THE IDEOLOGIES OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS REGARDING FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS
IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

A thesis presented
by
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to
The School of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in the field of
Organizational Leadership and Communication

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
September, 2015
ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is associated with students’ educational achievement (Ahmad, 2010; Theodorou, 2008; Yanghee, 2009). Although parent involvement is linked to student success, schools frequently fail to establish a strong connection between home and school (Ahmad, 2010; Bourdieu, 1973; Brint, 2011), particularly in urban areas (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Thus, a descriptive case study was used to examine the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships with respect to how they both care for their children. Three varied data sets were used: (a) open-ended interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) a focus group. The data from the three sources were analyzed and coded using MAXQDA data analysis software. Results indicated that both teachers and parents prioritize communication and sharing information as two main strategies to improve engagement and optimize children’s academic results. Additionally, results indicated that both groups expressed the hope that parental involvement in their children’s educations would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and the children’s continued motivation for learning. Further, results indicated four major social and cultural factors that influence the relationships between families and schools: attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, gaps in home–school communication, and a lack of trust in special services. Moreover, creating a welcoming environment, improving home–school communication, and establishing early collaboration emerged as significant requirements for healthy parent–teacher relationships.

Keywords: parental involvement, urban schools, parent-teacher communication, parent-teacher relationships
Acknowledgements

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this process. I would not have been able to achieve my goal of completing my degree without the amazing support I have received from them all, especially my family, friends, and teachers. First, I would like to thank my wonderful advisor, Dr. Billye Sankofa Waters, Ph.D., for guiding me through this process. I will be always grateful for your wisdom, expertise, and patience, and your invaluable feedback and direction. To my second reader, Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed, Ph.D., I am grateful to you for your guidance, knowledge, support, and time. I offer my profuse thanks to my third reader, Dr. Simone Elias, as well. I am also grateful to all of the participants in this study who took the time to share their stories with me. Finally, I would like to express a tremendous thanks to my father, Jack Chakib Akl, who lives in Lebanon. Dad, I want you to be proud of me. You are my candle lighting the darkness, and I love you so much. To my sisters, Rania Torbey and Roula Khoury, thank you for being there for me. To my friend Gada Gebara, thanks for your support. To my mother, Manahel El Habr, you are my angel in the sky, and I love you. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to send a special thanks to the Rached Group: Jack, Georgy, and Kouka.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home (e.g. providing a secure and stable environment), academic stimulation (e.g. reading to children, helping with homework), parent-child communication (Ahmad, 2010; Epstein & Sanders, 2006), transmission of educational values and high aspirations (Bloom, 1980; Seginer, 1983), parent-teacher communication (Epstein, 1995), and parents’ communication with children at home (Walberg, 1984). Parental involvement could also take place inside the school building such as participation in school events and collaborating on decision making committees (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). The federal government has played a leading role in promoting the concept of parent involvement in schools to create a deeper and meaningful collaboration with parents, reduce overall dropout rates, and increase students’ academic success. According to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a US education reform effort implemented in 2001, schools are asked to build capacity for involvement and support school-family partnerships, which is explicitly stated in Section 1118 (NCLB, 2004); school districts are required to involve all parents in the development, evaluation, and revision of parental involvement policies, and provide training to parents and teachers (NCLB, 2004). Despite these sustained and intensive efforts to involve parents, ample evidence exist indicating that barriers to effective parent-teacher relationships continue to exist, particularly in urban areas (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Issues such as social class differences, language and culture barriers, and the intimidation felt by some parents and teachers who did not experience successful relationships create obstacles for meaningful involvement and communication in urban schools (Lewis-
Antoine, 2012; Swick, 2008). In general, a wealth of evidence on parent involvement points to a need to formulate strategies that help to encourage and support low-income, immigrant, and working-class parents (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Horn, 2003; McGrath, 2007). Rather than approach this problem from only one side, the purpose of this doctoral thesis was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships in urban elementary schools, with respect to how they both care for their children.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is evidence that suggests parental involvement positively enhances student achievement (Epstein, 2001; Mapp, 2002; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005). Although parent involvement is linked to student success, schools frequently fail to establish a strong connection between home and school (Ahmad, 2010; Bourdieu, 1973; Brint, 2011). The gap in home-school relationships is further magnified in urban schools, where there is a high rate of parents who are from different cultural origins or speak English as a second language (Stringfield et al., 1997).

**Research problem.** Educational leaders, including teachers and principals, tend to attribute low parental involvement among parents from distressed circumstances to a lack of interest in their children’s education, a lower value placed on education, and a lack of connection between home and school (Mapp, 2002; Lewis-Antoine, 2012). This deficit-based thinking obstructs parental involvement before it begins, and/or does not give weight to the various strategies that parents use to support their children’s education (Ahmad, 2010). With respect to involvement within the schools, parents are most likely to play an active role in their children’s education when “they are part of a community of people working together on their behalf”
(Redding, Murphy & Sheley, 2011, p. 18). Such is the nature of strong school-family partnerships in which everyone plays a role (Redding et al., 2011). Thus, it is of critical importance to identify successful measures taken by parents and teachers in developing meaningful relationships through which students are facilitated in achieving their academic endeavors (Jeynes, 2010).

While so many teachers acknowledge the value of establishing strong working relationships with parents, some of them are not taking an active interest in building this type of community in urban schools (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Galinsky, 1990; Langdon & Novak, 1998; McGrath, 2007; Taylor, 1968). Similar to parents, teachers may find difficulties communicating regularly with parents due to their busy schedules, or language barrier (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Comer & Haynes, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009). Also, making connections with parents who are already disconnected from the school is even harder (Langdon & Novak, 1998). As a result, teachers do not work closely with those parents as partners (Langdon & Novak, 1998). Other teachers may not have good experiences in the past, or feel inefficient, or unappreciated in their interactions with parents (Galinsky, 1990; Greenberg, 1989; Taylor, 1968). In all cases, teachers’ efforts to involve parents may not bring about the desired results including better parent-teacher relationships and improved learning for all students (Comer & Haynes, 2014; McGrath, 2007; ). This could diminish teachers’ confidence to get involved in school-family-community partnerships (Powell, 1998; McGrath, 2007; Rich, 1998).

With respect to relationships with teachers, parents may also face several barriers (Ahmad, 2010; Antunez, 2000; Auerbach, 2007; Brint, 2011; Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1987, 2000, 2001); For instance, working-class
parents are specifically targeted through structural inequalities, unequal distribution of and access to resources, and deficit-based propaganda (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In this case, differences in social class, and feelings of lack of confidence, power, and resources, cannot be well managed without caring relationships between parents and school personnel (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987). Also some parents take the level of interest and involvement appropriate to the level as they see it (Antunez, 2000; Lareau, 2000); they may practice some aspects of out-school involvement such as reading to children and helping with homework. Yet, their efforts may be considered premature (Antunez, 2000; Auerbach, 2007; Lareau, 2000). Other parents come from cultures in which schoolwork is considered to be to the teacher’s responsibility (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1987). In both scenarios, parents may not be seen as active partners in their children’s education (Antunez, 2000; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1998). This could negatively affect parents’ abilities to build rapport with teachers (Auerbach, 2007; Lareau, 1998, 2000). Other parents may not feel genuinely welcomed; they may find their ideas and help tolerated, but not needed (Connell et al., 1982; Yanghee, 2009). All these barriers can have cumulative effects on family-school relationships (Ahmad, 2010; Auerbach, 2007; Brint, 2011; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1987, 2000).

Unless educational leaders understand the real challenges of promoting stronger and more positive parent-teacher relationships, students will ultimately continue to find difficulties in their educational paths. Some of the difficulties include lower test scores and grades, poor attendance, less completion of homework, less positive attitudes and behavior, negative educational experiences, less positive relationships with teachers and peers, low graduation rates
enrollment in higher education, and poor self-esteem and aspirations (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2002; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).

**Justification for the research problem.** The purpose of this study was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships with respect to how they both care for their children. The overarching question of this study was: How do both teachers and parents interact and build rapport with each other to foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools? Interviewing both teachers and parents could reveal different views of the home-school collaboration (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The gulf between schools and parents remains especially wide, separated by deficit perspective, and mutual distrust (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2002). The voices of parents have traditionally been silenced in urban schools and muted in educational research, despite their potential to shape student success and aspirations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Redding et al., 2011). Also, given the central and determinative role of parent-school relationships, it was imperative that educators reflect upon and learn from the experiences of all parents (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Lau, Hui, & Rao, 2011). By shedding light on the ideologies of both teachers and parents, researchers can further their understandings of how each views their roles in the education of their children (Lewis-Antoine, 2012). This is vital for developing better family-school relationships (Redding et al., 2011). Several studies have focused on identifying barriers to families’ involvement in their children’s schooling rather than providing sufficient literature that highlights the issue from both the teachers’ and the parents’ perspectives (Griffin & Steen, 2010; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).
**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Parents and schools have different approaches to education (Theodorou, 2008). Many times, teachers’ perspectives of the home-school collaboration are not the same as those of the families (Olivas, 2013; Payne, 1996). Differences in the viewpoints can create conflict in relationships (Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Redding et al., 2011), in addition to the disadvantages of educators’ holding deficit perspectives of parents (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; MacLeod, 2009). This could be very harmful to the relationships among parents and educators (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Theodorou, 2008). Listening to the voice of all parents and teachers may help urban educators and policy makers bridge the gap between parents’ home cultures and the culture of the school (MacLeod, 2009; Olivas, 2013).

There are some scholars such as Epstein (2001), Epstein and Sanders (2006), and Lau et al. (2011) who have used quantitative approaches to develop data from teachers and parents to study ways to bridge the existing gap between parents and teachers views of effective relationships. Yet, those studies do not provide detailed views of participants in their own words. Few studies focused on the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their relationships with each other (Ahmad, 2010; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Olivas, 2013). The significance of parent and teacher views toward better family-school collaboration is less well researched, although ideologies are believed to comprise a key component of the relationship between parents and schools (Olivas, 2013).

**Relating the discussion to audiences.** It is vital that parents and teachers understand each other’s points of view and use this understanding to build more positive relationships to improve parental involvement in order to help improve academic success (Payne, 1996). For instance, teachers’ views of parents’ efforts to build rapport and communicate with teachers
may positively or negatively affect the quality of their relationships with each other (Korkmaz, 2007; Kuperminc et al., 2008; Theodorou, 2008). In turns, parents’ beliefs of schools as academic institutions may also improve or diminish the quality of relationships with teachers (Lewis-Antoine, 2012). When schools understand how both teachers and parents view the home-school relationships; it will further develop meaningful collaboration that have long-term consequences for students’ academic motivation and achievement (Olivas, 2013).

A qualitative approach that analyzes existing evidence, concepts, and theories concerning the quality of home-school relationships from the teachers’ and the parents’ perspectives may help educational leaders develop strategies or interventions programs with the plan that more parents whose children attend urban elementary schools become more engaged (Kuperminc et al., 2008; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Theodorou, 2008). This study also seeks to help researchers fill the gap in present literature and integrate these aspects to better understand the complexity of relationships between parents and teachers from different lenses. Future studies that highlight the importance of building positive parent-teacher relationships between parent-teacher could provide further insight into measures that could increase parental engagement.

**Significance of Research Problem**

There is a growing recognition of the importance of building positive relationships between parents and teachers in raising the level of parental involvement in urban schools (Kuperminc et al., 2008; Redding et al., 2011; Swick, 2008; Theodorou, 2008). Teachers and parents share responsibility for the education of children (Epstein & Sanders, 2006) but, teachers’ relationships with parents are considered as a complex process that is collectively shaped by their experiences (Tam & Chan, 2009; Theodorou, 2008). Without an in depth-
knowledge of the needs and strengths of positive relationships between parents and teachers, educators may fail in creating a community of families, students, and teachers that serves as an additional support for children’s learning (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). Thus, the relationship between parents and teachers is necessary to study because the level of parental involvement may be predicted by the quality of these connections (Battistich et al., 1997; Booth & Dunn, 1996). If the quality of interaction between parents and teachers is based on conflicted points of views, the resulting experiences of both stakeholders will be unsatisfied and affect student’s learning and development (Turney & Kao, 2009).

**Focusing on socioeconomic status.** Detangling the wide range of factors affecting the family-school relationships and their effects on parental involvement is a complicated task (Battistich et al., 1997; Kuperminc et al., Redding et al., 2011; Valdes, 1996). But, it is very clear that the quality of relationships vary considerably depending on the socioeconomic status of the parents such as: occupational class and level of education (Lightfoot, 1978; Redding et al., 2011; Valdes, 1996). The relations between home and school appear to be less positive for working-class parents than for higher income parents due to specific stressors facing this population such as: structural inequalities, issues of social class and power, deficit-based propaganda, the school culture, teacher attitudes, and language differences (Ahmad, 2010; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Redding et al., 2011; Swick, 2008). Parent-teacher interactions targeting working-class parents for involvement call for a broader focus, especially that parental involvement is at the epicenter of policy (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Instead of taking the socioeconomic status of the parents into account, too often parental involvement policies ignore the particular needs of underrepresented groups leaving those parents and students farther behind
their higher income counterparts (De Carvalho, 2001). Too often, such parental involvement policies only serve to widen the achievement gap and create a tension between homes and schools (De Carvalho, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). As a result, many researchers have called for further research regarding involving parents in their children’s education (De Carvalho, 2001; De Gaetano, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Redding et al., 2011).

**Parent-teacher relationship at Palermo Elementary School.** The lack of parental involvement is salient at Palermo Elementary School (a pseudonym). The school is one of the seven Elementary public schools that operate in Methuen, MA and serve a high population of disadvantaged students (*Methuen Public Schools*, 2012). One administrator at Palermo Elementary School claimed that teachers may have effective strategies to involve parents; however, their views of effective involvement may not be what parents view as beneficial for effective home-schools relations. Thus, when considering parental involvement among parents at Palermo Elementary School, the role of relationships is tremendous and unmistakable. Positive relationships based on mutual communication and information sharing, create ongoing opportunities for both teachers and parents to view and share their approaches for better learning communities (Wright, 2009; Yanghee, 2009). This will result in a revolutionary change not only in parent-teacher relations but also will lead to better learning experiences for all children (Byfield, 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009).

**Positionality Statement**

According to Skelton (2001), positionality refers to sex, race, gender, ethnic, age, ability, cultural, political, and historical backgrounds, levels of education, all of which “have an impact on the ways we do our research and how the people we work with perceive us” (Skelton, 2001,
p.89). As a French teacher in a public school in Lebanon, MEA, with seven years of teaching experience in grades 7-12, I realized how important is to build positive relationships with parents that account for student’s success. Since then, I became very interested in discovering how teachers and parents experience this relationship and where the difficulties lay.

In 2005, I moved to the United States of America and I started my first career as a French teacher in one elementary school in MA. Being multilingual and from a Middle Eastern culture, at the beginning of my career in the state, it was hard for me to build rapport and communicate effectively with all parents. This was related to me coming from a single cultural background to a diversified cultural classroom. At my current school, Palermo Elementary School, school administrators acknowledge the importance of family involvement; they effectively address daily school problems and ensure that teachers are reaching out to parents. However, acceptance and acknowledgment are not always translated into implementation. Few parents are attending meetings and special events offered by the school committee, especially, those who do not have positive relationships with teachers. Yet, through the time I spent with these parents, it was clear to me that they care deeply about the education of their children. I hope that I reflected their experiences accurately as well as the experiences of teachers to show the love that they both have put into raising and teaching their children and students.

