. He had one year of experience teaching at an inner city school that was closing. Participant #2 shared how at their first school there was no accountability for teachers or parents and that people *"just didn't seem to care anymore, especially when it was announced that we (the school) were closing at the end of the year."* When the participant described the experiences about working with parents and students at this school the negativity was apparent in the descriptions of interactions that included numerous examples of abusive relationships among family members. Participant #2 also spoke about not receiving support from administration, the behavioral/emotional difficulties with the students and lack of involvement from parents. Participant #2 described the community where they worked as a *"violent neighborhood, not a welcoming community and hard to stay late knowing that my safety could be at risk."* Simply put, Participant #2 stated that they *"didn't want to work 100 hours a week when I didn't see anyone else moving forward."* When Participant #2 shared their experience about the current school, the participant

described a school that held teachers and parents accountable for their partnership. Participant #2 described a connection between safety, support from administration and accountability with parental involvement and effective communication. The current school is located in an up and coming neighborhood that has a higher test scores and a student population of 63.4% Hispanic, 13.1% White, 6.7% Black and the remaining Asian or other nationalities. It is unclear in Participant #2's case what has made the difference in gaining the trust of parents at this current school. There are many factors that could result in this difference; more active parents, Participant #2 feeling safer in the school community which results in being more relaxed and open with communication, the administrative support or the participant's comfort level with the culture and social economic status of the community.

Based on stories shared by the participants in this study, support from administration makes a difference in the perceptions and attitudes of teachers when working with parents. When administration was supportive of participants engaging parents in the educational process of students they are promoting Epstein's framework of parental involvement by encouraging teachers to communicate with parents, teach and support parenting skills, providing learning activities for the home, and ways for parents to volunteer in the classroom. Examples of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system theory of human development were identified throughout this study when participants shared examples of understanding how the macrosystem of culture and social-economic status affects the classroom.

Relationships Emerge from Concerns about Students

The participants in this study discussed various types of relationships that they developed with parents based on concerns about student performance, either academic or behavioral. Discussions regarding student performance are the basic level of involvement from parents as discussed in the literature review. Researchers agree that the promotion of social-emotional and organizational skills is a major difference between parental engagement in elementary school and parental engagement in middle schools (Constantino, 2003; Deslandes, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Rogers & Renard, 1999; Simon, 2001; Witmer, 2005).

Each participant in this study shared various ways that they connected with parents to discuss grades, missing homework assignments and discipline problems in the classroom. The one area that participants did not express knowledge about was how to work with parents was in the area of growing a student's social-emotional and organizational skills. There were many opportunities where the participant described an interaction with a parent where they could have segmented into a discussion on organizational skills or social-emotional growth (Epstein, 2009). For example, when Participant #1 shared working with parent who was concerned about his son's Art grade, Participant #1 only focused on working with the Dad about the immediate need. The participant did not take the opportunity to work with the Dad and the student to talk about future plans, like high school, especially since Participant #1 spoke about how talented he was as an artist. This strategy would have supported the collaborating with community component in Epstein's framework (Epstein, 2001). Participant #2 also missed an

opportunity support the collaborating with community component in Epstein's

framework when not engaging his parents with the Arts and Writing program that his

principal brought into his classroom. Participant #2 shared with excitement how the

students were really involved in the program where they had a chance to express their

thoughts and feelings about the neighborhood they live in. It is often difficult for

teachers of middle school students to find ways to work with parents as they learn how to

listen to their child's needs, opinions, and attitudes (Deslandes, 2005; Elias, 2007; Jeynes,

2007; Murray, 2009). By inviting parents to a performance at the end of this Arts and

Writing program, Participant #2 may have made some connections to parents that may

not have been there before. It is also a way to promote self-confidence and self-esteem

within the student as well.

The relationships that developed with parents through student concerns were not

always initiated by the teacher. Participant #1 shared one story where the parent initiated

the relationships when advocating for her special needs child which is an example of

Epstein's decision making component. Participant #1 described the struggle that the

parent and participant went through in the beginning to develop common goals for the

student, yet in the end the relationship was considered a success for all parties. Weiss

(2010) reports that when both groups have access to the same information they are able to

share goals that will result in identifying problems and ways to support the child within

the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Family Roles Changing

Understanding the roles individuals play in their family is similar to understanding the roles individuals play within the classroom and school. When teachers can connect to a students' home life and cultural background they will begin to understand the family structure and can start to build the home-school partnership that is essential to student success (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Weaver, 2007; Williams, 2002). Participants in this study shared stories that demonstrated that their success in understanding the roles their student's played within the family and how they adjusted their teaching to support the student.

Students in the middle school grades can still benefit tremendously from having their parents actively engaged in their school success (Harris, 2009; Jeynes, 2011). Research has documented that the support middle school students need include support in academics, organizational, time-management and social emotional skills (Elias, 2007; Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Murray, 2009; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2006). Participants in this study shared how the changing roles of family have impacted their students, which has directly impacted the home-school partnership. Several participants shared that as their middle school students became more independent and wanted to take on more responsibilities parents were less likely to become involved in the student's actual school work. Participant #6 and #7 specifically shared while they encouraged their students to become more independent, they also talked to parents about how they can continue to provide the student with support by listening to them, checking to make sure that homework was completed and taking an interest in their extra-curricular activities.

These are examples of participants utilizing Epstein's framework components of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home and decision making to support the student and parent. When participants provided parents with the types of supports that have been described earlier in this chapter they are also demonstrating their ability to symbolize the principles of Bronfenbrenner's work in real life.

In several other cases, participants shared stories when students were forced to grow up too soon due to effects of the ecosystem and macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory of human development. When Participant #2 describe walking students home afterschool because they were worried about student safety, or when Participant #6 shared how their students were responsible for the care of younger siblings they were describing their response to the demands that families and the community were placing on their students. By making necessary adjustments to their teaching they were be proactive to the needs of students based on their understanding of the macrosystem within their community.

Participant #2 makes sure that their students were safe walking home after tutoring which demonstrated an understanding of the importance the macrosystem of the community but this also left him with a negative perception of teaching in high poverty area schools. Participant #2 would benefit from learning how to utilize the components of Epstein's framework to gain better understand of how to work within the microsystem of the school community to benefit the academic success of his students.

Teacher Perceptions of Communities and Culture Influence Their View of Involvement

Educators who understand the cultures and communities within in their classroom are able to develop engaging relationships with parents when they begin these relationships with the parents' self-interests in mind (Ferlazzo, 2009). As described in Chapter IV, Participant #2 struggled to understand the culture and community of their first school which resulted in a negative attitude towards parents while Participant #5, #6 and #7 described positive attitudes.

Participant #1 shared a fear of approaching the topic of Lesbian, Gay, Biracial and Transgender in their current school due to the conservative population and the possible backlash perceived to receive from parents. Participant #1 understood the microsystem within the school, yet stated feeling anxious of using the parenting, communication or even the learning at home component of Epstein's framework to educate parents while supporting the social emotional growth of her students. By moving past their own comfort level Participant #1 might have been able to truly engage the parents of the students in a true home-school partnership to benefit the success of the students.

The experiences of the participants of in this study amplify the importance of understanding the cultures and communities of the students which is the first component of Epstein's framework and also the macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Types of Interactions with Parents

Educators that make attempts to understand families learn about their beliefs and provide parents with many opportunities to interact with staff and students have positive

outcomes (Harris, 2009; Ridnouer, 2011). Participants in this study did report that they interacted reported with parents through typical parent teacher interactions; making phone calls home, sending home newsletters, attending school events, casual interactions at drop off and pick up, and parent teacher conferences. Out of the 20 interactions that participants described in the interviews 70% of the interactions were initiated by the teacher for behavior or academic concerns, 25% of the interactions were initiated by the parent for behavior or academic concerns and only 5% of the interactions were initiated by the teacher to share behavior or academic success. Participant #5 shared a story about how she engaged a parent to work with her son to improve his social skills by talking to her each day about how well the student was doing academically each day. One day after school wide testing occurred Participant #5 shared with the mother how well the student did with the testing and then showed her how she could look up the homework and other activities on the school website. As time when on, the mother began to trust Participant #5 more and began to ask Participant #5 for suggestions on how to help her son in other areas like social skills.

As seen in this study, often parents only hear from teachers when there is a problem. Research has shown that one of the easiest ways to engage parents is to ask them to help their children with learning at home activities as described in Epstein's Framework of Parental involvement (Epstein, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2007). There were several missed opportunities for participants to engage more parents in the learning process that would have combined Epstein's Framework for Parental involvement and enhance Bronfenbrenner's Theory as well. These activities would include teaching

parents how to utilize agenda books, asking parents to share their hopes and dreams for their child, provide opportunities for parents to share ideas and resources within the community with each other, and projects that would require students, parents and staff to interact together in the community (Epstein, 2001).

Providing teacher's with effective strategies on how to engage parents is vital since a child's educational achievement and cognitive development level can be directly impacted by the parenting behaviors of the caregiver (Bakker, Denessen & Bris-Laeven, 1007). Several participants identified with this critical need when they shared how they had to parent the parent. Participant #3 shared how they first needed to work on getting the parent on board and then they had to teach the parent how to help the student at home. While speaking about this experience, Participant #3 gave the perception that it was more of a struggle and something that they didn't really want to do when stating *"it's a totally different discussion about her helping him with the homework since she could do it if she wants but the parent needs to want to do her part."* Participant #6 had a positive attitude about the whole experience of teaching parents how to be parents. Participant #6 explains how talking to the parents in a nonthreatening way and lets them know that teachers does not expect them to know how to help their child with school related issues, that's their job as the professional. Participant #6 understands the demands of parents and shared how they have enough to worry about so as the teacher, they gives them the things that they can improve on to help their child.

Middle School Teachers Ability to Challenge Own Belief System

Parental engagement is multifaceted beginning at the classroom level as teachers examine their own belief systems, how they may influence the level of parental engagement through various parental practices and behavior patterns (Ferlazzo, 2009; Harris, 2009; Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Rothstein, 2004). Researchers have identified several variables that teachers need to consider when examining their own belief system when working on parental engagement (Ferlazzo, 2009: Harris, 2009: Reed, 2007; Ridnouer, 2011; Rothsetin, 2004). These variables include the social and psychological resources available to parents to support parental engagement; parent's efficacy beliefs; parent's perception of their child; parent's assumption about their role in educating their child; parent's attitude toward school; and parent's ethnic identity and general socialization practices.

To determine if participants challenged their own belief system of parental engagement, each participant was asked what they believed the parent's role was in the educational development of diverse students. This was done to see if there was any connection to their belief and the interactions that they shared with parents. In analyzing the data for this study participants were able to align their definition of parental involvement to their own belief of the role of the parent. There was also an association between the experiences that participants shared and their answer to the belief of the role of parents in the educational development of students.

Participant #1 believed that parents should be involved by being in contact with teachers if there was a question about homework or a concern. Participant #1 also

believed that parents should be checking homework, talking to students about their day and what they learned. These are all the basic components of Epstein's framework. During Participant #1's interview she spoke about the importance of communication, providing learning opportunities for home and how knowing the cultural norms of her class were helpful. Based on the information provided in the literature review and the interview, Participant #1 appeared to be flexible in ways to involve parents but lacked the experience and/or knowledge on how to truly engage parents as defined by NPTA and Epstein's framework. Participant #1 did appear to have some understanding of Bronfenbrenner's theory affects the interactions with parents and students.

Participant #2 believed that parents needed to communicate with the teacher and child by making sure that if their child was struggling that the parent takes the steps to learn why. Participant #2 definition for parental involvement to communicate with the teacher and he did not see any difference between parental involvement and engagement. Participant #2 reported the most challenging experience with parents out of all the participants. The participants' belief system was based on only one component of Epstein's framework. Participant #2 struggled in understanding how the culture and socioeconomic differences relate to each other and effect the success of parental engagement in his classroom, which indicated that they do not have understand of the principles in Bronfenbrenner's work. The lack of administrative support and lack of experience was a huge hindrance to this participant's ability to share success stories during the interview. Participant #2 was operating based on their own belief system of

the role of parents but lacked the experience and support in challenging them or changing them.