I believed that while parental involvement is widely recognized to be vital for student success, it was also essential that educators and parents know more about effective ways of building positive relationships, and engaging in the learning process. The goal for this research was to shed light on the different ideologies of both parents and teachers regarding the quality of their interrelationships with respect to how they both care for their children. This has helped me
understand how they both interact and communicate with one another to foster parental involvement in the school for the success of the students. As both a researcher and a teacher, I planned to consistently take detailed notes of my experiences and thoughts throughout this process as my analytic memos/reflexivity journal. I planned to educate myself about parent-teacher interactions approaches and treat all of my interviewees with an open mind and a positive attitude. It was also imperative for me to believe in the capacity of all parents and teachers to help their children meet high academic expectations. With this in mind, I made a conscious effort to set aside any opinions or other partialities throughout the research process.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships, with respect to how they both care for their children. The overarching question of this study was: How do both parents and teachers interact with each other and build rapportsto foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools? Using elements from Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction to frame the study, the focus of the study centered around three research questions that guided the interview protocol:

1. What are the alignments of parents’ and teachers’ hopes for their children?
2. What social and cultural factors do teachers and parents observe that influence the relations between families and schools?
3. Which types of involvement efforts do teachers and parents observe that help to establish and foster parent-teacher relationships?
**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research study was derived from the research-base on parent-teacher relationships and the application of Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction to parental involvement. The theory of social and cultural reproduction of Pierre Bourdieu makes the assumption that middle and upper-class parents have greater social and cultural capital giving them an advantage to promote school achievement of their children, and build positive relationship with teachers. The theory includes two major conceptual tools: cultural capital (e.g., education, language) and habitus (attitudes, beliefs and experiences) (MacLeod, 2009).

**The theory of “cultural capital”**. MacLeod (2009) defines cultural capital as “the general cultural background, knowledge . . . and skills that are passed from one generation to the next” (p. 13). According to Bourdieu (1973) children inherit cultural capital passively via exposure to their parents’ capital. The less cultural capital the parents have, the greater the challenges they will experience. In consonance with the positions of Bourdieu, researchers such as Theodorou, (2008) and Turney and Kao (2009) who examined the degree to which parent-teacher relationship can be thought as cultural capital found a clear connection between the cultural capital of parents and the kind of involvement that they pursue. This sometimes leads to differences in compliance between what a teacher wants and what parents are able to offer. They found that parents of middle and upper class have the ability to provide their children with a variety of educational supplements such as computers at home and various reading materials that help them acquire vocabulary and technological skills before arriving at school (Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Yanghee, 2009). In *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday*
Experiences of Young Children, Hart and Risley (1995) reported a clear difference in the way lower and middle-class parents engage their children. They found the number of words used by parents and their children during conversation varied significantly with disadvantaged children at 616, as compared to 1,251 words with working-class parents and 2,153 words used with children of high-income parents (p. 32).

The concept of “habitus”. The concept of habitus may be seen as close to the concept of culture but, in this case, the culture is embedded in children’s knowledge, and language, i.e., in what Bourdieu calls their habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 45). Habitus is defined as the sum of “attitudes, beliefs and experiences of those inhabiting one’s social world” (MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). In order to gain a complete understanding of the term habitus, many researchers such as Jager (2011) and Overstreet et al. (2005) studied the relationship between the habitus of parents and their contribution in the learning process. Their findings indicate that parents who are more familiar with the system of higher education and more convinced of its benefits, are therefore, more likely to stimulate their children to do well in school through several activities such as: helping their children with their homework, creating a positive learning environment, building positive relationships with teachers, and /or participating in school activities (Jaeger, 2011; MacLeod, 2009; Overstreet et al., 2005; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Cultural capital, habitus, and parental involvement. Although parents and teachers play a substantial role in every aspect of student learning, there are differences in the ways that parents and teachers perceive parent engagement (Lewis-Antoine, 2012). According to Bourdieu’s theory, the middle class culture is considered as the standard in the school context, and therefore, all other forms of culture are compared to this specific class. Bourdieu suggested
that even if parents have capital, and habitus, people working in schools such as administrators and teachers, make distinctions between the values, languages, and culture of wealthy parents versus the general cultural background, knowledge, and skills of those from distressed circumstances; so they cannot utilize the capital they have (Boudrieu, 1973). In *Ain’t No Makin’ It*, MacLeod (2009) demonstrates through the example of the different groups of boys living in a low-income housing project that cultural capital and habitus of an individual are extremely important in determining the person’s outlook on life and subsequent opportunities and achievements (MacLeod, 2009). MacLeod (2009) found that middle- and upper-class parents who share the same values as the school system are at an advantage, while the cultural capital of working-class parents is devalued within the context of the school. Educational leaders may not perceive the cultural capital of working-class parents and their children as valuable capital because it is different from the perceptions of the dominant culture (MacLeod, 2009). In fact, some parents think they are involved in their children’s learning but teachers have different conceptions about this involvement (Lewis-Antoine, 2012). Misconceptions leave parents and teachers blaming each other and leave parents feeling unappreciated (MacLeod, 2009).

**Relevance and purpose of the theory.** Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction offers some general predictions on the different perceptions related to the quality of parent-teacher relationships through its examination of the assumptions that underlie the mismatch, or incongruence between a family’s habitus and culture, and the dominant culture of schools. This focus is understandable when considering that: a) many parents are disenfranchised in the home-school relationship due to a wide variety of factors all affecting cultural and social capital such as, issues of language, and communication, poverty, and culture difference (Turney
& Kao, 2009), and b) teachers’ views of the quality of the home-school connection are influenced by a deficit perspective of socially vulnerable parents (Theodorou, 2008; Yanghee, 2009). However, the opinions and views of teachers working with working-class parents have not been thoroughly researched in education because the perspectives of effective collaboration are usually representative of middle-class parents (Yanghee, 2009). Therefore, a qualitative approach based on Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural reproduction allow researchers to fill the gap in existing studies on parent-teacher relationships as perceived by teachers and parents in their own words.

Bourdieu’s (1973) theoretical framework served two purposes. The first purpose was to help broaden the definition of parental involvement even in the presence of differences in perceptions of cultural and social capital. The second purpose was to understand the different views about the quality of parent-teacher relationships from the position of the teachers and parents. Therefore, conceptualizing parent-teacher relationships as a key element of social and cultural reproduction will allow educational leaders to better understand teachers’ and parents’ ideologies regarding the quality of their interrelationships with respect to how they both care for their children. It will also broaden the scope of viable intervention strategies for better school-family partnerships.

Conclusion

The purpose of this descriptive case study case was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships with respect to how they both care for their children. Chapter I “Introduction” described the rational for the problem that was researched in this study. The chapter also demonstrated the significance of the research
problem to the educational field, the contributions of Bourdieu’s (1973) theoretical framework, and presented an overview of the research study. Chapter 2 “Literature Review” maintained the process by presenting a literature review related the research questions. Chapter 3 “Methodology” described the research design of the study conducted. Chapters 4 “Research Findings” identified what emerged from the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 “Discussion of Research Findings” discussed the findings based on the review of the literature along with concluding remarks and recommendations for future research study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The United States is facing a future of increasing multicultural diversity and a projected growing population of students whose parents have financial or familial uncertainties. This country is challenged with a highly complex educational issue of how to improve the collaboration between parents and teachers (Mncube 2010; Yanghee, 2009; Theodorou, 2008). In particular, relationships between parents and educators in urban school settings are unlikely to flourish because of differences in perspectives (Tam & Chan, 2009; Theodorou, 2008). While teachers believe that many parents in urban areas do not fulfill their obligations regarding their children’s education, parents often avoid schools because they feel intimidated in interactions with teachers (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; MacLeod, 2009). If the quality of interaction between parents and teachers is undermined by ambivalent points of view, the resulting experiences of both stakeholders will be unsatisfactory, affecting the students’ learning and development (Yanghee, 2009; Brint, 2011). This literature review offers a framework for understanding the ideologies of both educators and parents regarding the quality of relationships between them in urban elementary schools, and the efforts that have been made toward better partnerships.

The literature review begins with an overview of what constitutes parental involvement. Additionally, parental involvement among families in urban areas is discussed. Then, a review of parental involvement programs is highlighted and evaluated. Also, the literature review examines the effects of family-school-community partnerships on parental involvement, family-school relationships, and the major factors and strategies that affect the development of effective relationships. A review of research studies that have explored the ideologies of educators and
parents begins to set the stage to determine the validity of studying parental involvement in urban elementary schools.

**Redefining Parental Involvement**

A common theme in the literature regarding parental involvement is the lack of understanding between parents and educators regarding what constitutes involvement (Christenson, 1999; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Lattimore, 2013). The law defines parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities,” including assisting their children’s learning at home and in school, and parents’ participation in the development and implementation of parental involvement practices (*NCLB*, 2004, p. 1). In the past, the schools dictated to parents how they should help their children, but with the passage of NCLB, the relationship between educators and parents has become increasingly sanctioned (Lattimore, 2013; Smith, 2005).

Today, schools are required “to establish a two-way means of communication” (Lattimore, 2013, p. 24). According to Davies (1991), parental involvement shifts from “parent focus to family focus, family to community agencies, school to home/neighborhood setting, eager parents to hard-to-reach families, teachers’/administrators’ agendas to family priorities, and deficit view of urban families to emphasis on inherent strengths of families” (p. 377). When two-way communication is established by the school, parents are more likely to feel comfortable interacting with teachers and become more supportive to their children’s academic attainment (Bauch, 1989; Taylor, 1999).
Inevitably, research concerning the definition of parent engagement has not been clear or consistent (Christenson, 1999; Seginer, 1983; Walberg, 1984). Parent engagement has been defined as representing a wide range of parental behaviors and practices, such as parental aspirations for children’s academic achievement (Bloom, 1980; Seginer, 1983), parents’ communication with children at home (e.g., Christenson, 1999; Walberg, 1984), parents’ communication with teachers about student progress (Epstein, 1995), and parents’ involvement in school activities (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). In all, there was a lack of cohesion in the definition of parental involvement, which led many researchers to develop frameworks centering on parent-teacher relations for defining meaningful school-family partnerships (Ahmad, 2010). These include: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory; the concept of the importance of the parents as a contribution in children’s academic achievement as well as parent-teacher relationships (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986), the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’ model of parental involvement, which is based on parental role construction and their sense of efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995, 1997), and Epstein’s model which explains how the connection between educators, parents, and communities may support student learning and success in school (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002).

One of the most widely cited frameworks of parental involvement from which scholars and researchers garner large portions of their insights is Epstein’s framework of six types of involvement (Altschil, 2011; Epstein, Sanders, Connors-Tadros, & Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, 1999; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Griffin & Steen, 2010; Lau et al., 2011). Joyce Epstein (2002) and her colleagues at the Center on Family, School, and Community at John Hopkins University have developed a useful framework of six types of
parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 34). Epstein et al.’s model is based on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which stresses the importance of home-school partnerships. Since parental involvement is multifaceted in nature, researchers have often referred to Epstein’s model when attempting to define or classify effective parental involvement practices (Mapp, 2002; Sanders, 2008; Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009; Wanat, 2010; Wright, 2009).

In his attempt to compare and contrast the views of parents and teachers on the importance of different categories of involvement, Wright (2009) explained the framework of Epstein et al.’s (2002) six categories of parental involvement and added parental expectations, in what Bourdieu (1973) calls habitus, as an additional form of engagement. Wright’s study contained new findings that overshadowed Epstein’s study. Interestingly, teachers rated the category of parental expectations the highest, while parents felt strongly about communicating and learning at home. Additionally, teachers defined parental involvement as participation in formal activities such as meetings and school related events, whereas parents defined involvement as working in informal home activities such as checking homework, reading to children, and listening to children read.

Yet, by focusing on finding ways to create partnerships rather than dwelling on the differences which may exist, educators and parents can collaborate successfully (Snell et al., 2009; Wanat, 2010). Epstein et al.’s (2002) ground breaking research on school-family partnerships remains the basic foundation for present research when defining parental involvement as the vehicle for building connections between schools and parents in urban areas (Wanat, 2010; Wright, 2009).
Parental Involvement in Urban Areas

Parents who experience socioeconomic disadvantage are typically poor and culturally diverse with limited English proficiency, or are non-English speaking with limitations in learning and understanding (MacLeod, 2009). As Bourdieu (1973) and numerous others point out, some people working in schools, such as administrators and teachers, consider middle-class parents more prepared to help their children succeed in schools compared to working-class parents (Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Stringfield et al., 1997; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Despite many pedagogical efforts to involve all parents in their children’s education, researchers found that parental involvement issues are complicated by diverse socio-cultural differences among teachers, students, and parents (Jaeger, 2011; Yanghee, 2009). In urban areas in particular, the role of educators in building positive relationships with parents is especially important because of the unique economic and sociological pressure that face some parents (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Broussard, 2003; Dauber & Epstein, 1991; Lareau, 1987). In fact, parents are a diverse group of people in terms of their education attainments, native language literacy, socioeconomic status, values, and cultural backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1973; Brint, 2011). Parents may be new immigrants, may not speak English, or may be unfamiliar with the American educational system (Brint, 2011). Yet, some educators and school personnel enter the field with a mindset that all parents have the same values and level of education, and are familiar with how schools work (Broussard, 2003; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

McWayne et al. (2004) and many other researchers argue that teachers, in particular, play an instrumental role in parental involvement when they take into consideration the different
stressors or circumstances faced by parents (Dauber & Epstein, 1991; Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 1987; MacLeod, 2009). Epstein (2001) illustrates that educators’ expectations must be realistic, given the multiple stressors that parents may be experiencing. In *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*, Epstein discusses in some detail the social context of parental involvement and parents’ ideologies in particular. Underpinning Epstein’s work is a study of the variables that influence parents’ decisions to take an active or a passive role in their children’s education. Interestingly, Epstein reported that teachers’ attitudes regarding the involvement of families are as important or more than parents background factors such as language, ethnicity, and social class in determining why and how parents choose to become involved.

On the other hand, Lareau (1987) asserts that occupational status, education, and income affect the way in which parents perceive their role in their children’s education. Conversely, Christenson (2002) reports that “what parents do to support learning (family process variables) predicts scholastic ability better than [who] families are (family status variables)” (p.6).

Even though parents in urban areas facing challenges related to socioeconomic factors might not be able to get involved in the same manner as middle- and upper-class parents, many of them have high aspirations for their children (MacLeod, 2009). Questions arise from these studies as to what educators can do to improve the relation with parents while at the same time refuting the notion that underrepresented parents do not place a high value on education (Crozier, 1998; Immerwahr, 2000). However, intervening effectively in the academic life of children is not the sole responsibility of teachers or parents, but rather is a shared concern between schools, parents and communities (Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Epstein, 2002).
The Effect of Family-School-Community Partnerships on Parental Involvement

Studies have demonstrated the lasting effects that successful school-family partnerships have on parental involvement, specifically in urban schools where there is a very large population of parents and students who have financial or familial uncertainties (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Arresola, 2011; Lo, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009). For schools to involve more parents in their children’s education, they must develop partnerships based on mutual respect “and implement programs that are carefully designed, with input from all stakeholders (Arresola, 2011; Lo, 2008). Using data from 423 parents at six high schools in Maryland, Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at the Center on Family, School, and Community at John Hopkins University found that “parental attitudes toward school are positively influenced by schools’ programs of partnership” (Epstein et al., 1999, p. 3).

Yet, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz (2001), and Payne (2007) note that schools may not always implement parental involvement programs in ways that reflect the needs, values, and abilities of diverse families. Trumbull et al. further argue that some schools that offer parenting techniques may not recognize cultural differences in child-rearing practices. Similarly, some parents may not possess the time or the skills to assist children with homework (Brint, 2011; Trumbull et al., 2001). Other parents come from cultures in which schoolwork is considered to be to the teacher’s responsibility (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1998). To be effective, involvement efforts must become more collaborative, more inclusive, and more culturally relevant (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Trumbull et al., 2001).

Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) posit that school reform initiatives such as English Language Learners (ELL) programs can facilitate communication with parents and students,
particularly those who have cultural and linguistic differences, as well as increase parents’ participation in or out of school activities. Because Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students and parents may feel a loss of connection with the school due to differences in their ethnicity, language, and culture, programs that address the individual needs of parents can foster their sense of belonging, thus encouraging them to develop partnerships with the school (Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Besides the ELL programs, researchers such as Lo (2008, 2012) have also explored other practices such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Schools and communities can use IEPs to encourage parents of students receiving special education services to become more involved in their children’s education (Lo, 2008; 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009). The majority of studies reported numerous barriers preventing parents from active participation in partnerships, such as the language barrier, lack of adequate interpretation services, and feelings of disrespect and alienation (Lo, 2008, 2012; Valdés, 1996).

For instance, Lo (2008) investigated the level of participation and experiences of five Chinese parents of children with disabilities in IEP meetings through observations and interviews. The results of Lo’s study indicates that Limited English Proficiency (LEP) parents who were not satisfied with the instructional and specialized services did not show a high level of participation in IEP programs. Parents also reported that language was the major barrier that prevented them from communicating effectively with professionals about their children’s progress. This finding is inconsistent with Cho and Gannotti’s (2005) qualitative examination of “20 Korean-American mothers’ perception of professional support in special education programs” (p.7). Cho and Gannotti (2005) reported that language was not a barrier for all of the
mothers interviewed as long as teachers and professionals showed willingness to take extra time to clarify any misunderstanding and to listen carefully to parents’ concerns. However, all mothers expressed the need for better translation and interpretation services.

Later efforts by Lo (2012) demonstrate that adequate translation and interpretation services are even more important for families of children with special needs “because parents are the advocates for their children and are the ones who can speak for their children regarding what services and supports are suitable to address their needs” (p. 19). Lo (2012) further argues that without proper translating services, parents’ participation in school meetings could be limited, making it difficult for schools to offer unique opportunities for all parents. Nevertheless, due to the complexity of relationships, researchers agree that teachers and parents who wish to forge meaningful and lasting connections express frustration at the low levels of success in creating effective home-school partnerships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

**Family-School Relationships; Trends and Barriers**

A positive relationship between home and school is a key construct in contemporary theories of parental involvement (Ahmad, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009). When parents experience a sense of belonging at school and supportive relationships with teachers, they are motivated to engage actively in their children’s education (Ahmad, 2010; Bauch, 1989; Bourdieu, 1973; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Taylor, 1999). Social scientists and researchers have focused primarily on the influence of parent-teacher relationships on educational outcomes, concluding that a positive parent-teacher relationship is essential for student success (Al-Shammari & Yawkey, 2008;
Altschul, 2011; Lau, et al., 2011; Moniac & Olivia, 2011). Yet very little attention was given to the processes through which those relationships are created and maintained (Ahmad, 2010; Brooks 2002; Crozier & Davies, 2007). Of particular interest to this investigation are findings that low-income parents are less likely than higher income parents to enjoy supportive relationships with teachers (Ahmad, 2010; Auerbach, 2007; Bourdieu, 1973; Connell et al., 1982; Crozier & Davies, 2007).

Studies that have examined family-school relationships among disadvantaged parents used two major approaches to frame their understanding of the complex interplay of schools and homes (Ahmad, 2010; Bourdieu, 1973; Connell et al., 1982, Crozier, 1998; Hughes et al., 2002; Immerwahr, 2000; Lareau, 1987; Oxford & Lee, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009). Some researchers blame the educational institutions themselves, claiming that schools make middle-class parents feel more welcome than working-class and lower-class parents (Connell et al., 1982, Hughes et al., 2002; Yanghee, 2009). In Making the Difference, one of ten books to win The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) Award, Connell et al. (1982) conducted a qualitative study of home-school relationships in Australia, arguing that working-class parents are “frozen out” of schools (p.76).

The second perspective for understanding the tension between parents and educators draws on the work of Bourdieu (1973) and the concept of cultural capital and habitus (Ahmad, 2010; Lareau, 1987; Lee & Bowan, 2006; Pena, 2001; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009). Researchers such as Lareau, (1987, 2001), Pena (2001), and others (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011) found that when there is a mismatch in cultural capital, these relationships become less constructive, making parental involvement harder.
There are a number of factors that affect the development of a smooth parent-teacher relationship. Focusing on family-school relationships, the majority of studies depict four major factors: (a) the degree of match between teachers’ and parents’ cultural capital and habitus, (b) influences on how the parents and teachers view their roles, (c) teachers’ and parents’ efficacy beliefs, and (d) parent and teacher communication (Ahmad, 2010; Bourdieu, 1973; Brint, 2011; Epstein, 1995, 2001, 2008; Ferrera, 2009; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Pena, 2001; Powell, 1989; Reed, Jones, Walker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2000).

The degree of match between teachers’ and parents’ cultural capital and habitus. Pierre Bourdieu (1973) defines cultural capital as “the structure of the distribution of instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (p.73). Bourdieu maintains that individuals who are rich in capital such as education and language have more opportunities to build ongoing relationships with members of the society (Bourdieu, 1973). According to Bourdieu, schools value the cultural capital of the dominant group and the knowledge of the upper and middle classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society. This belief may be embodied in the school culture influencing people’s knowledge, and perceptions in what Bourdieu calls their habitus (Bourdieu, 1973).

Researchers have empirically demonstrated that cultural capital and habitus intersect to influence parent-teacher relations in myriad ways for different class backgrounds (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; MacLeod, 2009; Monica & Olivia, 2011; Pena, 2001; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Walker & Maclure, 2005). Although their interpretations vary, most of these researchers found that the cultural capital valued in schools is
more congruent with the cultural capitals of middle- and upper-class parents (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Concerning social class and cultural capital, Lareau (1987, 2001) employed a combination of social class and cultural capital to throw light on the issues underpinning parent-teacher relationships. In a 1987 study, Lareau used cultural capital and social class as two theoretical tools to compare and contrast the way middle- and working-class parents use their cultural capital to establish relationships with educators. Based on a qualitative approach, Lareau interviewed parents, teachers, and principals from two schools located in two different communities reporting that an unequal distribution of and access to resources made middle-class parents better prepared to respond to teachers’ requests compared to their working-class counterparts.

As Lareau (1987) points out, “schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula” (p. 74) that closely match the middle- and upper-class knowledge. Lareau found that middle- and upper-class parents were already familiar with these social arrangements. Those parents utilized their cultural knowledge and resources into what Bourdieu (1973) calls cultural capital to effectively help their children as well as connect with teachers (Lareau, 1987). However, Lareau did not move beyond the discourse on the incompatibility of cultural capital between the middle-class and working-class parents; she did not provide a “broader understanding of the structural dynamics of cultural capital” that dictate how parents use their resources differently (Ahmad, 2010, p.86).

Yet Lareau’s (1987) findings resonate with similar literature that highlights the importance of cultural capital and habitus in shaping family-school relationships (Ahmad, 2010;
Brint, 2011; Lee & Bowan, 2006; Smith, 2009). Researchers such as Brint (2011) and Pena (2001) found some variation among parents from different socioeconomic positions in the degree to which they can utilize their cultural capital to build relationships with teachers. For instance, Brint notes that middle- or upper-class parents may have access to a computer at home and therefore can learn numerous computer-related vocabulary and technological skills before interacting with teachers. Those parents may have acquired cultural capital because computer-related vocabulary and technological skills are valued in the school setting (Brint, 2011).

On the other hand, although many working-class parents have an interest and desire to support the educational growth of their kids and establish good relationships with teachers, they may not be equipped in the same manner as their middle-class counterparts (Brint, 2011; Lee & Bowan, 2006; Pena, 2001; Smith, 2009). Pena (2001) investigates the involvement of Mexican American parents in schools and found that it was influenced by many factors including language issues, time constraint, level of parent education, and school staff attitudes. According to Pena, parents may bring some cultural knowledge such as using different vocabulary, perhaps in two languages (English and Spanish) during their communication with teachers. This cultural knowledge is very valuable to the parents, but does not necessarily carry any capital in the school context (Pena, 2001). As a result, they cannot use their cultural capital to connect with teachers, or for their children’s advantage (Pena, 2001). According to Walker and MacLure (2005) a mismatch in cultural capital and habitus can lower parental involvement to the minimum; in particular “parents who are disconnected from the school” (Walker & MacLure, 2005, p. 98).

In Linking Bourdieu’s Concept of Capital to the Broader Field: the Case of Family School Relationships, Lareau (2001) documented a social advantage from the congruence
between the parent’s habitus and culture and the school’s way of doing things. Laureau found a
difference in the way middle-class and working-class parents interact and operate with the
teachers and school personnel; working class parents were more likely to play a passive role
compare to middle-class parents who often socialized more with school staff. According to
Lareau, middle-class parents enjoyed a cultural capital and habitus that are more congruent with
the social group, giving them an advantage when communicating with school staff and teachers.

Lasky (2000), however, describes parent-teacher interactions as emotional practices that
“are shaped by influences of culture and relationship and inextricably interconnected elements of
status and power” (843). Following the notions of social class and power that underpins the
relationships between parents and educators, Lewis and Foreman (2002) conducted an
ethnographic study in two elementary schools in the US to examine why the relationships
between parents and schools were so different in the two schools. The researchers focused on the
informal interactions between homes and schools. They argue that “social class is not merely a
background social fact, but is an active part of everyday relations” (p.5), which is totally related
to the cultural capital and habitus that shape everyday interactions in myriad ways. The author
demonstrates that the complex process of home-school relationships “is often relational rather
than absolute, with neither teachers nor parents universally powerful or powerless” (p. 4). The
authors therefore presented a strong theoretical and analytical framework for the interplay that
exists between social class, power, and school culture, which in turn shape and structure various
aspects of communications and interactions between parents and teachers (Ahmad, 2010).

An analysis of the literature in this area reveals that the predominant focus of much of
research has been on the cultural capital and habitus in the middle-class and working-class
continuum (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Lasky, 2000; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Pena, 2001). Other researchers such as Crozier (1998) and Katz (1984) have explored parent-teacher relations and their dynamics from a number of dimensions. For instance, Crozier (1998) collected data from 120 parents and 29 teachers in two secondary schools, arguing that a “mismatch between teachers’ and many parents’ perception of educational roles and educational values” (p.131) also affects the quality of relationships.

Influences of how the parents and teachers view their roles. Teachers and parents share responsibility for the education of children (Getzels, 1974; Powell, 1989). Home and school have traditionally been viewed as two separate systems with “separate roles and responsibilities in educating children” (Marti & the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Research Group, 2000, p. 3). In the past 50 years, with the increased level of awareness about the importance of bridging the gap between homes and schools, there have been changes in how schools and parents have viewed and defined their roles in education (Davies, 1991; Lattimore, 2013). The roles of teachers and parents have developed primarily beyond the formal education arena; schools have focused more on reaching out to families (Davies, 1991; Ellis & Hughes, 2002). In turn, parents have doubled their efforts to become heard in schools (Davies, 1991).

Katz (1984) and other researchers (Getzels, 1974; Powell, 1989; Reed et al., 2000) have described and defined the differences in the roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents, claiming that they maintain different relationships with the same child. For instance, Katz (1984) developed a useful framework to distinguish between parenting and teaching. According to Katz, the teacher’s role is specific to schooling, while the parent’s role goes beyond schooling to include all aspects of the child’s life. Teachers are responsible for the education of all children in
the school setting for a specific period of time (Katz, 1984, Powell, 1989). In addition, the role of teachers is based on professional knowledge such as academic abilities and techniques to support student’s learning and behaviors (Getzels, 1974; Katz, 1984; Reed et al., 2000).

On the other hand, the role of parents is more subjective because it involves more than academic support (Katz, 1984). Parents have primary custody of and are responsible 24 hours a day for their child’s well-being (Katz, 1984). They are also morally responsible for their children’s actions (Katz, 1984). Given the difference in positions, it is essential to examine how teachers and parents view their respective roles in the education of their children (Lareau, 1987; Reed et al., 2000). Those views affect parent-teacher relationships (Ahmad, 2010; Keyes, 2000; Reed et al., 2000).

Noting the importance of the parent-teacher relationship to maintaining good home-school partnerships, Reed et al. (2000) presented a theoretical approach classifying teachers’ and parents’ roles into three categories: parent focused, school focused, or partnership focused. Reed et al. (2000) analyzed responses from 853 parents of 1st- through 6th-grade students enrolled in an ethnically diverse metropolitan public school system in the mid-southern United States. In the parent-focused model, while parents consider themselves as primarily responsible for their children’s educational outcome, teachers work closely with parents, giving them teaching roles (Reed et al., 2000). Unlike the parent-focused model, parents in the school focused-model consider schools solely responsible for the education of their children (Reed et al., 2000). Also, in the school-focused model, home and schools play different roles. Perhaps this view is more popular in elementary and middle schools (Keyes, 2000).
The third category of Reed et al. (2000) is the partnership-focused model. In this view, both parents and teachers believe that they need to work cooperatively (Davies, 1991; Epstein et al., 1999; Reed et al., 2000). Undoubtedly, what is evident from Reed et al.’s (2000) work and that of other researchers such as Keyes (2000) and Epstein et al. (1999) is that the partnership-focused model has evolved recently with the recognition of the significant benefits of partnerships to children, parents, and teachers. In this sense, Christenson (1995) wrote that “home-school collaboration is an attitude, not simply an activity; it occurs when parents and educators share common goals, are seen as equals, and both contribute to the process” (p. 253). It seems obvious from these research findings that how parents and teachers interact will vary based on the beliefs they hold (Ahmad, 2010; Keyes, 2000; Reed et al., 2000).

Lareau (2000) conducted an ethnographic study to compare family-school relationships between middle-class and working-class parents and found a difference between parents’ and teachers’ views of their roles. While teachers expected parents’ presence at the school, working-class parents believed that their role is to prepare their children for school through teaching them basic skills at home (Lareau, 2000). Parents did not believe that they should be checking homework, reading to their children, listening to children read, and attending school events (Lareau, 2000). Lareau concluded that the lack of common understanding of teachers’ and parents’ roles and responsibilities weakens parent-teacher relationships. Presumably, this is due to differing beliefs and expectations of parent-teacher roles (Lareau, 2000).

On the other hand, researchers such as DePlanty, Coulter-Kern and Duchane (2007) found in their survey that parents do know the activities expected of them, such as attending school events, but they may not know the benefits of such involvement. Also, research indicates
that parents from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often wait for
instructions from educators before interacting with the school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001;

In some cultures … teaming with the school is not a tradition. Education has been
historically perceived as the responsibility of the schools and family intervention is
viewed as interference with what trained professionals are supposed to do (p. 54).

Parents from such cultures may believe that their role is to raise “respectful, well-behaved human
beings and leave the academic life to schools” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 39).

Moreover, educators generally acknowledge the benefits of family involvement, but
report the need for information on how to effectively collaborate with parents. In their study of
why parents choose to become involved in their children’s education, Ferrera (2009) conducted a
survey that included more than 16,000 parents, administrators, and school staff in one district.
Ferrera (2009) indicated that although teachers and school personnel defined their roles
differently, they agreed on the need for professional development for teachers and school staff
about how to form partnerships with parents. Findings from these studies strongly resonate with
the research and writings of a number of scholars in the field of sociology of education who
stress the importance of understanding the practices and beliefs that affect parent-teacher
relations (Ahmad, 2010; DePlanty et al., 2007; Galinsky, 1990; Keyes, 2000; Reed et al., 2000;
Taylor, 1968).

The role of teachers’ and parents’ efficacy beliefs in parent-teacher relationships. In
addition to how parents and teachers view their roles, their self-efficacy beliefs also influence
what type of interactions they are likely to have (Reed et al., 2000). Research has shown that the
more teachers and parents have high efficacy levels, the more they are likely to succeed in their interactions (Garcia, 2000; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Other studies indicate that teachers and parents who experienced a positive relationship with each other or heard of others’ success stories are more likely to believe in their own efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Olivas, 2013).