Participant #3 described their belief of the role of parents as partners with teachers in the educational development of diverse students. Participant #3 continued to talk about the responsibility of the parent to follow up at home with activities relating to what was taught in the classroom through at home learning activities and also providing enrichment activities outside of the school that the child shows an interest in. Participant #3's definition of parental involvement was consistent with their belief, however during the interview they did not provide many examples where a true home-school partnership was being developed. Like Participant #2, Participant #3's personal experience may have clouded their belief in the ability of parents and teachers developing a true partnership. Participant #3 stated "*I've always found that parents talk a really good game*" and "*they say they will do something but then they don't and nothing changes.*" These types of statements will make it difficult for Participant #3 to challenge the belief systems to develop trusting relationships with parents.

Participant #4 believed that it is the parent's responsibility to take care of the child's basic needs including learning about the culture that they live in so that the child can be successful in school. According to Participant #4, parents should be contacting teachers to see how their child is doing. Participant #4's belief and definition of parental involvement was not consistent with the stories that she shared. Almost every story that Participant #4 shared was a result of them reaching out to the parents. The negative experience with receiving administration support did result in the participant having

doubts about her ability to be an effective partner with parents, especially parents that have English as their second language since the participant was focused on sharing stories where the language barrier was an issue. Participant #4 appeared to struggle with understanding the components of Epstein's framework especially in the area of parenting and communication. Like Participant #2, Participant #4 struggled with understanding the importance of learning about the culture and socioeconomic differences within the schools she worked.

Participant #5, #6 and #7 all had similar beliefs regarding the role parents play in the educational development of diverse students. They believed that parents need to be partners with the teacher for students to be successful. Parents should be involved by actively talking with their child at home about school, reaching out to the teacher to find ways to support the learning process at home and to become a team member with the teacher and child. Their belief system was aligned not only with their definition of parental involvement but also with the stories that they shared. As indicated earlier in this chapter all three showed understanding of Epstein's framework and were able to use their belief systems to support their work with parents and students while learning about the cultural and/or socioeconomic differences within the schools they have worked in.

The participants in this study have shown that while it is possible to challenge their belief system of how parents can support the educational development of diverse students it is also challenging. Understanding the how and why parents engage within the educational system will help teachers in developing a trusting parent-teacher relationship. This understanding takes place through the macrosystem and chronosystem

of Bronfenbrenner's theory. Participants that shared stories of understanding these systems were more successful with developing trusting relationships with parents, were able to challenge their belief system when necessary and shared experience joy in their work. The same held true in relationship to understanding and utilizing components in Epstein's framework for parental involvement. Participants who struggled with the components of parenting and decision making also struggled with being able to challenge their own belief system. There was also a relationship between have administration support, prior experiences and the participants ability to challenge their own belief system.

Limitations

In this phenomenological research study the limitations are lack of diversity from participants as it relates to race, culture, years teaching and small sample size. Bearing in mind that there may be limitations in this study, the individual stories will remain unique to each participant. Focusing on what participants experience and how they experience is the heart of phenomenological inquiry while being able to provide a comprehensive description of their experience to find similarities and differences among the individuals participating in the study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

For this study, using only seven teachers from charter schools in one metropolitan setting could be considered a limitation. While it is not unusual to use one site or even one participant in phenomenological research, such a limitation can influence the applicability of the findings (Patton, 2002).   The schools selected for this study were purposefully selected to obtain samples of various ethnicity, and social economic status.

This opened the door to potential limitations on the age of the teachers, number of years they have been teaching and their ability to develop effective parental relationships. By using snowball sampling, recommendations from teachers within each school to seek out other potential participants would provide rich data for this project. Another limitation was that all only one teacher was male and they were all from the same ethnic background. The goal was to only have teachers with more than one-year experience participant in the study, however due to limited potential participants one of the participants did not fit the criteria but was accepted into the study based on the recommendation of the school principal.

Most of the participants for this study actually came from two different schools. While this provided noteworthy data it also made the risk of bias higher while analyzing the data; for example, when the theme of receiving administrative support from administration emerged. It was difficult to decipher if the results from the interviews were due to the participants perception and experiences or the experiences and perceptions provided by the administration.

Time also became a factor in completing the interviews. With the teachers schedules, the holiday season approaching and school schedules it was difficult to get participants to agree to doing the interviews in person, most only agreed to participant if the interview was conducted over the phone. Conducting interview by telephone has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that the participants may have felt more relaxed and disclosed more information than if they were conducted in person. The disadvantages of telephone interviews is that there was an absence of the visual clues that

in person interviews provide, and the interpretation of the responses which could be used in the data analysis, and the possibility of low quality data when being recorded (Patton, 1990). For this study prior to the beginning of each interview, a protocol was established in case the telephone call was interrupted. Also ample wait time was established before moving to the next question, rephrasing what the participant said was often done to clarify any misunderstandings or unclear communication that may have occurred.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study may be of greatest value to key members of the middle school community who work with and provide support to middle school teachers. Middle school administrators, providers of professional development and community agencies that oversee and support middle school students all have contact with middle school teachers may thus find practical use of the results from this study. In addition, given the gap in research between elementary school and middle school research on parental engagement, this study may provide additional avenue for consideration regarding parental engagement in the middle school years.

This study provided evidence of several well supported principles of parent involvement and engagement and the consequences associated with missing key components of the theoretical framework and models of parental involvement. These opportunities for engagement do make a real difference in the lives of children, particularly those who in high need areas. There is a general lack of understanding of culture and the needs of diverse families in these participants. This resulted in the

participants either enjoying their experiences with diverse families or they found it to be challenging and frustrating.

Middle school administrators set the agenda for teacher expectations, professional development opportunities and curriculum requirements. Providing teachers will opportunities to interact with parents, supporting the efforts when engaging parents in discussions and providing professional development so teachers can learn strategies that are important to engaging middle school parents would benefit not just the individual teachers but the school as well.

Professional development providers support the classroom teacher in providing research-based strategies and activities that teachers can easily use in their classroom. Research on parental involvement has mainly been limited to elementary school situations. Middle school teachers would benefit from learning how to support the parent-teacher partnership as parents learn how to provide the social-emotional and executive functioning skills that are needed for students to become successful in life.