On the other hand, teachers and parents who experienced a lot of roadblocks when trying to build relationships with each other may not feel efficient in their interactions (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Antunez, 2000; Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998; Galinsky, 1990; Greenberg, 1989; Langdon & Novak, 1998; Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 1998; Powell, 1998; Rich, 1998; Taylor, 1968). From the teachers’ perspectives, some feel unappreciated by parents (Galinsky, 1990). They claim that parents do not attend conferences or meetings, do not read the material they send home, do not accept home visitations, or are not willing to volunteer for school activities (Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998; Langdon & Novak, 1998). Some teachers feel that parents seem to lack interest in their children’s education or they perceive parents as too overwhelmed by their own problems to deal with their children’s education (Greenberg, 1989; Taylor, 1968). Others describe parents as always having opposing points of view (Langdon & Novak, 1998; Greenberg, 1989). Researchers such as Powell (1998) and Rich (1998) argue that teachers have more confidence when building relationships with parents who are familiar with teaching issues and who share important things about their children.

From the parent perspectives, Anderson and Minke (2007) conducted a quantitative study and surveyed parents of elementary students from an urban district study to analyze the nature of parents’ involvement in their children’s education. They categorized involvement into two
categories: involvement at home, such as reading to children, or involvement at school, such as volunteering at the school. Their findings indicate that parents decide to be involved in their children’s education based on their beliefs such as sense of efficacy, and the need for involvement from the school and their children (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Other studies indicate that parents may feel uncomfortable during their interactions with school officials whether that is due whether to language or cultural differences, or their previous experiences with school (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Lo, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Valdés, 1996). Also some studies have shown that parents perceive teachers as having an authoritative position, which prevents them from expressing their concerns (Comer & Haynes, 2014; Henry, 1996). Parents in those studies relate this lack of openness with teachers to the school climate or bureaucracy (Comer & Haynes, 2014; Henry, 1996).

Some parents, particularly those from distressed circumstances, perceive themselves as inadequately prepared to participate in a true collaboration with schools (Antunez, 2000; Onikama et al., 1998). The lack of clarity concerning what to expect at meetings and conferences also poses a challenge for educators as well as for parents (Valdés, 1996). In both teachers’ and parents’ scenarios, the research is not clear whether there is a lack of agreement because they have opposite points of view, they lack skills, they have different cultural beliefs, or they cannot effectively communicate with each other (Antunez, 2000; Keyes, 2000; Onikama et al., 1998).

**Parent and teacher communication.** Communication is one of the categories identified by Epstein (1995) to establish a good parent-teacher relationship (Epstein, 1995). Research suggests that successful home-school collaborations involve frequent and ongoing communication (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Christenson & Sheridan;
Horn, 2003; Lattimore, 2013; McGrath, 2007; Pattni-Shah, 2008; Patton, Jayanthi, & Polloway, 2001). Yet, in today’s mobile society, neither educators nor parents have enough time to communicate with each other and establish working relationships (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Comer & Haynes, 2014). Researchers such as Lattimore (2013) and Christenson and Sheridan (2001) distinguish between two modes of communication: one-way and two-way communication. The one-way communication is used to share information with parents about student progress and school events. This traditional way includes newsletters, communication books, and weekly home notes to update parents on their children’s progress, and report cards (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Lattimore, 2013).

The two-way communication occurs when teachers and parents dialogue. It includes options such as phone calls, voice mail, emails, parent-teacher conference, and follow-up after parent-teacher conferences that open further discussion if needed (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Horn, 2003; Lattimore, 2013). Research studies found the way that parents and teachers communicate explains how the partnership plays out in practice (Becker & Epstein, 1982; McGrath, 2007). Becker and Epstein (1982) conducted a large scale survey that included 3,698 elementary teachers from 600 schools in Maryland. They found that “virtually all teachers report that they talk with children’s parents and send notices home” (p. 87). In addition, most teachers reported that parents check and sign students’ homework. In terms of communicating with parents about different techniques to help them work with their children at home, the majority of teachers encouraged parents to read to their children at home (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Pattni-Shah (2008) wrote, “It is through communication that teachers and parents are able to learn from
each other and work together” (p.86). But this requires open lines of communication (Horn, 2003; Lattimore, 2013).

Although a two-way communication is essential for successful partnership, too often school-home communication is one way, with schools determining the information needed and sending it to parents (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Epstein, 2001, 2008; Horn, 2003; McGrath, 2007). This kind of communication does not always provide opportunities for meaningful involvement (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback). For instance, researchers such as Brewster and Railsback (2003) argue that parents from some cultures believe the notes sent from school are too “impersonal and may not be interpreted as genuine invitations for parents to participate” (p. 17).

Concerning this, Adams and Christenson (2000) stress the importance of establishing relationships “on a positive note” (p.482). McGrath (2007) recommends that teachers make the first contact to parents or send the first notes to praise their children’s success in class. This demonstrates to parents that the school cares about their children (McGrath, 2007). The important thing to reiterate here is that through positive, “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication” (Horn, 2003, p. 9), teachers or parents who need to express any concerns are more likely to work constructively because they already have established a relationship with each other (Adams & Christenson, 2000; McGrath, 2007).

On the other hand, the research found a strong link between teacher and parent contact (phone calls, conferences) and students’ academic problems and bad behaviors (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Comer & Haynes, 2014; Epstein, 2001, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Adams and Christenson (2000) cautioned that often
The only time parents have contact with the school is in crisis situations such as when the student has violated school regulations . . . with no previous contact . . . these situations often lead to non trusting interactions (p. 482).

This finding is consistent with Epstein’s finding (2008) that many teachers admit that they usually communicate with parents only in serious cases such as negative student behavior or achievements.

Earlier research by Epstein (2001) found that teachers and parents communicate more often when students run into difficulties, “to try to solve these problems” (Epstein, 2001, p. 54). Epstein (2001) gathered data from 82 teachers reporting that homework and behavior issues are addressed through communication between teacher and parent. Teachers in this study indicate that they initiate more contacts with parents whose children are “identified as having homework . . . or discipline problems” (Epstein, 2001 p. 248). This occasionally leaves the rest of the parents without convenient contact or a strategy to reach out to them. This could lead “schools . . . [to] unintentionally isolate the students’ parents” (Blackerby, 2005, p. 6). Ferrera (2009) discussed similar ideas in her study, reporting that parents would contact schools “more often if their children were in trouble of failing their subjects” (p. 133). Comer and Haynes (2014) concluded that some school policies discourage parents from spending time in classrooms and that teachers are expected to communicate with parents “only when a child is in trouble” (p. 1).

It is noteworthy that using communication constructively creates conditions that facilitate the effectiveness of home-school collaborations and maintain effective relationships based on mutual trust and confidence between parents and teachers (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Brooks, 2002; Horn, 2003). Based on a large scale survey of 1,234
parents and 209 teachers in a large suburban school district, Adams and Christenson (2000) found that both teachers and parents believed that improving home-school communication was a “primary way to enhance trust in the family-school relationship” (p. 491). This requires “schools to minimize the use of educational jargon and break down cultural and language barriers, and [parents to] maintain contact with the schools” (Horn, 2003, p. 18).

Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001), Turney and Kao (2009) report that the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services makes it difficult for parents to take ownership in the learning process, converse with teachers, and participate in school activities. Turney and Kao (2009) further argue that when parents and educators feel uncomfortable communicating with each other, the likelihood of supporting the educational growth of their respective children may decrease. Similarly, Lewis-Antoine (2012) emphasizes the importance of having access to interpreters and individuals on staff who speaks other languages. This will facilitate and maintain open lines of communication with parents and teachers (Brewster & Railsback; Turney & Kao, 2009). Otherwise, lack of communication on the part of both parents and schools can create tension and distrust (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Brooks, 2002).

Beside the language barrier, the research identified other impediments to effective parent-teacher communication (Ahmad, 2010; Crozier & Davies 2007; Dor, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McGrath, 2007; Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004; Reay, 1998; Rogers & Wright, 2008; Stier, Backes, & Lamb, n.d; Valdés, 1996; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007). For instance, researchers such as Ahmad (2010) and many others (Crozier & Davies 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004; Reay, 1998) discussed parental communication from the lenses of
cultural capital that informs their habitus. Findings from these studies indicate that the economic status of parents and their cultural and educational backgrounds appeared to have important implications for parental communication with teachers. Ahmad (2010) posits that since parents have an educationally disadvantaged position, some of them may feel uncomfortable and intimidated when visiting the school site and conversing with teachers regularly about aspects of school life (Ahmad, 2010). Also, some parents feel that teachers are not clear in their communication efforts (Valdés, 1996).

Valdés (1996) reported in her qualitative study that “parents might not know the appropriate ways to communicate with the teachers, that they might feel embarrassed about writing notes filled with errors, and that they might not understand how to interpret their children’s report cards” (p. 214). Valdés’s findings (1996) resonate with similar literature that supports the premise that a lack of education may cause parents to be intimidated in interactions with teachers. However, Valdés and others (Ahmad, 2010; Epstein, 2001) have been instrumental in furthering the concept of establishing and facilitating the collaboration with parents through understanding their needs and concerns. Undoubtedly, findings from these studies provide a vivid description of the underlying factors that hinder the dialogue between parents and teachers.

Other researchers, such as Rogers and Wright (2008), cautioned that many times parents and teachers count on each other to establish a relationship and initiate the dialogue. Also, they may not agree on the way of communication (Rogers & Wright, 2008). Based on a mixed approach, Rogers and Wright collected data from teachers and parents reporting that teachers strongly prefer to use email for communication, while parents prefer a phone call, newsletter, or
note. Rogers and Wright further argue that parents do not use technology to communicate with schools because they either do not have access to the internet at home or they do not have the skills needed to use the technology to communicate.

From the teacher’s side, even though most teachers greatly value the importance of communicating with parents, they face many challenges (Dor, 2012; McGrath, 2007; Stier, Backes, & Lamb, n.d; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007). They may, in turn, feel uneasy about communicating with parents (Stier et al., n.d). They may feel “pressured to always have to say the right things in the eyes of the parents . . . who may scrutinize their teaching ability” (Stier et al., n.d., p. 4). Wadsworth and Remaley (2007) explained it best when they said that keeping parents happy is often intimidating for teachers. Those feelings can minimize teachers’ correspondence with parents (Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007).

Researchers such as Dor (2012) assert that correspondence with parents is also affected by other factors. Based on a semi-structured interview, Dor (2012) compared the attitudes of teachers with school counselors toward parents’ involvement in elementary schools. Dor (2012) found many challenges faced by teachers resulting in ambivalent relations with parents. Unlike counselors who “mostly interact with individuals or small groups” (p. 931), teachers’ working conditions included “responsibility for large classes” (p. 931). In addition, some teachers expressed “personal emotional difficulty” (p. 932) in their interaction with parents such as “criticism, ungratefulness, lack of appreciation, and miscommunication” in relation to the way some parents treated them (Dor, 2012, p. 929). Other teachers had a hard time communicating openly and regularly with some parents because parents “were not eager to open and share” according to the teachers (Dor, 2012, p. 929).
On the other hand, teachers whose parents trusted them, especially during one-to-one interactions, felt confident to communicate openly with parents (Dor, 2012). These findings are consistent with those in previous studies, which also found that communication with parents is connected to teachers’ positive feelings, such as job satisfaction (Christenson & Cleary, 1990), and confidence (Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Using these parameters, McGrath (2007) reported that when parents call the school director directly, stepping over the authority of teachers, this can diminish the level of trust between them. Lareau (1987) encouraged faculty to initiate contact with parents and to be notified if anything happens at home that could affect children’s learning. The majority of studies advocate for two-way communication as a stepping stone for meaningful partnerships (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Dor, 2012; Epstein, 2001, 2008; Horn, 2003; Lareau, 1987; McGrath, 2007).

**Meaningful partnerships.** Beside two-way communication, researchers propose other conditions that are necessary for meaningful involvement (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Harris, 2011; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Liontos, 1992; Lo, 2012). For instance, Ellis and Hughes (2002), authors of *Partnerships by Design*, contend that building school-family-community partnerships have to be “meaningful to all parties” (p. 12). Ellis and Hughes present a partnership model that could assist educators in understanding the complexity of relationships with parents. This model depends on “parents and staff”

- Respecting and valuing [parents’] diverse contributions, and integrating them into the life of the school;
- taking an active interest in the well-being of each child, and school staff members taking an interest in the well-being of each child’s family as an extension of the child;
• encouraging parents to assume multiple roles as supporters, ambassadors, teachers, monitors, advocates, and decision makers;
• not confining [effective] parental involvement to activities that take place in the school building” (p. 5).

A better understanding of the nature of parental involvement will lead to a more collaborative partnership between all stakeholders in education. The work of Ellis and Hughes (2002) conveys the difference between parental involvement and partnerships, stating that the concept of partnerships is wider than the idea of parental involvement. While parental involvement consists of “a specific set of activities performed by a certain set of participants, partnerships allow for a wider set of [more meaningful] activities to be performed by a larger set of partners” (p. 26). Ellis and Hughes further argue that educators should adopt a “customer service philosophy” based on collaborative relationships among the four major stakeholders in education: students, parents, community members, and school staff. The purpose of this approach is to make sure that parents, community members, and students feel “welcome at school,” school staff “is courteous and helpful,” and educators are fulfilling their obligations by treating parents and students with “respect” (p. 6). By doing that, all partners will forget the attitude of we don’t want to work together, but we have to (Ellis & Hughes, 2002).

While Harris (2011) argued that it is the responsibility of parents to demonstrate the need for meaningful involvement at home, Epstein and Sanders (2006) found that teachers, parents, and the public all must take “leadership roles” in increasing student learning (p. 34). Other researchers such as Lo (2012) found that meaningful involvement necessitates a “culture that values individualism, equality, and the need to exercise one’s rights” (p. 15). But these values are
not always recognized by families from diverse cultures (Hughes et al., 2002; Lo, 2008). This could make the process of building school-family-community partnerships even more complicated, preventing those parents from participating successfully in partnership programs (Hughes et al., 2002; Lo, 2008). Likewise, Bryan and Henry (2012) noted that the process of building school-family-community partnerships is “infused with the principles of democratic collaboration, empowerment [and] social justice” that foster collaboration (p. 411).

Furthermore, Liontos (1992) indicates that it is essential to take into consideration certain beliefs about parents when addressing and implementing parental involvement policies and practices such as the following:

1) “All families have strengths.

2) Parents can learn new techniques.

3) Parents have important perspectives about their children.

4) Most parents really care about their children.

5) Cultural differences are both valid and valuable” (pp. 30-33).

To synthesize the general ideas that emerged in this strand of the literature, the purpose of meaningful involvement between parents and educators is to improve student learning through establishing better parent-teacher relationships (Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Liontos, 1992).

**Summary.** This review includes historical and current studies exploring the following areas: (a) the definition of parental involvement as well as different typologies centering on parent-teacher relations for defining meaningful school-family partnerships, (b) parental involvement among disadvantage families in urban areas, (c) parental involvement programs, (d) the effects of family-school-community partnerships on parental involvement, and e) the major
factors and strategies that affect the development of effective relationships. Commonalities were found between research methods and research techniques. Data collected through the use of the quantitative method focusing on experimental design forms the majority of previous studies. Epstein et al. (1999), DePlanty et al. (2007) and Crozier (1998) conducted surveys and found that the motivation of parents and teachers to foster meaningful partnerships increase with more parental involvement policies and practice.

On the other hand, Ahmad (2010), Valdés (1996) and Lareau (2000), using a descriptive analysis established that despite the efforts of NCLB and federal mandates, the gap in relationships between teachers and parents in urban elementary schools has not been lessened.