Community agencies were the missing link for the participants in this study. While many participants did have the support of administration and some had professional development in the area of parental engagement, no participant shared successful interactions with community agencies to support parents and/or students. Getting support of outside agencies would only strength the move from involvement to engagement as teachers move into using the last two components of Epstein's framework and utilize the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory more effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research

Extending the research on how to engage middle school parents in the educational development of student achievement would greatly benefit all stakeholders. Due to the developmental needs of the middle school student, engaging their parents involves more than taking an interest in the child's grades, process and attending events. Middle school parents also need to assist their child through social-emotional and executive functioning development. Participants of this study shared little knowledge on how to support parents when their child needed support in these areas in order to be successful in the classroom and in life.

With the changing criteria for parental involvement based on the government's definition developed by NPTA's National Standards Implementation Guide (2009) there is a need to learn the difference between parental involvement and parental engagement especially at the middle school level. Participants of this study did not show a thorough understanding of parental engagement, especially when talking about the unique characteristics of promoting the social emotional and executive functioning skills of middle school students. Providing educators with education and support in understanding the various components of Epstein's framework of parental involvement is important, especially with the edition of the last two components; decision making and collaborating with community (Epstein, 2009). Participants in this study did not share examples of working with the community to provide resources and services for students and families to be successful. As several participants described developing the parenting skills for parents in high needs communities is important and teachers struggled with how to do

this along with challenging their own belief of why they needed to do this. For example, when Participant #2 went on the home visits, the participant described the home environment of several of his students. Participant #2 shared how it was one of the biggest hurdles to get through, walking into a home where parents would be drinking alcohol, doing illegal drugs and not saying a single word as they walked away after opening the door. Participant #2 stated *"it opened me up to the fact that I think the parents obviously do not take a role in their children's lives."* Throughout the interview, Participant #2 shared the feeling of frustration about how to support students when not knowing how to reach the parents to get them to understand how important their role was in their child's life. In the end, the participant gave up at this school. Participant #2 stated that it was not worth working harder than anyone else works. Participant #3 spoke about their struggles in trusting that parents were really doing what they say they would. As Participant #3 stated *"I've always found that parents talk a really good game."* Participant #3 shared how they provided one parent with extra resources, activities and even the materials to help the student bring her grade up. Participant #3 stated that for several weeks, the student was asked about the work and the student replied, *"My mom said I don't need to do this packet."* After saying this Participant #3 laughs and then says, *"you know sometimes there isn't much you can do to change some people's mind in terms of making education important."*

Since the 1990's when Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced educators to the concept of culturally relevant teaching to understand student behavior, motivation and how to resolve conflicts in the classroom (Campbell, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Participants shared learning about this concept in classes and/or reading about it. The research has occurred on how to be aware of student cultures within the classroom, but there has been a limited amount of research on how teachers can use this same concept when working with parents. Understanding the needs of the community, how the community can support the school, and also understanding what the parent perceives their role and responsibility in their child's education is important for educators to learn. Manning (2009) states that educators need to understand the extended-family concept, to understand that parents are individuals with intracultural, generational, and socioeconomic differences. Participants in this study had limited knowledge of how to support parents within the various cultures, race and social economic status' of where they teach. The lack of this knowledge and strategies to work with parents limited the participants in developing the true engaging partnerships with their parents.

Participants in this study that had administrative support in engaging parents in the educational process of their students felt that they were more successful in the process of developing partnerships with parents and were happier in the work place. The participants working at School 3 illustrated the effectiveness of this support. As indicated in the literature review for this study, there has been enormous research on the benefits of parental engagement in school, with little research on how this would be accomplished at the school level for low performing schools, schools with several different languages, social-economic status and various ethnicities. Further research could also support administrators in determining how their perceptions and experiences with parental

involvement and engagement affect the tone of school wide efforts.   School administrators and teachers would benefit from additional research in this area.

Continuing this current research study using a wider variety of schools and participants would be valuable to determine if there is a trend in the results found in this study. Besides using a wider variety of participants, it would also be interesting to learn how gender plays a role in teacher's perceptions and involvement. In addition, this research was completed by solely by the researcher it would be important to have this study completed by another researcher to determine any biases and validity errors.

Conclusion

The work of middle school teachers learning how to engage parents in the educational process of students is highly challenging, as documented by this study. Parental engagement in the middle school is more than academic and behavior. Participants shared that working with parents of middle school students is more than just communicating student progress and informing them of events. Participants in this study demonstrated efforts to work with parents to understand their culture, family background, parenting skills and how best to support the student. They worked to engage parents in a variety of environments, some partnerships were successful and some were not. The perceptions and experiences of each participant shaped how they viewed parental involvement, which at times was challenging, to move parents towards parental engagement.

Understanding the knowledge and skills of the components of Epstein's framework for parental involvement is key to moving parents from involvement towards

engagement. The participants in this study had limited understanding of how to complete this due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the decision making and collaborating with community components of the framework. Participants supported parents with basic levels of parent involvement strategies like communication, learning at home activities, volunteering and parenting skills.

With the consistently changing political systems, social policies and culture and economic trends that are occurring within student's macrosystem it is important for teachers to develop a more thorough understanding of culture, the needs of diverse families and the types of community resources that may be available. Understanding the connection between the theoretical framework for this study and the research on parental engagement provided a better understanding of how teachers could support parents as they move into an engaging partnership that would benefit students and parents. Most of the participants of this study shared examples of how they worked with parents to provide academic and/or behavior support to the student. There were very few examples of how participants provided parents with support to develop the social-emotional and executive functioning skills necessary to be successful.