When it comes to the topic of the complexity of relationships between parents and educators, the majority of studies drew on the work of Bourdieu (1973) and the theory of cultural capital and the concept of habitus (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Crozier, 1998; Lareau, 1987; 2001; Lee & Bowan, 2006; Pena, 2001; Ranson et al., 2004; Reay, 1998; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009). Most scholars will readily agree that the cultural capital valued in schools is more congruent with the cultural capital of middle- and upper-class parents (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; Yoso, 2005). Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of how cultural capital and habitus affect various aspects of communications and interactions between parents and teachers. Whereas some are convinced that the economic status of parents and their cultural and educational backgrounds appear to have important implications for parental communication with teachers (Ahmad, 2010; Crozier & Davies 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Ranson et al., 2004; Reay, 1998), others maintain that how teachers and parents interact and communicate will vary based on the beliefs they hold (Crozier, 1998; Keyes, 2000; Reed et
al., 2000). For instance, in his qualitative analysis, Ahmad (2010) posited that the lack of common understanding of teachers’ and parents’ roles and responsibilities weakens parent-teacher relationships after conducting and analyzing data gathered in face-to-face semi-structured interviews with both teachers and parents.

By choosing these methods, researchers demonstrated through numerical data predictor variables (e.g. family socioeconomic factors, teachers’ and parents’ motivational beliefs about involvement) that affect the quality of parent-teacher relationships (Crozier, 1998; DePlanty et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 1999; Ferrera, 2009; Reed et al., 2000; Turney & Kao, 2009). Researchers also demonstrated a desire to establish meaningful involvement and support after interpreting open-ended teachers’ and parents’ responses; adding to the current body of knowledge and allowing for continued research and further considerations in parental involvement (Ahmad, 2010; Lewis & Foreman; 2002; Liontos, 1992). The findings supported the occurrence of a gap in relationships between teachers and parents from distressed circumstances at the elementary school level, demonstrated by lack of consistent communication (Ahmad, 2010; Dor, 2012; Sheldon, 2003).

In the discussion of the importance of communication in shaping family-school relationships, the debate has moved to a further controversial issue. On the one hand, Rogers and Wright (2008) argued that many times parents and teachers count on each other to establish a relationship and initiate the dialogue. Or, they may not agree on the way of communication (Rogers & Wright, 2008). On the other hand, Epstein (2001) and Ferrera (2009) contended that parents and teachers often communicate with each other only in serious cases such as negative student behavior. Some researchers such as Brewster and Railsback (2003) and Brooks (2002)
have maintained the premise that a lack of two-way communication on the part of both parents and teachers can create tension and distrust.

The literature review presented various factors sustaining the need for additional research in the area of parental involvement in urban elementary schools. One factor from the review provided evidence on the limited success of previous government intervention strategies for parental involvement including the NCLB (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; De Carvalho, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Gomez & Greenough, 2002; Jaeger, 2011; Lattimore, 2013; Payne, 2007; Smith, 2005; Trumbull et al., 2001; Yanghee, 2009). Another factor revealed a lack of research concerning the barriers to effective parent-teacher relationships (Ahmad, 2010; Connell et al., 1982, Crozier, 1998; Hughes et al., 2002; Immerwahr, 2000; Lareau, 1987; Oxford & Lee, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009). The final factor concentrated on the restricted investigation as to how teachers and parents can communicate and work in a collaborative partnership so that they both have the tools and support they need to help their children develop (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Hughes et al., 2002; Lontos, 1992; Lo, 2008).

Investigative searches through relative literature established a foundation for conducting further research regarding the relationships between educators and parents, especially in urban elementary schools. Therefore, future qualitative approaches based on a descriptive case study may extend the existing literature on parent-teacher relationships by generating a model for elementary teachers to use to establish and facilitate home-school partnerships.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of literature with respect to teachers’ and parents’ ideologies of the quality of their relationships between them in urban elementary schools. The
review exposed several findings: A gap in parent-teacher relationships continues to present a problem for many elementary schools in urban areas (Ahmad, 2010; Dor, 2012; Sheldon, 2003). Many times, teachers and parents come to the table with negative stereotypes of one another, which fosters distrust in relationships (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Brooks, 2002; Horn, 2003; Taylor, 1968). Besides the lack of trust between parents and teachers, the literature indicates other barriers for effective relationships related to cultural capital and habitus (Ahmad, 2010; Brint, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2001; MacLeod, 2009; Monica & Olivia, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009; Walker & MacLure, 2005; Yoso, 2005), social class and power (Lasky, 2000; Lewis & Foreman, 2002), social factors (e.g. time constraint, working conditions) (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Comer & Haynes, 2014; Dor, 2012; Pena, 2001), cultural and linguistic challenges (Brewster & Railsback, 2012; Lasky, 2001; Lo, 2008, 2012; Pena, 2001), ambivalent perceptions of educational roles and values (Antunez, 2000; Getzels, 1974; Powell, 1989; Reed et al., 2000; Trumbell et al., 2001), negative feelings (Dor, 2012; Galinsky, 1990; Stier et al., n. d.; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007), self-efficacy beliefs (Garcia, 2000; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Onikama et al., 1998; Reed et al., 2000), gaps in communication (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Epstein, 2001, 2008; Horn, 2003; McGrath, 2007), and the school climate and bureaucracy (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Henry, 1996).

Additionally, the literature review provided a number of proven effective strategies for meaningful partnerships, such as fostering a school culture based on mutual respect and openness (Ellis & Hughes, 2002), maintaining open lines of communication with parents and teachers (Brewster & Railsback, 2012), implementing a two-way communication (Adams & Christenson,
establishing relationships “on a positive note” (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 482), providing multilingual translation services (Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Lo, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009) and implementing parental involvement policies and practices which address the needs and values of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Davies, 1991; Gomez & Greenough, 2002; Trumbull et al., 2001).

The present literature review provided an advanced knowledge about the major impediments that hinder parent-teacher relationships. These findings could be widely used to develop strategies and parental intervention programs for teachers and parents to promote a nurturing environment. However, the results from this literature review showed that the barriers for effective partnerships are numerous (Christenson, 2002; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009; Trumbull et al., 2001), necessitating future research.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodologies that will be used to conduct this qualitative descriptive case study. Chapter 3 details the design and the performance of exploring teacher’s and parent’s ideologies regarding The purpose of this study was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships in urban elementary schools, with respect to how they both care for their children.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships in urban elementary schools, with respect to how they both care for their children. It was a qualitative descriptive case study. A qualitative approach helps the researcher to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Specifically, the overarching question of this study was: How do both parents and teachers interact with each other and build rapport to foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools? Using elements from Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction, the interview protocol of this study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the alignments of parents’ and teachers’ hopes for their children?

2. What social and cultural factors do teachers and parents observe that influence the relations between families and schools?

3. Which types of involvement efforts do teachers and parents observe that help to establish and foster parent-teacher relationships?

This chapter describes the methodology for this study. The research purpose and questions are restated, above, as a basis for describing how they relate to the selected study methodology, design, and tradition. This chapter also describes the intended study participants, the ways that they will be recruited, the process of obtaining access to the study location, the data collection techniques, the data storage techniques, and the analysis procedures. Also, it describes
the strategies that were used to increase the trustworthiness of the study and to protect human subjects. Finally, it identifies the potential limitations of this research study.

**Research Methodology**

Given the nature, scope, and depth of the research questions stated above, a social constructivist approach guided the research. This paradigm of inquiry required an in-depth exploration of the relationships between parents and teachers in their respective environments of home and school. A paradigm of inquiry is defined as a “belief system, world view, or framework that guides research in a field” (Willis, 2007, p. 8).

Butin (2010) posits that, within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, reality is created and interpreted through conversations and interactions between the researcher and the population being studied. According to Butin (2010), the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the conceptual framework behind studies that explore, describe, review, or evaluate a phenomenon, answer *how* and *what* questions, and tell a story. The method of study in this paradigm was qualitative; the investigator may have chosen to create a tentative hypothesis that has changed as new information was discovered (Butin, 2010; Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Design**

The research design that was adopted was qualitative in nature. A qualitative approach either involves an interpretation of the natural world or explains a natural social phenomenon without disrupting the status quo of the phenomenon’s environment (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) also posits that, in all qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary individual who collects data and interprets the study results. According to Creswell (2012), the goal of a qualitative study is to explore human experiences and perceptions; it does not involve testing a
hypothesis. Therefore, a qualitative design was an ideal approach for addressing the research questions of this study. It allowed me to gauge teachers’ and parents’ views on the quality of their interrelationships in urban schools.

**Case Study**

A descriptive, qualitative single case study was used for this research. According to Creswell (2007),

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information… and reports a case description and case-based themes (p. 73).

This research tradition has the ability, in other words, to provide answers to *how* or *why* questions (Yin, 2009). In a qualitative case study, researchers answer their posited questions by interviewing participants and linking the data to determine emerging themes (Creswell, 2002). Yin (2003) asserts that descriptive case studies allow researchers to review a majority of the factors affecting a group of persons. In addition, qualitative research focuses on a specific issue in a specific location (Yin, 2009). This qualitative single case study has focused on the relationships between parents and teachers at Palermo Elementary School. Since the purpose of this study was to explore both teachers’ and parents’ ideologies regarding the quality of their interrelationships, a descriptive, qualitative case study format was appropriate.

Most researchers agree that there is no single strategy or design for conducting social research. Many seem to have a general consensus that decisions about research design and tradition should be based on the idea of “fitness for purpose” (Briggs & Coleman, 2007, p. 8;
Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 73). With respect to this investigation, case studies allow researchers to explore organizations in the context of the real world, investigating concrete issues by focusing on specific phenomena within the organizational context (Yin, 2009).

Given that the purpose of this research was to study the relationships between parents and teachers, using the format of a descriptive, qualitative single case study allowed me to do the following: (a) explore effectively the in-depth meanings and structures of the participants’ attitudes and practices, (b) make a connection between the research objective and findings derived from the data, and (c) describe the most common themes that reflect teachers’ and parents’ ideologies of parent-teacher relationships in urban elementary schools (Yin, 2003). A qualitative case study uses a method of inductive reasoning that proceeds from particular to general ideas (Yin, 2003). In addition, the directions of the issue that shape a study often emerge during data collection and analysis, rather than from an a priori research plan (Yin, 2003). This type of research tradition was also an excellent fit for being used along with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm of inquiry, since the proposed research questions were all how- and what-type questions (Butin, 2012, Yin, 2003).

**Sample Selection and Strategy**

Maxwell (2005) states the typical manner of choosing individuals in qualitative studies is called “purposeful selection” or “purposeful sampling” (p. 50). This method is a requirement when using a small sample size, as it ensures that the individuals being studied are representative of a larger population. Maxwell (2005) suggests that purposeful sampling allows researchers to be confident that the study findings represent the average members of the studied population. I used a purposeful sampling to conduct interviews with five teachers and five parents from one
elementary school in Massachusetts. According to Creswell (2012), 10 is an adequate sample size for interviews in a qualitative study. The teachers interviewed were both male and female. They were from a variety of age groups, socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, and races. They also met the following criteria:

1) Teachers have taught an elementary class in which at least 40% of the students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

2) Teachers have participated in teacher-family partnership programs and will show willingness to participate in this research study.

3) Teachers have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in urban elementary schools. Podsen (2002) contends that teachers who have taught for at least five years may be considered “teacher specialists” who have acquired the necessary skills to “seek more in-depth understanding of students and their learning needs” (p. 25).

Parents were recruited based on the criteria that their children are eligible for a free or reduced lunch. They were both male and female, from various age groups, educational backgrounds, and races. Also, parents were chosen based on their willingness to be candid, to offer insights into understanding parent-teacher relationships, and their availability to participate in interviews during the study process. The criterion sampling strategy was utilized because it requires participants to have experience with the case under investigation (Creswell, 1998).

**External validity.** Creswell (2012) suggests that external validity may pose an issue in qualitative research studies. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), external validity is the ability to apply the research findings and conclusions from a study conducted on a sample population to a larger population. This study was conducted in one elementary school in
Massachusetts and involved five teachers and five parents. However, my goal, however, was to select an adequate number of participants to conduct an in-depth study that has resulted in rich data and will address the three research questions. Creswell (2012) posits that, in qualitative studies, researchers need to provide sufficient and rich descriptions of human experiences and perceptions. Validation means that a study should “raise new possibilities, open up new questions, and stimulate new dialogue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 205). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (2005) recommended that sampling should be conducted only to the extent of saturation and include enough participants to understand the phenomenon of interest. As mentioned above, Creswell (2012) posits that 10 is an adequate sample size for interviews in a qualitative study. In addition, limiting the number of interviewees to 10 was necessary due to the lengthy, in-depth interviews and conversations as a part of the data collection.

Context

Palermo Elementary School is one of the seven Elementary public schools that operate in Methuen, MA and serve a high population of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (Methuen Public Schools, 2012). Given my experience as a teacher in Palermo Elementary School, I decided to conduct my research study at this site because in the past few years, it had made extra efforts to involve parents. Teachers have an immense responsibility to make connections with parents in an effort to improve student success. They recognize the need for parental involvement within the educational system itself as well as in the home. In turns parents have a definite aspiration to help their children succeed in schools but they might not know the exact avenues of how to accomplish that goal. Sometimes, parents do not attend planned conferences or fail to make contact with teachers. Based on this knowledge, I thought that
Palermo Elementary School was an ideal site to conduct my study. At the beginning, I felt somehow nervous about studying parent-teacher relationships in one school setting, but, I thought that Palermo Elementary School would provide the opportunity to look at one kind of school and the efforts it made to build better relationships with parents. According to Creswell (2012), transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative viewpoint, the researcher can improve the transferability of a qualitative work by doing an intensive work of describing the research context and the assumptions that are related to the research (Creswell, 2012). Another strategy that was used to improve the transferability of this study is referred to as “member checking.” In fact, all of the interview transcriptions were sent back to the interviewees for verification and the confirmation of identified themes (Creswell, 2012).

**Recruitment and Access**

The study took place in one elementary school in Massachusetts. As six-year faculty member, I have access to the site and met with the administrators – per the IRB approval – to discuss access to teachers and parents for this research project. After successfully gaining IRB approval from Northeastern University, the researcher started the actual process of data collection. The initial key informants were the school supervisor and two members of the registrar’s office. The researcher called each informant to explain the study, asking him or her to provide referrals for teachers based on the research criteria. This was a case of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). A research study advertisement with information regarding the study was distributed to all elementary teachers (Appendix H). Interested teachers were able to contact me via mail, email, or in person to take part in this study. Informed consent forms were handed, mailed or emailed to
all interested teachers who had met the research criteria (Appendix B). This was followed by contacting and recruiting five parents based on the research criteria as well as their willingness to participate in the research study. Only five teachers have been chosen based on the research criteria because the study site was small and had only 15 elementary teachers elementary. Selected teachers were given the location, date, and time of the interviews, and they all submitted their signed consent forms on the days of their interviews.

In addition teachers were asked to recommend parents for interviews. Research study advertisements were distributed to parents as they entered Palermo Elementary School in the morning for parent conferences, student drop-off, parent pick-up, and school visits from 7 a.m.-9 a.m. and again in the afternoon from 12-1 p.m. for 2 weeks (Appendix I). Parents were most accessible during these times. Formal letters were sent to interested parents inviting them to take part in the study (Appendix A). This was followed by contacting and recruiting five parents based on the research criteria as well as their willingness to participate in the research study. A sample of the formal letter that was sent is included in Appendix A.

Per IRB requirements, all participants were asked to sign a participant consent form (Appendix B). This form was required before conducting research with human subjects, as mandated by IRB offices located at many higher education institutions (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012). All of the participants signed this informed-consent form before participating in the open-ended interviews (Creswell, 2012). The IRB form also included an option for the study participants to opt out of the study at any time; it stated that all information collected will be kept confidential and that the investigator will not intend to inflict any harm (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012). Some demographic characteristics were
requested, including information about gender, age, race, ethnicity, and education. It is imperative that the backgrounds, experiences, and views of teachers and parents be studied so that commonalities can be discovered. Participant demographic questionnaires are included in both Appendices C and D. Creswell (2012) posits that ethically, it is vital to keep the names of study participants confidential by giving them pseudonyms. Therefore, the real names of the participants as well as the actual name of the school in any of the published research results were not used. Pseudonyms were used instead.

**Data Collection**

For the purpose of this research, I used three forms of data collection (a) open-ended interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) a focus group. The three data sets were designed to gather data specific to the ideologies of educators and parents, including how educators and parents view their interrelationships in urban elementary schools. These three data sets were expounded throughout Bourdieu’s (1973) cultural capital theoretical framework. The data was collected, transcribed by, REV.com, and analyzed based on a linear logic model (Yin, 2009, p. 150). The linear logic model has helped in determining whether parental involvement practices are producing their intended outcomes or diminishing the barriers to effective parent-teacher relationships.

**Open-ended interviews.** According to Yin (2009), one of the most important sources in case study information is the interview (p. 106). Open-ended interviews were the first phase of this study’s data collection. The interviews were considered the primary source of data collection when answering the three research questions. In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five teachers and five parents, allowing them to personally give voice to what
they believed were the challenges and successes of building positive parent-teacher relationships. All interviews were conducted face to face allowing the development of a positive working relationship with participants. Semi-structured interviews allow for specific data collection and the ability to pursue more data (Creswell, 2012). Also, semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to learn more about people’s experiences and views in depth (Creswell, 2012).

Furthermore, Merriam (2009) recommends that the interview questions should be somewhat open-ended. This method allows the interviewee to speak freely and openly. It also gives the interviewee the flexibility to draw connections, rather than just answering the questions that will be addressed. Using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed me to break the ice at the beginning of the interview and ask for more open-ended questions. According to Creswell (2007), this style requires the researcher to have a few planned topics of discussion in mind and a method for asking follow-up questions. The interview protocol instrument followed this format and consisted of main questions, prompts and follow-up questions. In this study, the goal was to understand how teachers and parents interact and communicate with each other in their respective environments. In summary, semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study because of the flexibility of their structure.

The interview guide consisted of 15 open-ended questions. Each interview has lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. For consistency, the same questions were asked of all the teachers and all the parents. Follow-up phone calls were used to clarify any statements or misunderstandings. All follow up interviews were conducted by speaker telephone. Each interview was digitally recorded on two devices, transcribed word for word, then coded and analyzed for emergent themes using MAXQDA 11. All follow up interviews were conducted by speaker telephone.
Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommend that the transcriptions should be completed immediately after the interview and that everything on the digital audio be typed word per word. It usually takes three to four hours to transcribe a one-hour interview (Creswell, 2012). The Interview Guides for both teachers and parents are attached as Appendix E and F.

**On-site observation, field notes.** In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews, on-site observation was a useful source for obtaining ideas of how the school fosters collaboration between parents and teachers. According to Creswell (2012), this method of data collection helps the researcher to record personal thoughts, observations, reflections, and feelings about the interview. Therefore, field notes were taken during all field observations. Yin (2009) described field notes as a useful source of data collection because of the following criteria: (a) They record individual behaviors, (b) they contain full, detailed notes with personal observations, (c) they inform about the influence of the physical environment and, (d) they have the ability to capture the differences between what people perceive and what they actually do. However, in order to avoid taking attention away from the study participants during the interview process, however, the field notes were minimized (Creswell, 2012).

**Focus group.** A focus group was selected as the third and final data set. The data that were collected from the open-ended interviews and the field notes were analyzed to help inform the questions for the focus group. More precisely, six of the 10 participants agreed to participate in a focus group interview to validate and confirm the themes and findings that have emerged in the two previous data sets. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), a focus group allows participants to “piggy-back” on the comments of others, adding “richness to the dialogue that could not be achieved through a one-on-one interview” (p. 1).
The meeting of the focus group took place in a secluded conference room or at a convenient off-campus location. This way, participants had the time and space to share and discuss their opinions and beliefs about their interrelationships. The questions for the focus group (Appendix G) were created based on the results and themes of the first two data sets.

The focus group was used as a means of member-checking. Prior to the formation of the focus group, I sent each participant in the focus group an email with the transcriptions and findings from the first two data sets, allowing the participants to check the transcriptions for accuracy. The participants were encouraged to confirm or revise the document based on their views. They were able to further discuss the document with me, if needed. Upon review of the data, each participant confirmed that the findings of the data collection were clear and reflected their ideologies about parent-teacher relationships at Palermo Elementary school. The participants of the focus group received the transcriptions and findings, again to check for accuracy.

Finally, the various data collected from the three data sources were triangulated using “corroborating strategies”; this allowed the results of the study to be supported by more than one source of evidence and inform “one another through the data collection process” (Yin, 2009, p. 116). Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that, “triangulation is a mode of improving the probability that the findings and interpretations of the study will be found credible” (p. 305).

**Data Management and Storage**

In order to assure the confidentiality of the study data, the audio files and transcriptions were stored in two different locations. Following Creswell’s (2012) suggestions, one of the locations was a computer hard drive. Another storage location was one personal flash drive.
Confidentiality was maintained by securing all data materials in a locked file cabinet at my house. In addition, the real names of the participants were eliminated from the study and replaced with pseudonyms. According to Butin (2010) data should not be stored on a work computer because the data is likely to be viewed by co-workers, jeopardizing its confidentiality. It is also important to make sure that all computers, external storage devices, and accounts are password protected (Butin, 2010). My goal was to keep all data files in these safe places until after the results of the study were analyzed successfully. They were then destroyed (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009) posit that there is no universal way to code qualitative data. Research findings emerged from the “frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In this study, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The data from the transcribed interviews were examined and analyzed using Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction. All of the transcribed interviews were sent back to the interviewees for verification purposes. This was a recommended technique for adding trustworthiness to the results of the study (Creswell, 2012).

The data analysis took an inductive approach to coding, moving from descriptive coding to pattern coding using thematic reduction (Saldaña, 2009). I first developed an individual profile for each participant by reviewing transcripts, notes, and interview recordings. I then analyzed and hand-coded the interviews using a first-cycle descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009). The data were categorized with single words and short phrases to create a basic organizational understanding of the study (Appendix J). Finally, I re-coded the data that emerged from the first-
cycle coding and my reflexivity journal using a second-cycle coding that applied a pattern-coding method through the matrix system in MAXQDA 11 software data analysis (Saldaña, 2009). This pattern-coding procedure reduced the original codes to seven specific themes. Patton (1990) wrote that “inductive analysis means the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection” (p. 390). Therefore, the code-recode procedure was an excellent fit for this study, as it helped me make crucial decisions about which categories were the most important and thematic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Likewise, once the focus group’s interview was transcribed, its data was analyzed and coded using the MAXQDA 11 data analysis software. The researcher coded the transcriptions by color based on themes that had surfaced in the previous data sets. The data collected throughout this focus group affirmed this case study’s conclusions and has allowed each theme to be explored in greater depth. As supported by the previous data sets, the themes that were evidenced coincided with the research questions and Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction.

**Trustworthiness**

The term *trustworthiness* is often used in lieu of the term *validation* in qualitative studies. Researchers such as Shenton (2004), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) used four criteria to ensure the presence of trustworthiness in qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While *credibility* refers to the act of establishing credible findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2012), Merriam (1998) defined *transferability* as “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p.39). In addressing the issue of
trustworthiness, the positivist employs the criteria of whether future researchers can repeat the same study in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, and obtain similar results. This is called dependability. Confirmability is the extent to which the study’s findings reflect the ideas of the informants rather than the perspectives and preferences of the researcher (Creswell, 2012). With the purpose of following these four criteria and to minimize any threats, I implemented these four strategies as follows.

1) Credibility: Member checking, triangulation, and interview technique

2) Transferability: Dense description, member checking

3) Dependability: Triangulation, code-recode procedure

4) Confirmability: Triangulation

Therefore, various strategies were used to increase the trustworthiness of the study. First, I ensured a prolonged engagement in my research study and was persistently observant. Second, multiple forms of data collection and analysis were used: open-ended interviews, field notes, and a focus group. According to Creswell (2012), this technique is used to increase the study’s trustworthiness and is referred to as “triangulation.” In addition, this method of data collection along with the code-recode procedure allowed me as a researcher to pursue themes that were most relevant to my research objectives.

A third strategy that was used is referred to as “member checking.” Creswell (2012) posits that this technique involves corroborating the findings by asking one or more study participants to verify them with study-related documents. All of the interview transcriptions were sent back to the interviewees for verification and the confirmation of identified themes. Fourth, rich descriptions of findings provided a visual journey for the reader and capture accurate
perceptions and experiences of the participants. Finally, I made every effort to identify personal bias and perspectives and ensure that all participant voices emerged during data collection and analysis.

**Potential threats to internal validity.** One frequently identified limitation of the interviews was that the data that were produced may not be consistent with what people actually felt and did on a daily basis (Creswell, 2012). Briscoe (2005) contends that scholar practitioners can be biased by interpreting others “through the construction of ethno-, class-, and gender-centric versions of universality” (p.2). In addition, it is also argued that both the interviewer and the interviewee cannot remain totally objective during the interviewing process (Merriam, 1998). Non-objectivity and bias can be minimized, however, if the interviewer gains the knowledge and skills to avoid this potential threat (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Additionally, the method of sampling when conducting qualitative research interviews is sometimes a biasing factor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data produced in this study were related to specific contexts and people, thus unique to those specific settings. This may raise consistency and objectivity issues that may affect the reliability of the data (Creswell, 2012). However, my goal was to seek thick description in the data generated. In other words, my objective was to see how people gave meaning to their lived experiences that was specific to person and context as well as social and cultural aspects of this study area. The probability of encountering this limitation was also reduced through the use of multiple data collection methods: open-ended interviews, field notes, and the focus group. The triangulation of the results therefore reduced or avoided any potential threats to the reliability and validity of the study.
Strategies to minimize potential threats. In order to reduce bias and minimize potential threats to internal validity, the following strategies recommended by Creswell (2012) and Yin (2009) were followed: (a) extending the time for observing the setting, (b) focusing upon building participant trust in order to access more detailed and honest data, (c) acknowledging and identifying biases and preferences by consulting the researcher’s academic advisors, (d) working with another researcher and compare field notes and impressions from independent observations, (e) offering participants an opportunity to validate the accuracy of the data after observations are completed, (f) keeping a journal of the researcher’s own reflections, concerns, and uncertainties during the study and referring to it when examining the data carefully, and (g) examining odd or contradictory results for explanations.

Protection of Human Subjects

It is of the utmost importance that any person who conducts research with human subjects gives ethical considerations and informed consent high priority. In this study, the researcher was fully aware that participants were not below the age of consent. However, some demographic characteristics were requested, including gender, age, race, ethnicity, and education. It was essential to treat all participants with respect, justice, and beneficence. Although there was minimal risk anticipated during the study, precautions were taken to protect the welfare of the participants and all other contributors.

Also, the researcher needed to complete the IRB for the research site (the school). IRB forms were obtained from each participant acknowledging that they have not been coerced or influenced in any manner to participate in the study. All teachers as well as parent participants were expected to sign a letter of consent before participating in this research project. Consent
forms pertinent to this research study were not handed out without prior approval from Northeastern University (IRB). The academic advisor was contacted to obtain IRB approval two months prior to conducting the interviews. All participants were informed of the goals of the study as well as its expectations and relevance to their school. Participation was absolutely voluntary, and teachers and parents had the opportunity to “opt out” at any point of the study. Creswell (2012) stressed the importance of ethical concerns, recommending researchers to always be: rigorously ethical with [his/her] participants and treat them with respect; rigorously ethical with your data and not ignore or delete those seemingly problematic passage of texts; and rigorously ethical with [the] analysis by maintaining a sense of scholarly integrity and working hard toward final outcomes (p. 29).

Furthermore, all data were kept confidential and stored in both password-protected electronic and online locations (Butin, 2010, Creswell, 2012, Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were assigned pseudonyms in order to keep their identities confidential (Creswell, 2012). After the thesis will be defended successfully, the data will be destroyed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The main objective of this research study was to study the relationships between educators and parents while protecting human subjects from any potential harm.

**Limitations**

The scope of this study was limited to one urban area. Ideologies about parent-teacher relationships may differ significantly in urban areas nationally. Another potential limitation could be related to the interview process. This could include poor negotiation of questions or using open-closed questions during interviews, researcher bias influencing the interview process, time constraints, unexpected participant answers or reactions, and the sensitivity of the research
problem under study (Shank, 2006). Also, issues could arise when teacher and parent participants in this study feel intimidated to reflect their own ideologies, do not answer questions honestly, or believe that they cannot answer questions freely (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). All these issues could impact findings of the study. Yet, it was important to make every effort to keep an open dialogue with parents and teachers, and explain there was no right or wrong answers, with the hope that they felt very confident to reflect on their own experiences.

Chapter 3 presented the research methodologies that were used to conduct this qualitative descriptive case study. Chapter 4 will explore the findings of the study.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the data analysis process. It is organized into several sections: it begins with a restatement of the purpose and research questions, followed by an overview of the demographic characteristics. This is followed by the presentation and analysis of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data gathered from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and the focus group. In addition, a summary of findings is presented in the last section of the chapter.

The purpose of this case study was to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships in an urban elementary school in Massachusetts, with respect to how they both care for their children. The data were obtained through open-ended interviews with parents and teachers, field notes, and a focus group. The research was guided by Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction. Specifically, the overarching question of this study was this: How do parents and teachers interact with each other and build rapport to foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools? Using elements of Bourdieu’s theory, three sub-questions guided the collection and analysis of data for this study:

1. What are the alignments of parents’ and teachers’ hopes for their children?
2. What social and cultural factors do teachers and parents observe that influence the relations between families and schools?
3. Which types of involvement efforts do teachers and parents observe that help to establish and foster parent–teacher relationships?

The next section presents an overview of the demographic data for the sample population, which was obtained from the questionnaires.
Demographic Characteristics

Demographic information about the sample population for this case study was gathered using questionnaires before interviews were conducted with parents and teachers (Appendix C & D). Tables 1 and 2 below summarize the demographic data gathered on the teacher and parent interviewees. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for privacy and confidentiality.

Table 1

Teacher Participant Demographic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Numbers of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Level Currently Teaching</th>
<th>Participated in Teacher–Family Partnership Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rania</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roula</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawal</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Parent Participant Demographic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Highest Educational Level</th>
<th>Having Children a Eligible for Free or Reduce Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mimo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charbel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes from Open-ended Interviews with Teachers and Parents

The seven themes derived from the analysis of all of the face-to-face semi-interviews with teachers and parents are: Communication and sharing information, providing parental
support for a brighter future, attitudes and beliefs, Unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, gaps in home–school communication, creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts, and improving home–school communication.

**Theme one: Communication and sharing information.** The main theme discussed by participants was communication and the sharing of information. Both groups discussed communication, either as a way to build rapport with parents and contribute to a higher level of parental involvement, or as an way to improve home–school relationships. On the teacher side, all the participants felt that parents cannot be adequately involved in their children’s education if they lack the necessary information. Several aspects of communication come into play here, though cases differed depending on whether the communication was initiated by the parent asking for help or by the teacher recognizing the parent’s need for help. An example of a parent-initiated communication was given by Rania: “I’ve had families that have come in to me and said, ‘I got this notice. Explain it to me.’ It’s just a matter of finding the right words to tell them exactly.” Teachers also used phone calls and email to inform parents about their children’s progress and problems. Nawal said the following on the importance of communication to relationship-building:

> I really feel I have to build that relationship through communication. Like if someone gets hurt, I can’t rely upon the nurse to call, because she’s got the whole building to cover. I always feel like it’s my job, even though the nurse saw the child, to let the parents know.