Finally, parental engagement does not occur in isolation. For teachers to be successful the school administration needs to support this outreach as well. Participants that felt they had administrative support for any type of parental engagement, shared more success stories and were more enthusiastic during the interview then those who did not have administrative support. Working to support students to grow to become successful independent adults will take the all stakeholders, teachers, administrators,

community members and of course parents, working together. Educators need to include

on their learning agenda how to engage the culturally and generationally diverse parents

and families to support the educational development of students, as they are our future.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL

**New Project Application:
CICS Response**

☀ **Chicago International**
CHARTER SCHOOL

To: Karen Love

Date: November 4, 2013

Re: Research Request- **Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership during the Middle School Years**

Dear Ms. Love and Dr. Kennedy,

It is the decision of the Chicago International Charter School CEO to allow your study, **Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership during the Middle School Years,** to be conducted on campuses of Chicago International Charter School, provided you can find interested and willing participants.

As the study principal investigators, you are responsible for making sure that this research is conducted according to the protocol described in the documents forwarded and in accordance with the IRB approved by Loyola University of Chicago on October 3, 2013. You are equally responsible for all actions of the study staff and sub-investigators with regard to the protocol.

Please note that the CEO of CICS, or her designee, has ongoing authorities which include:

(a) Authority to Require Progress Reports and to Oversee the Study: CICS the responsibility and the authority to review the progress of research studies, to monitor the activities in approved studies (including regularly scheduled continuing review at least annually), and to require verification of compliance with approved research protocols and informed consent procedures through means such as audit, observation or third party review. **The authority to review the progress of studies includes the authority to require prompt reporting to CICS of any planned changes in approved projects prior to the implementation** of those changes and the authority to require prompt reporting to the IRB of any unanticipated problems (including adverse events) occurring in, or related to, approved protocols.

(b) Authority to Suspend or Terminate Approval of Research: CICS has the authority to suspend or revoke approval of any study that was originally reviewed and approved for reasons such as unanticipated problems involving risks to human subjects, serious or continuing non-compliance with any federal regulation or serious or continuing non-compliance with the requirements or determinations of the CICS CEO or her designee.

(c) Authority to Restrict Research: CICS has the responsibility and the authority to restrict any study that it has originally reviewed and approved if it determines that such action is

warranted. Under this policy, 'restrict' is defined as suspending or terminating a portion of a study found in non-compliance either permanently or until it is brought into compliance.

As the principal investigator, we'd also like to remind you that CICS approval is granted for no more than one (1) year or until the expiration of the IRB approval of Loyola University of Chicago (10/03/2014), and that the CICS must receive a completed Renewal or Revision form no later than one month prior to the date of expiration of this approval. No research activities may continue past the date of expiration until CICS has reviewed and approved the continuation. No revised protocol procedures may occur unless CICS has approved in writing the proposed changes. These changes to the protocol include, but are not limited to:

- Changes to research staff, including principal investigator or co-investigators, or changes to the contact information of research staff
- Changes to the types of or number of subjects to be recruited or enrolled in the study
- Changes to the study procedures
- Changes in instruments or data collection procedures
- Changes in methods of recruitment, advertisement of the study, or to the wording of the informed consent(s).

We appreciate greatly your cooperation with CICS standards and procedures. We are confident that together, through this process, we are able to ensure the protection of the rights and well-being of our students. If you have any questions regarding previously discussed protocol, or any of the aforementioned information, do not hesitate to contact the CICS by e-mail at bpurvis@chicagointl.org or at the following number: (312) 651-5000.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Purvis, Ed.D.
CEO
Chicago International Charter School
11 East Adams, Suite 600
Chicago, Illinois 60603

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

November 5, 2013

Dear Director:

My name is Karen Love and I am a doctoral student, under the supervision of Adam Kennedy, PhD from the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. My dissertation study is designed to analyze teacher impact on supporting the parent-teacher partnership during the middle school years. I have received approval to complete this study with Loyola University and Chicago International Charter Schools.

Through my research, I am seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent involvement and towards parent engagement?

2. How do these educators describe their experiences in parent involvement in relation to diverse populations?

Educators who teacher middle students, in grades 6th-8th, are being requested by this researcher to participate in this study. The interview is designed to gain insight into how effective teachers of diversity interact with parents/family members and support the parent-teacher partnership through the middle school years. I am asking for recommendations of 2-3 exemplar teachers with effective practices in working with diverse students and families to be invited to participate in my study. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will not interfere with the instructional day of your students and teachers. I will call you within in the next ten days for your recommendations, and then would like to place an invitation to participate in this study in their mailboxes. If you have any questions in the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me at klove3@luc.edu.   Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Karen Love, Researcher

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Educators,

My name is Karen Love and I am a doctoral student, under the supervision of Adam Kennedy, PhD from the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. My dissertation study is designed to analyze teacher impact on supporting the parent-teacher partnership during the middle school years. Through my research, I am seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers in supporting parents/families as they move from traditional forms of parent involvement and towards parent engagement?

2. How do these educators describe their experiences in parent involvement in relation to diverse populations?

Educators who teacher middle students, in grades 6th-8th, are being requested by this researcher to participate in this study. The interview is designed to gain insight into how you interact with parents/family members and support the parent-teacher partnership through the middle school years.   I am requesting your participation. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your anonymity and responses to interview questions will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate, please respond via email at klove3@luc.edu with Parent Research in the subject line and I will contact you to schedule an interview time that will be convenient for you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Karen Love, Researcher

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership during the Middle School Years
Researcher(s): Karen Love, Doctoral Student, Loyola University of Chicago
Faculty Sponsor: Adam Kennedy, PhD, *Department of Education,* Loyola University of Chicago

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Karen Love, for a dissertation study under the supervision of Adam Kennedy, PhD in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because of your experience in working with middle school age students and their parents.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the impact teachers have in supporting parents in school and at home to increase the success of their middle school child.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:
- To participate in an interview with the researcher, which will last approximately 60-90 minutes.
- Agree to have interview audiotaped.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your participation in this study will benefit the impact teachers will have on student achievement and parental involvement in the future.

Compensation: (optional section)
Teachers participating in the interview process of this research project will receive a $10 gift card to Starbucks at the completion of their interview.