In this example, Nawal showed a high level of responsibility for communicating with parents about their children’s problems at school.
Likewise, regarding the importance of communication as a strategy teachers can use to foster parental involvement in schools, Jack said, “I feel like it is mainly my responsibility to involve parents . . . [and] make sure they have all of the information of everything that is happening in the school.” At times, teachers would ask third parties for help improving the quality of communication. For example, Ali said: “I have some families where English is very challenging for them, so I might have somebody come in and sit in on the meeting to explain for them.”

The open-ended interviews showed that the teacher participants employed various communication strategies for fostering parental involvement in and out of the school. Most often, they reported that they communicated with parents through binders, notes sent home, parent handbooks, homework sign-off sheets, monthly newsletters, attachments on students’ homework, and report cards. When asked about ways of communicating that would involve parents, Rania said, “By trying to communicate with my families, through their binders, the monthly newsletters, and the attachments on their homework, its letting them know what’s going on in school and what to do.” In the same vein, Roula stated,

Parents come in the fall time for an open house. . . . We go through a quick routine with them on what is expected in the class. . . . It’s important that we give them my parent handbook, and we try to highlight some of the key things that keep them informed.

Teachers also mentioned various aspects of two-way communication that involved “interactive dialogue.” These included telephone calls, parent–teacher conferences, open houses, school–based community activities, and emails. Given the working conditions of many parents, the majority of teachers believed that it was essential to use multiple forms of communication to
maximize the information shared with all parents. All of the teachers described emails as “quick” and “easy.” Nawal explained:

I have done email grouping . . . if there is a change . . . instead of sending a paper off that not everybody might see because life is crazy at home. Parents are on their phones and their computers. . . . I’ve been doing a lot more emailing this, year with the group email format, where the parents are all blind copied so they can’t see each other’s names.

Nawal thought that parents too often miss the messages from school, whether written or verbal, and realized that group emails made a good strategy for engagement.

It was also clear from the interviews that, in addition to email, teachers supported parents’ own preferences for different communication styles that suited them better. The teachers thus sometimes asked parents how they preferred to be contacted. Jack said,

At the open house I usually have the parents fill out a communication log. What is the best way to communicate with them during the day and at night? A lot of times I’m at school emailing at night back and forth with parents. It’s easy for them. Some of them don’t have jobs, so they can be interrupted during the day. I try to leave the messages on emails or anything.

All of the teachers interviewed stressed the importance of communication and of sharing information with parents as a way to engage them and improve their children’s academic performance. The majority of the teachers also encouraged parents to share information with them and acknowledged their own responsibility for protecting confidentiality. Three teachers believed that by sharing personal information with teachers (e.g., marital status, socio-economic data), parents could significantly improve the level of communication, which is essential for
family–school relationship-building. One teacher thought that information shared by parents could help teachers understand children’s academic and behavioral problems better. Nawal described the benefits of parental information sharing:

Anything you say to me is confidential. I’m here to help you. I have had parents really confide with issues that are happening at home, and it’s nice. I would like parents to understand the importance of just letting me know if something is going on at home. I don’t need the details of whatever they’re going through, but I think if somebody is sick in their immediate family, or grandparents or parents are separating—and I have had that this year—and they’re not telling me that, I think that plays a big role in both the behavior and academics of the child. . . . If I knew, I would think of a way . . . I would understand why this child is crying in the corner, or this one is just scrambling instead of doing their work, because I think a lot falls on that at home. . . . I would help them more.

Nawal believes that being able to talk with students’ parents to learn what’s going on with them at home helps her be more efficient in the classroom. She thinks that the more she knows about her students’ home lives, the more she can understand their academic and behavioral performance, and the better she can accommodations each individual student’s social situation. Most of these accommodations are based on things she learns from parents.

Jack believed that it was not always possible to acquire vital information from students themselves because “they’re six and seven years old; they can’t process it.” Therefore, he affirmed, “parent input is necessary.” Conversely, when parents do not communicate regularly with teachers, teachers cannot understand the challenges faced by students and their parents, and cannot forge relationships with them. Roula reported, “I want families to feel comfortable
enough to tell me about their situations at home and to ask me what their children’s day in school was like . . . so I can help them better. . . . I think it’s extremely important that we have that relationship.”

Another teacher explained how parental information helps teachers respond better to their students and avoid prejudging their families:

When the children and the parents come in for open house and for the screening, I try to chat with the parents, to get to know the parents as well as the children. I think it’s very important that you have a close-knit relationship with them, so that they can share information freely with you. And I think that, being a teacher, I need to know the family situations, everything that is going on. This will help me become non-judgmental about different families, regardless of their origin, their religion, or anything like that, I think.

The teachers in this study reported that knowing about their students’ lives and what they did outside of school let them work more consciously toward meeting those students’ needs, as well as those of their parents. Almost all the teachers gave examples of how they could use information from parents to solve students’ academic and behavioral problems. They also reported that communication and information sharing helped them minimize the effects of class and cultural differences on home–school relations.

When asked about the ways in which parents interact with teachers and built rapport in order to foster parental involvement, the majority of parents mentioned the benefits of communicating, sharing information, and seeking out relationships during school events (e.g., open houses, PTO, PTA, ice cream socials, musicals, and sports events). Their goals were to build relationships that could create opportunities for networking, sharing information, and
accessing resources that could improve children’s academic and other achievements. Although these parents claimed that communication is a form of parental involvement and tended to refer to it positively, they also mentioned networking opportunities when they spoke about their own relationships with teachers. According to the majority of parents, networks within the school community increase communication, trust, and the willingness to collaborate and share information. Each parent interviewee believed that the stronger networks that are formed between teachers and parents, the more likely it is that both groups will communicate and cooperate to the benefit of the children.

When asked about the kinds of interaction and communication with teachers that foster parental involvement, Mimo, who has two daughters, said,

When they have the open house, I go there. I also go to the ice cream social. I like to communicate with teachers. I make sure I meet the teacher. I meet other parents. I make sure that she knows who I am, and I offer my help. If she needs anything, she can always ask me, and I’ll do my best to help her. Anything she needs in the class. Or if there is anything that I need to know regarding my daughter, I could ask her. I could also ask other parents if I want. Mimo made it clear that communication and information sharing within the school community are important for her relationship with teachers, and that she help teachers in whatever way she could. She also believed in supporting teachers while networking and exchanging information with them and with other parents.

Charbel, the father of two daughters and a son, explained that communication allows parents to stay informed on their children’s academic progress. But, he noted that there was no
specific policy regarding regular communication between parents and teachers. He himself relied on other parents “to exchange information during the drop-off and pick-up periods,” and he believed that “parents are no longer informed of [their children’s] daily activities.”

On the other hand, parent participants in the open-ended interviews expressed the desire to be a part of the “school community.” For instance, one parent mentioned that volunteering at the school created more “network opportunities” and “communication channels.” According to Mimo, such opportunities help parents, especially immigrant parents, “become better communicators with teachers.” Georgina phrased this as “giving chances to all parents,” while Roger added that volunteering in the classroom had “encouraged [him] to talk regularly about his [son’s] schoolwork and progress.”

Interestingly, one parent thought that by communicating with teachers, parents could ensure their children received “special treatment” that might prevent them from “getting into trouble or falling behind in class.” For instance, when asked about involvement efforts as a way of building better relationships, Nana, the mother of two boys, answered,

I think communication is important. I like to go to the school and communicate with teachers. . . . I do volunteer twice a week. I feel that when the teacher knows [you] better, their ways of dealing with you and your child are different.

Like Nana, Georgina felt that a sense of belonging to the school community was essential to her children’s success in school. She believed that volunteer opportunities had helped her get to know many of the teachers, as well as many of the other parents, who interacted with her children more and more over the years. She remarked,

Now I knew that my daughter had a loving environment . . . and that she was around
people who really cared about her . . . around teachers and other parents [that] you know, [that] you trust more, [and] who are helping her learning something in a different way . . . something that I may not be doing at home.

Georgina also found that her involvement helped her come to trust the whole school environment and learn new ways of doing things.

The majority of parents interviewed believed that communication during school events was vital for their relationships with teachers and for their children’s success. Parents sometimes learned about their children’s needs through informal conversations with teachers and other parents. Not only did communication provide parents with information on their own children’s strengths and weaknesses, but it led them to work to meet those needs. Efforts like volunteering at the school help parents communicate and partner with teachers, build trust, gain social capital, show interest in their children’s education, feel like a part of the school community, and exchange information.

Theme two: Providing parental involvement for a brighter future. Providing parental involvement for a brighter future was a second major theme for both groups. All of the parents and teachers interviewed expressed the view that parental involvement benefits children in myriad ways. Participants often linked such involvement to academic success. Teachers and parents alike dreamt of brighter futures for their children. As Roula put it, “We want parents to be involved . . . because we want our students to graduate from high school with very high ACT scores.” Teachers agreed that children with engaged parents would be more successful and motivated and would have a better life. The teacher participants expressed the need for parental involvement. According to Rania, “it is fabulous if a parent can be involved with helping their
child with homework or at least checking their homework to see what we’re learning in school. . . If the parents are involved, the kids feel more motivated, and they work harder at school.” The teachers said that initiating parental involvement activities early in childhood can provide children with strong foundations for their upper school years. Jack added, “It’s important for the parents to know what’s going in second grade because it really sets the tone for the rest of the schooling.” Another teacher talked about the improved self-confidence children have when their parents are involved in their academic lives. Nawal believed that “kids love it when their parents come in and read stories to the class . . . they feel more confident in their abilities.” Teachers believed that increased interaction between homes and schools creates a sense of happiness and fosters understanding of and support for the role of education in children’s lives. Nawal explained wanting the best for her students when she added,

I think it’s important that [parents] come in and see their kids’ classrooms. I think it’s important for the kids, too, to see their mom and dad in here. This will tell kids that their mom and dad do care about their education. . . . “You are doing a great job.” That’s what I put in my email to them. “This is important for your child . . . just to see the smile on their faces: ‘My mom came in! My dad came in!’”

Two teacher participants believed that the benefits of parental involvement in education go well beyond just helping the kids themselves do better academically. According to them, parents and teachers also reap a number of benefits. Ali described the parent–teacher conference this way:

It’s an excellent opportunity to share information with the parents about how their kids are doing in school, and also to find out any issues or concerns that the parents might
have that might help me and them better instruct their child.

This was echoed in the second teacher’s view that parental involvement helps parents gain a sense of community: Roula commented, “They love coming in for party days. They love it when there’s something special going on . . . when they feel a part of this community.”

At Palermo Elementary School, teachers recognized a wide range of parental involvement efforts. Even small efforts parents made to support their children’s education, such as photocopying homework and picking up books and food, were welcomed and appreciated. Parental presence at school that didn’t involve volunteering in the classroom was also perceived as involvement in education. Rania stated, “I think it’s fabulous when parents find a way to get into the school for just five or ten minutes . . . show [their] face and connect with the teacher.” She considered parental involvement an opportunity to build “a close-knit relationship with parents” so that “they can share information freely with teachers.”

During the interviews, the parents too discussed the advantages of parental involvement, as education, from birth to college, was important goal they set for their children. On wanting the best for her two daughters, aged 6 and 8, Mimo said, “I want my daughters to go to Harvard. . . . I want them to get the right education.” It was also noted that the parents talked to their children about the jobs the children wanted to pursue and ways they could accomplish their goals. Nana, who has two boys aged 8 and 9, explained how she supported her children’s education: “Their homework is my priority every single day. I keep reminding them that if they do not go to college they’re not going to find a good job. They’re not going to have a good life.” Georgina, the parent of one daughter and one son, added, “Number one is that they know in the bottom of their heads that each one of them is going to college right away. It’s not negotiable.” Georgina
suggested that academic success was a result of parents stressing the importance of education and refusing to allow failure to be an option.

Charbel, the father of two girls (ages 4 and 8) and a boy (age 10), described his desire for his children to have a better life than his own. He hoped that through his involvement, his children would be able have a brighter future. He explained,

I grew up in Michigan, and it was hard. . . . My parents were separated and we had to move to Massachusetts. . . . I did not get the chance to graduate from high school. . . . I want to provide support for my children and convince [them] that education is a daily dream that they should think about . . . Hopefully they will have a better life than mine.

Each of these parents wanted to support their children academically because of their own beliefs about the benefits of their personal involvement. For instance, Roger, the father of one boy, discovered that his involvement in school events made his son feel “proud, special, and happy.” Furthermore, the parent’s happiness is often tied to the child’s excitement about school: “When I get to the classroom, my son runs to me, he sits in my lap. He wants me to keep him as my helper. He feels he’s so special, it makes me happy.”

Teachers and parents alike expressed the hope that parental involvement in children’s education would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and ultimately would translate into the children’s lifelong drive for learning. Continued learning was perceived by both groups as an important journey and one they all wanted their children to take. Both groups also acknowledged the importance of their own roles in their children’s learning and development, describing parental involvement as a “shared responsibility” of parents and educators.

Virtually every parent and teacher clearly and consistently affirmed that it takes a group
to raise and educate a child from birth to college. As one teacher put it, “Education’s the core, and I think it needs to have a place in both the school and the home.” Although the groups considered themselves partners in education, the teachers tended to emphasize children’s academic and behavioral outcomes, while the parents referred more often to psychological and emotional aspects of their lives.

**Theme three: Attitudes and beliefs.** Another theme both groups discussed when reflecting on the social and cultural factors that affect the quality of parent–teacher relationships was attitudes and beliefs. Four of the five teacher participants noted the impact that parental attitudes have on the quality of home–school interactions. They expressed a strong desire to make these interactions as productive as possible, so they offered suggestions for dealing with unpleasant situations. Most of the teachers recognized the sensitivity required when talking to parents about their children’s behavioral problems. Although Nawal reported that interactions generally go more smoothly when parents keep positive attitudes, she made it clear that this is not always the case. At times, she noted, “you have a parent who comes to school [who] will say, ‘Not my son!’ . . . This will definitely impact our relationship.” Like Nawal, Rania felt that it was hard to maintain good relationships with parents who were not receptive to information about their children’s problems. She remarked, “Some parents come in, and they’re full of excuses as to why, ‘with my child—’ . . . so it’s hard sometimes to keep this relationship.” In a similar vein, Ali explained that parents are less receptive to teachers when their children struggle with behavioral problems. He noted the negative impact of defensive attitudes on parent-teacher relationships, saying,

> If I let [parents] know that there are some behavior issues going on, they don’t want to
come in and deal with it right away. If they do, that’s great. But some of them are
defensive, and this doesn’t help the relationship.

Ali recognized that it helps to have parents involved in dealing with their children’s behavior, but
he noted that some parents have ambivalent attitudes that can keep them from cooperating.

While the teachers found it difficult to articulate in interviews how they dealt with
parents’ defensive attitudes, most of them were able to identify some useful strategies. Often
they would ask a third party for support in unpleasant situations. Roula commented, “I always
bring in the guidance counselor or another teacher to explain it in a different way and support
what I’m saying.” The teachers indicated that second opinions were helpful and often defused
hostile feelings.

Jack saw the value of partnerships, believing that it takes a “joint effort” of the parent and
the teacher “working together” to solve problems in the classroom. Rania indicated that
volunteering can help parents stop blaming teachers for not being able to give individualized
attention for every student. She said,

I think that sometimes parents can’t understand that their child is not the only one. I think
the best way to show them that is to have them come in and help out, because when there
are 26, 27 kids in the classroom, you can’t always have the teacher’s attention for just one
kid. . . . I think they kind of say, “He’s not writing as nice as he should, but I know he can
write better if the teacher were helping.” But parents who come with an open heart, make
that little bit of extra effort, that’s where I think you see more positive attitudes.