Confidentiality:
- Please be assured that the collection information will be kept highly confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed at any time and data will be coded so that no actual names will appear on any documents or forms generated from the study.
- Access to the audio-taped transcriptions will be available only to the researcher and members of her dissertation team. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and eventually destroyed five years after the termination of this study.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to Karen Love at (773) 960-5344 or klove3@luc.edu or faculty sponsor Adam Kennedy, PhD at (312) 915-6857or akenne5@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study**.** You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   **Date**

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   **Date**

APPENDX E

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Protocol

Project: Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership During the Middle School Years

Interview #:_____**Date:**_____**Time:**_____**Location:**____
Release form signed? _____

Script:

      Welcome and thank you for your participation today. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice. The interview will take about 60- 90 minutes and will include questions to gain insight into how you interact with parents/family members and how you support the parent-teacher partnership through the middle school years. As I mentioned in our previous conversation, I would like to accurately document the information you convey, so I would like your permission to tape record this interview. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers support the parent-teacher partnership.

      At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project: Teacher Impact on Supporting the Parent-Teacher Partnership during the Middle School Years. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

      Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or reschedule for a different time, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

1. Let's begin with you telling me about the school you work in.
   What are the demographics of the school?
   a. Number of teachers – male vs female
   b. Average years of experience
   c. Diversity within teachers
   d. Number of students
   e. Diversity within student population
   f. Are there any requirements for parental involvement in your school?
      If so, what are they?

2. Now tell me more about your teaching history?
   a. years teaching and subjects taught
   b. public vs private schools

      c.   number of years at current school/current grade
      d.   what experience do you have with teaching in a diverse population
      e.   Degree/certifications
      f.   courses or workshops in parent-community relationships or culturally relevant teaching

3. Please describe for me in as much detail what you believe is the role of parents in the educational development of diverse students.

4. Let's talk about a success story you have of working with a diverse student and their family to create a trusting and engaging parent-teacher partnership. Please give me as much detail as possible.

5. Now, describe a story where when working with a diverse student that the parent-teacher partnership was difficult to develop. Please include as much detail as possible of what made this relationship difficult or challenging and what type of strategies you used to develop an engaging relationship with this family to promote growth with this diverse student.

6. Next, can you describe for me in as much detail as possible how you develop your relationship with parents to support diverse student growth.

7. In working with parents that are reluctant to get involved with their child's education, what strategies have you found successful in developing communication and trust with diverse parents?

8. Describe in as much detail as possible how you learn about the community in which you work in and where your diverse students live? In your description, please include how you use this information to support your classroom instruction.

9. What do you think the different is between parental involvement and parental engagement? Which do you believe you practice in your classroom?

10. Do you have any questions that you would have liked me to ask that I did not ask?

11. Is there anything else that you think we should have talked about today?

If there are no more questions, then I would like to thank you very much for your time today. If I have any further questions, would be alright if I contact you again?

REFERENCE LIST

Anderson, K., & Minke, K. M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *The Journal of Educational Research, 100*(5), 311-323.

Anfara, Jr., V. A., & Mertens, S. B. (2008). What Research Says: Varieties of parent involvement in schooling. *Middle School Journal, 39*(3), 58-64.

Attaway, N., & Bry, B. H. (2004). Parenting style and black adolescents' achievement. *Journal of Black Psychology, 30*, 229-247.

Bakker, J., Denessen, E., & Brus-Laeven, M. (2007). Socio-economic background, parental involvement, and teacher perception of these in relationship to pupil achievement. *Educational Studies, 33*, 177-192.

Berger, E. (1991). Parent involvement: Yesterday and today. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 209-219.

Boisvert, R. (1998). *John Dewey: Rethinking our time.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Bouffard, S., & Weiss, H. B. (2010). Families, time, and learning. In H. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman-Nelson, *Preparing educators to engage families: Case studies using an ecological systems framework,2nd edition* (pp. 120-125). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bowler, J., Annan, J., & Mentis, M. (2007). Understanding the learner environment relationships: A matrix of perspectives. *School Psychology International, 28*(4), 387-401.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Brendtro, L. (2006). The vision of Urie Bronfenbrenner: Adults who are crazy about kids. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 15*(3), 162-166.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723-742.

Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2001). *Raising resilient children: Fostering strength, hope and optimism in your child.* Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books.

Campbell, D. (2009). *Choosing democracy: A practical guide to multicultural education, 4/e.* New York: Pearson Education.

Coll, C., & Chatman-Nelson, C. (2010). Ethnic and racial diversity. In H. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman-Nelson, *Preparing educators to engage families: Case studies using an ecological systems framework,* 2nd edition (pp. 90-96). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Constantino, S. (2003). *Engaging all families.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Crosnoe, R. (2009). Family-school connections and the transitions of low-income youths and English language learners from middle school to high school. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(4), 1061-1076.

Culp, A., Hubbs-Tait, L., Culp, R. E., & Starost, H. J. (2000). Maternal parenting characteristics and school involvement: Predictors of kindergarten cognitive competence among head start children. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 15*, 5-17.

Culter III, W. (2000). *Parents and schools: The 150 year struggle for control in american education.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Davenport, E., & Bogan, Y. K. (2005). It takes a village to teach a child: An analysis of an african-centered parental involvement program. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice, 2*(3), 34-45.

Davis-Kean, P., & Eccles, J. S. (2010). Social executive functioning. In H. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman-Nelson, *Preparing educators to engage families: Case studies using an ecological systems framework,* 2nd edition (pp. 27-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *The landscape of qualitative research theories and issues,* 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2009). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling. *Journal of Educational Research, 98*(3), 164-175.

Eccles, J., & Harold, R. (1993). Parent-school involvement during the early adolescent years. *Teachers College Record, 94*(3), 568-587.

Elias, M. J., Patrikakou, E. P., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). A competence-based framework for parent-school-community partnerships in secondary school. *School Psychology International, 28*(5), 540-554.

Epstein, J. (2001). Building bridges of home, school, and community: The importance of design. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 6*(1 & 2), 161-168.

Epstein, J., & Dauber, S. L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 289-305.

Epstein, J., & Sanders, M. G. (1996). *School, family, community partnerships: Overview and new directions.* Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Center of Family Schools and Children's Learning.

Epstein, J., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorkis, F. L. (2002). *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for actions,* 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Everson, S. (2004). The nature of parent and community engagement in schools that are learning communities. *Journal of School Public Relations, 25*, 70-91.

Ferlazzo, L. (2011). *Parent involvement or parent engagement?* Retrieved May 19, 2011, from Public School Insights: http://www.publicschools-insights.org/LarryFerlazzoParentEngagement

Ferlazzo, L., & Hammond, L. (2009). *Building parent engagement in schools.* Santa Barbara, CA: Linworth Publishing.

Ferrara, M., & Ferrara, P. J. (2005). Parents as partners: Raising awareness as a teacher preparation program. *Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 79*(2), 77-81.

Feuerstein, A. (2000). School characteristics and parent involvement: Influences on participation in children's schools. *Journal of Education Research, 94*(1), 29-40.

Flick, U. (2002). *Qualitative research in psychology: A Textbook.* London: Sage.

Flynn, G., & Nolan, B. (2008). What do school principals think about current school-family relationships? *National Association of Secondary School Principals, 92*(3), 173-190.

Garcia, D. (2004). Exploring connections between the construct of teacher efficacy and family involvement practices: Implications for urban teacher preparation. *Urban Education, 39*(3), 290-315.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities and classrooms.* New York: Routledge.

Green, C., Walker, J. M., Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (2007). Parent's motivations for involvement in children's education: Empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(3), 532-544.

Harris, A. (2009). *Do parents know they matter?: Raising achievement through paternal engagement.* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2007). *Engaging parents in raising achievement: Do parents know they matter?* University of Warwick, Department of Children, Schools and Families.

Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research, 50*(3), 277-289.

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence:The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement annual synthesis 2002.* Austin, TX: SEDL: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

Hiatt, D. B. (1994). Parent involvement in american public schools: an historical perspective 1642-1994. *The School Community Journal, 4*(2), 27-38.

Hill, N. (2001). Parenting and academic socialization as they relate to school readiness: The roles of ethnicity and family income. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*, 686-697.

Hill, N., & Tyson,, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytical assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(3), 740-763.

Hill, N., Castellino, D. R., Lansford, J. E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K. A., & Bates, J. E. (2004). Parent-academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescences. *Child Development, 75*, 1491-1509.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Sandler, H. M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record, 97*(2), 310-331.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research, 67*(1), 3-42.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., Bassler, O. C., & Brissie, J. S. (1987). Parent involvement: Contributions of teacher efficacy, school socioeconomic status and other school characteristics. *American Educational Research Journal, 24*(3), 417-435.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., Bassler, O. C., & Brissie, J. S. (1992). Explorations in parent-school relations. *Journal of Educational Research, 85*(5), 287-294.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., Walker, J. M., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C., & Clossen, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal*, 105-130.

Ice, C., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2011). Linking parental motivations for involvement and student proximal achievement outcomes in homeschooling and public schooling settings. *Education and Urban Society, 43*(3), 339-369.

Ingram, M., Wolfe, R. B., & Lieberman, J. M. (2007). The role of parents in high-achieving schools serving low income, at risk populations. *Education and Urban Society, 39*(4), 479-497.

Jeynes, W. (2007). The relationships between parent involvement and urban secondary school student achievement. *Urban Education, 42*(1), 82-110.

Jeynes, W. H. (2011). *Parental involvement and academic success.* New York: Routledge.

Jorgensen, M., & Hoffmann, J. (2003). *Assessment report:History of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).* San Antonio, TX: Pearson Education, Inc.

Joshi, A., Eberly, J., & Konzal, J. (2005). Dialogue across cultures: Teachers' perceptions about communication with diverse families. *Multicultural Education, 13*(2), 11-15.

Katz, L., & Bauch, J. P. (1999). The Peabody family involvment initative: Preparing preservice teachers for family/school collaboration. *The School Community Journal, 9*(1), 49-61.

Keyes, C. (2002). A way of thinking about parent teacher partnerships for teachers. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 10*(3), 177-191.

Kohl, G. O., Lengua, L. J., & McMahon, R. J. (2000). Parent involvement in school conceptualizing multiple dimensions and their relations with family demographic risk factors. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(6), 501-523.

Laboratory, S. E. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community conncetions on student achievement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of african american children, 2/e.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationshps: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education, 60*(April), 73-85.

Lareau, A. (2000). Social class and the daily lives of children: A study from the united states. *, 7(2).* Retrieved July 4, 2011, from Sage Publishing: http://chd.sagepub.com/content/7/2/155

Lawson, M. (2003). School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education, 38*(1), 77-133.

Machen, S., Wilson, J. D., & Notar, C. E. (2005). Parent involvement in the classroom. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 32*(1), 13-16.

Manning, M., & Baruth, L. G. (2009). *Multicultural education of children and adolscents, 5/e.* New York: Pearson Education.

Mapp, K. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in children's learning. *School Community Journal, 13*(1), 35-64.

Merriman, S. (2009). *Qualitative research:A guide to design and implementation,* 2nd edition. San Francisco, CA: Josey Bass.

Miedel, W., & Reynolds, A. J. (1999). Parent involvement in early intervention for disadvantaged children: Does it matter? *Journal of School Psychology, 37*(4), 379-402.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Murray, C. (2009). Parent and teacher relationships as predictors of school engagement and functioning among low-income urban youth. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 29*(3), 376-404.

Office, U. G. (n.d.). No Child Left Behind Act PL 107-111, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Washington DC. Retrieved 01 26, 2011, from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pomerantz, E., Moorman, E. A., & Litwack, S. D. (2007). The how, whom, and why of parents' involvement in children's academic lives: More is not always better. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(3), 373-410.

Pryor, B., & Pryor, C. R. (2009). What will teachers do to involve parents in education?" Using a theory of reasoned action. *Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies, 9*(1), 43-99.

Reay, D. (2000). A useful extension of bourdeu's conceptual framework? Emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers involvement in their children's education. *Sociological Review, 48*, 568-585.

Reed, W. (2007). Inside connections: Local teachers' perspectives on parental engagement in a urban elementary school. *Teacher Education and Practice, 20*(3), 297-309.

Reese, W. J. (2005). *America's public schools: From the common school to "No Child Left Behind".* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ricciuti, H. (2004). Single parenthood, achievement and problem behavior in white, black, and hispanic children. *The Journal of Educational Research, 97*, 196-206.

Ridnouer, K. (2011). *Everyday engagement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ritblatt, S., Beatly, J. R., Cronan, T. A., & Ochoa, A. M. (2002). Relationships among perception of parent involvement, time allocation and demographic characteristics: Implication for policy formation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 30*, 519-549.

Rogers, S., & Renard, L. (1999). Relationship-driven teaching. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 157-160.

Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social economic and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap.* New York: Teachers' College Press.

Ryan, G., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods, 15*(1), 85-109.

Schlossman, S. (1976). Before home start: Notes toward a history of parent education in America 1897-1929. *Harvard Educational Review, 46*(3), 436-467.

Schutz, A. (2006). Home is a prison in the global city: The tragic failure of school-based community engagement strategies. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(4), 361-741.

Sedl, S. E. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Seidman, I. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Sheldon, S. (2002). Parents' social networks and beliefs as predictors of parent involvement. *The Elementary School Journal, 102*(4), 301-316.

Simon, B. (2001). Family involvement in high school: Predictors and effects. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 85*(627), 8-19.

Smith, J. (2006). Parent involvement in education among low-income families: A case study. *The School Communtiy Journal, 1*, 43-56.

Smith, J., Feldwisch, R., & Abell, A. (2006). Similiarites and differences in students' and parents' perceptions of the transitions from middle school to high school. *Research in Middle Level Education (RMLE), 29*(10), 1-8.

Smith, J., Wohlstetter, P., Kuzin, C., & DePedro, K. (2011). Parent involvement in urban charter schools: New strategies for increasing particiaption. *The School Community Journal, 21*(1), 71-94.

Stipek, D. (2010). Motivation to learn. In H. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman-Nelson, *Preparing educators to engage families: Case studies using an ecological systems framework,* 2nd edition (pp. 2-7). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Swick, K., & Williams, R. (2006). An analysis of bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective for early childhood educators: Implications for working with families experiences stress. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(5), 371-378.

The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (2011). Remarks by the president on no child left behind flexibility [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/remarks-president-no-child-left-behind-flexibility

Tudge, J., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009, December). Uses and misuses of bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory and Review, 1*, 198-210.

Tyack, D., Anderson, J. D., Cuban, L., Kaestle, C. F., & Ravitch, D. (2001). *School: The story of American public education.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Walker, J., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2006). Why research on parental involvment is important in classroom management. *Handbook of Classroom Management Reseaerch, Practice and Contemporary Issues*, 665-684. Retrieved January 28, 2011, from http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/family-school/papers.html

Weaver, S. (2007). Cultivating connections with parents. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 81*(1), 5-7.

Weisner, T. (2010). Ecocultural understanding. In H. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman-Nelson, *Preparing educators to engage families:Case studies using an ecological systems framework* (pp. 84-90). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Weiss, H., Lopez, M. E., Kreider, H., & Chatman-Nelson, C. (2010). *Preparing educators to engage families:Case studies using an ecological systems framework* 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Williams, A. (2002). *Putting a parent engagement into action: A practical guide.* Chicago, IL: Family Support America.

Witmer, M. (2005). The fourth R in education - Relationships. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 78*(5), 224-229.

Zhang, D., Hsu, H., Kwok, O., Benz, M., & Bowman-Perrott, L. (2011). The impact of basic level parent engagements on student achievement: Patterns associated with race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 22*, 28-39.

VITA

Karen Love received her Bachelor of Education degree in Elementary Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood from University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Karen also received her Masters' degree in Curriculum and Development from Loyola University Chicago. Upon completion of her Bachelor's degree, Karen taught in a variety of educational venues. She worked diligently with young children and their families in diverse early childhood settings as a teacher's aide, teacher, and lead teacher. She was a founding staff member of a large child development center in Chicago where she was also responsible for training new staff members and providing educational workshops for parents.

Prior to obtaining her Master's degree, Karen was a first grade teacher for Chicago Public Schools. She eagerly served on several committees including the leadership committee, mentoring committee, and local school council. Upon completing her Master's degree Karen became a Literacy Coach for Chicago Public Schools, serving under the Reading First grant. Karen facilitated professional development for other educators across the district, managed the grant budget for her school and supported teachers as they learned to align their instruction to data. Karen also began her work in parental involvement as she promoted family literacy development school and city wide.

With the experience gained from working as a Literacy Coach and mentoring teachers, Karen began working with Chicago's New Teacher Center to support first and

second year teachers using Danielson's framework. This experience provided Karen with the opportunity to share her passion for education, mentoring and leadership with others as she moved into the role of Curriculum and Assessment Director for a new charter school in Chicago. As a founding staff member of this 7th-12th grade charter school, Karen provided mentoring, curriculum development expertise and leadership to staff, students and parents. Karen facilitated professional development for other educators to establish a curriculum that was aligned to the College Readiness standards and data driven. She also provided parent workshops to support family members in understand the mission and vision of the charter school, the curriculum and also how to understand the various assessments that were new to all parents. Karen also served on several committees and organizations at the charter school. One committee that kept Karen directly involved with the students was a female mentoring program to support academic and social-emotional growth to 7th-12th grade students.

Currently, Karen is the Literacy Specialist and Response to Intervention (RtI) Coordinator for a school in Chicago. Karen is shares her love of learning by strengthening staff, parents and students who want to learn how to support struggling learners. She serves on the Literacy Committee, Family Engagement Committee, Instructional Leadership Committee and Assessment Committee. Karen is also the facilitator for the New Teacher Club to mentor all new teachers to the school.

Karen is dedicated to the field of education as she consultants on various projects. Karen's most recent project was working with Governors State University on their Alternative Certification Program. Karen has also co-authored a curriculum for parents

to support struggling readers. Karen continues to support the work of parental engagement by providing workshops at her school, and supporting individual teachers and parents. Karen is a member of the International Reading Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The Dissertation submitted by Karen R. Love has been read and approved by the following committee:

Adam Kennedy, Ph.D., Director
Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Ernestine Riggs, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Emeritus, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Tamiko Jones, Ed.D.
Account Manager
American Reading Company