Rania encouraged parents to volunteer in order to understand the classroom setting and the
teacher’s responsibility for managing a whole class. Parents who did so stopped putting blame on
the teacher for not giving individual attention to every child. When parents were willing to collaborate, the outcomes were more beneficial to parent-teacher relationships and to the child.

Although the participants acknowledged the negative impact of defensive attitudes on relationships with parents, they appreciated parents who trusted them to work with their children in the classroom. Jack noted, “A lot of parents come in, and if you’re able to work with them, to build this trust, they’re very grateful,” while Ali said, “I would like parents to understand the importance of building this piece of trust.” Teacher participants also reported that when parents trusted them, they were more able to discuss problems with an open heart, ask questions without intimidation, and be approached. Ali said, “I want the parents to feel comfortable asking me what their [children’s] sport day in school was like. I think it’s extremely important that we trust each other.” Rania noted, importantly, “I think [some parents] are getting so defensive—and emotion plays a part of that—because it’s their baby, and you understand that. I think at that point you need to defuse the situation and rebuild this trust through one-on-one communication.”

Teachers described trust as a crucial element in their relationships with parents. Trust was considered a reinforcing element in teacher–parent interaction. When trust was established, teachers were grateful to parents and more confident in their own ability to handle challenges and communicate openly with parents. This was especially noted during face-to-face interactions. Rania indicated that building trust through one-on-one communication is one of the best ways for teachers to nurture their relationships with parents and deal with unpleasant responses such as “criticism, lack of appreciation, and ungratefulness.” She said,

The parent was mad and aggravated and frustrated and I’m like, “Take a breath. Let’s go and let’s sit and talk about this. Let’s talk about what happened.” She immediately put the
blame on me. Once we sat down and talked and I let her know what happened, she was frustrated with her son. Her guard went up immediately: “It’s your fault!”

Teacher participants shared specific stories that emphasized the importance of one-to-one communication as a way to settle parents’ ambivalent attitudes. Although most of the teachers claimed to have good relationships with parents, they did report occasional unpleasant interactions, and assumed that these were due to parents’ own beliefs and defensive attitudes. Nawal commented, “I feel like we need to change that attitude and say, ‘Okay, these are the issues. What can we do to help? How can we fix this? How can we solve it?’” Nonetheless, what the majority of the teachers really valued from parents for maintaining good relationships were collaboration, trust during face-to-face communications, and positive attitudes toward solving students’ academic and behavioral problems.

With respect to the socio-cultural factors affecting them, parents discussed the ways in which attitudes and beliefs shaped parent–teacher interactions. They believed that unless both groups had positive attitudes, they were not likely to succeed in their interrelationships. Nana remarked that teachers’ positive attitudes and beliefs are prerequisites for meaningful involvement:

I think attitude is everything. I notice that some teachers—not all of them, some of them—when they feel that the child’s parents don’t care, they don’t care either, but when they feel the parents care, their treatment of that child and parent is different.

Nana described the way teachers’ perceptions and behaviors changed with the beliefs they held about families. She believed that some teachers approached parents with more welcoming attitudes when those parents showed interest in their children’s education. She also thought that
students whose parents did not take part in their learning activities were at an academic
disadvantage. She commented, “I don’t like to see my kids being left behind in their class
because a teacher thinks I don’t care for them.” Furthermore, Nana believed that teachers had
less positive views about parents who did not show active involvement.

Another parent based her understanding of teachers’ beliefs and approaches to parent–
teacher relationships on the first connections she built with them. According to Georgina, the
first meeting between parents and educators sets the expectations for future ones. She said,

I want to know who’s teaching my kid. . . . I make sure every teacher, at the beginning of
the year, knows that I’m very involved in my son’s and daughter’s education . . . I want
this thing to help my kids be more interested in learning.

She also connected the teacher’s attitude with the student’s motivation for learning: “If they
didn’t feel like the teacher liked them . . . maybe they wouldn’t be encouraged to continue
learning or doing better in the classes.”

For other parents, the specific experiences that shaped their attitudes and experiences in
the school environment had implications for the way they interacted with teachers. Charbel said,
“I definitely don’t feel comfortable talking or dealing with someone who showed certain
attitudes in the past, or who thought that I am not involved.”

Another parent described the effects of teachers’ individual characteristics and self-
efficacy beliefs on parent–teacher relationships:

If a teacher is a nice and loving person, this is number one and very important for the
relationship. . . . I like to approach her. . . . If that teacher is very confident in what she
[or he] does and likes the parents to be involved in the child’s education . . . it’s good for
Both parents and teachers believed that parent-teacher relationships vary considerably. Part of this variation is related to differences in attitudes and beliefs. The data indicated that both groups were more capable of cooperating and communicating with each when positive attitudes and shared beliefs were exhibited and reinforced.

**Theme four: Unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy.** Both groups mentioned feelings of unwelcomeness due to new school policies as a significant factor in declining home–school relationships. During the open-ended interviews, the majority of participants agreed that there was a “new, different policy” at the elementary school, “which [had] created less welcoming feelings” than there were three to five years ago. Currently, the school allows teachers and special education liaisons to make connections with parents via phones and meetings, but there is “not as much opportunity for face-to-face interaction.” Participants in both groups agreed that prior to the new policy, which restricts parents to volunteering inside the school building without a background check, the school’s climate was warm, personal, relaxed, and informal. Parents could stay informed about school events simply by socializing with each other. Referring to the policy change, Jack commented, “I think it used to be a very open-door policy, and now it’s a very closed-door policy.”

Parent-teacher interactions became very difficult outside of formal school events, and some teachers even wondered whether parents still felt comfortable coming to school. Both parents and teachers participants expressed the worry that the new policy had created “a less welcoming environment” in which they no longer felt “a sense of belonging and partnership.” Noting the changes in parents’ motivation to participate in school events, Nawal commented,
I think it’s changed over the years since I first started here. Parents were a lot more involved with the PTO within their classrooms. . . . Our PTO has nobody that comes to the meeting. There’s like the same group of five families. . . . I think there was more of a welcoming feeling and there was more of a partnership.

Rania also thought the new school policy was a primary reason for parents and teachers feeling less welcomed together. She said,

I think that [parents] are intimidated, absolutely, and I think sometimes the school isn’t as welcoming as it should be. We’re told that because of confidentiality, you can’t have parents in the classroom anymore. That makes me sad because I used to have parents all the time volunteering.

Teachers at Palermo Elementary School seemed to understand that because of the new policy, parents could not engage in classroom activities anymore. They did not blame parents for this lack of involvement, and the majority of the teachers understood the challenges the parents faced. Reflecting on the negative effects of the new policy, Ali said,

I had a grandmother this year who was very offended because at the beginning of the year I had her fill out the volunteer form for when you can come . . . if you want to come on a field trip. It’s very clear you have to be CORI checked to be able to do all those things . . . I think nothing really in our student handbook or from the school says exactly how much parent involvement can be. [Parents] have to fill out the form. Sometimes it’s hard because it’s a six- to eight-week turnaround.

He concluded that “the CORI laws almost need to be changed a little bit.” He further emphasized the need for a parental involvement policy that would to ease the volunteering
process at the school while still providing students with safety and supervision. He explained:

If you are coming to volunteer in my room, I’m not going to leave you alone with any children. I’m still the responsible person in this room. I’m not going to let you take a child out to the bathroom or out in the hallway. I can monitor and still make sure that it’s the proper behaviour going on. I think if we took that barrier away, we’d have a lot more parents willing to come in.

Ali believed that parents play an integral part in their children’s education, meaning the school system should reevaluate its parental involvement policy continually and implement better procedures for facilitating involvement.

Parents, similarly, expressed concern that the new policy had created less welcoming feelings and had limited parents’ ability to build rapport with teachers. Parent participants believed that they could no longer reach their children’s teachers and work with them as partners. The majority of the parents realized that the school, implementing new regulations on parental involvement, might no longer be able to involve parents in the same way. Parental involvement would look different with no parents in the classroom. Roger commented, “Over the last few years, we have been made to feel more like visitors. . . . There are a lot of regulations.” In spite of the new regulations and the restricted opportunities for relationship building, parents’ desire to connect with teachers and to participate in school events has not changed. Mimo commented,

I used to build gingerbread houses with my daughter. We had mother’s day tea, and we all came in and they had a little tea breakfast. . . . That was fabulous. . . . I wish they had it back again.

Georgina found that the new policy has diminished her sense of belonging to the school
community. She commented,

   It was sad for me to find out that I cannot volunteer anymore inside my daughter’s classroom. . . . I enjoyed reading stories and playing flash cards with other kids. . . .

   [Now] I really feel disconnected from the school.

   It is clear that the new policy has made people feel less welcome and has weakened relationship–building opportunities. Before the policy was implemented, the time and effort that parents put into volunteering inside the school building were considered very constructive for parent–teacher relationships. Parents and teachers alike indicated the need for family-centered partnership policies, and believed that optimizing parents’ capacity for promoting their children’s learning, both at home and in school, would lead to better outcomes both for the children’s academic success and for parent–teacher relations.

   **Theme Five: Gaps in home–school communication.** The gap in home–school communication was another theme mentioned by both parents and teachers as an obstacle to their interrelations. The interview transcripts contributed significantly to answering the second research sub-question, and offered insight into parent–teacher relationships. Unfortunately, the data also showed that communication between the two groups at Palermo was not frequent enough, and it required careful consideration to engage parents and to monitor student’s academic and behavioral performance. While teachers mentioned communication barriers related to parents’ socio-economic positions, time constraints, and language barriers, parents focused more on the lack of communication about behavioral problems as a major impediment to effective family–school relationships.

   The majority of teacher participants noted that parents often felt overwhelmed by
economic pressures and time constraints, which made home–school communication hard to maintain effectively. Discussion these time constraints, Roula said, “If you only see these parents twice a year and you’ve ten minutes to give them, it’s a tricky situation with the time too.” Also, she added, “when we have our second round of parent conferences, there are no night conferences. If someone is working the whole day, they have to take the day off from work to come in for a ten-minute conference because that’s all the time you have allotted.” Regarding challenges to effective communication with parents, teachers also referred to parents’ socio-economic circumstances.

During their discussion of the ways in which parents’ life circumstances could hinder their freedom to attend school events and communicate with teachers, the teachers realized that parents who faced social and economic pressures could not get involved to the same degree as their middle- and upper-class counterparts. Nawal stated, “The reality of it is, sometimes parents really just can’t make it in because their job is so demanding and they’re at risk of losing their job, or they don’t have a ride.” She added, “This applies maybe to parents who have certain social and cultural circumstances that affect their personal lives, like full time mothers.” It is noteworthy that all the teachers were very respectful toward the parents of their students and wanted to forge relationships with them through positive communication. They also understood that many of these parents had multiple jobs and could not come to the classroom to talk with teachers or participate directly in their children’s education. As Ali put it, “Sometimes when people work two jobs . . . they’re not able to have that flexibility to come in or have those few moments at night time for a little chat.”

In addition, all the teachers felt that their own time for relationship-building was limited.
Jack said, “When I’m outside in the morning, I really don’t have that time to talk and to have this face-to-face contact.” Similarly, Roula said, “You want to make those connections with the family because it’s important, but there’s a limitation on time for getting them in, and I have to work on everybody’s schedule.” Jack added, “I think time can be an issue. There’s really just not enough time in a day, unfortunately.” Not only did the teachers report wanting to invest time in talking to parents about their children’s progress, three of them suggested that the times when parents are in the playground were not appropriate for diving into communication. The majority of the teachers had encouraged parents to select “a convenient meeting time” so they could adjust their schedules accordingly. This expanded the opportunities for communication and partnership.

Apart from economic pressures and time constraints, teachers believed that language and cultural differences created communication challenges. They noted that parents with limited English language skills or education had more communication needs. As Ali explained, “some parents need additional support; they could feel misunderstood and overwhelmed by the language.” He considered “written communication in several languages” to be an appropriate strategy for ensuring that parents “are able to understand notes sent home and homework instructions.” Roula similarly helped parents overcome language barriers by providing handouts in different languages. Nawal noted that, with some parents, “English might be [their] second or third language, but they’re able to communicate.” She explained: “If I can’t communicate, then I have to find somebody who can.”

Three teacher participants expressed concern over the lack of adequate translation and interpretation services at Palermo Elementary School, which made it difficult for them to
communicate with parents who spoke different languages. Teachers were asked how often the school offered translation and interpretation services to parents and teachers. In instances where those services were largely available at the school, English–Spanish services were generally provided faster than for other languages, such as French, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Jack confirmed that these services would be possible in the future, while Ali held that they should be “considered and addressed when possible.” Otherwise, he said, “struggling parents could have limited chances to work side-by-side with teachers.” Jack summarized this:

I think language is the big one. Unfortunately I’m not bilingual. While we do have translation services in the district, it’s a long process to get something. If it’s something that needs to be translated into another language, we don’t always have those services available. . . . Spanish is the big one, but there are other parents’ children from other cultures. . . . They speak different languages, and I don’t necessarily have the resources right away. . . . Having those services available would build up the relationship a lot more.

The majority of the teachers indicated that the time taken to get translations for parents was extremely disruptive for both parties.

However, providing linguistic services to parents whose first language is not English would not be sufficient, according to three teacher participants. Two teachers noted that school personnel must also take into consideration each family’s unique cultural values and customs. This was illustrated by Jack, who considered communication with parents by way of notes and emails to be culturally incompatible and ineffective. Jack said, “I think that in some cultures, too, face-to-face communication is easier, and it’s more respectful than sending a note,” whereas Ali
recommended “putting something in place that adds another component to that parent–teacher communication, like putting in a behavior law.” In her discussion of the socio-cultural factors that hinder parent-teacher relationships, Rania said, “I think the culture, the second language . . . gets in the way sometimes. I’ve met with parents, and there’s definitely a language barrier. I might be saying something and they’re taking it another way, and vice-versa. I think that gets in the way sometimes.”

The data from three parent participants indicated that communication with teachers was poor, particularly in regard to students’ behavioral problems. This deficit in communication led to negative responses by some parents, who described their experiences and shared their stories. “Lack of communication” and “poor communication” were used interchangeably by parents throughout the open-ended interviews as they talked about their struggles, which primarily involved the school’s bullying problem. Roger phrased it this way:

When we talk about communication, we should talk about bullies, and that’s another thing they had in school, the bully problem. They don’t do anything, there’s no communication. If I call the school, then they punish the bully, but if I don’t call the school, teachers do not call me.

This parent described the lack of communication as very “dangerous” because it amounted to “hiding important information” from parents. He added that “when a child picks on another child, both parents need to be informed right away, and this could not be done without communication.”

A second parent believed that “teachers close their eyes too much on a lot of stuff that’s going on in school. There’s no communication.” Nana argued that the school does not have a
specific policy for when kids pick on each other and that teachers don’t want “to inconvenience the parents.” Mimo, who believed that the school “protected the bullies” and do not call parents, said,

My daughter was punched in the face. I tried to contact the teacher, but she took three days to get back to me. They don’t want to inconvenience the parent. . . . I went directly to the principal. She said, “I will look into it.” That was back in Christmas, and now we are in April. Nobody contacted me.

This parent had a bad experience with one of her daughter’s teachers, which made her go above the teacher’s authority and call the principal directly.

Nana also expressed concern over the lack of communication about discipline. When she was asked about a time when she had a bad experience with her children’s teachers, Nana replied,

One negative experience stands out in my mind. My son in first grade was one of the most frequent ones to go to the nurse’s office. The teacher never told me. The nurse never told me. He would go down every day and complain of a headache, and didn’t get any help. I never knew.”

Alongside the many negative perceptions of this lack of communication on discipline, some suggestions were offered as well. One theme that emerged frequently was power. Two parents said teachers needed to have more power and support from the administration. One commented, “Teachers are afraid to do anything to a student that’s really bad. . . . Teachers are afraid of calling the parents and making somebody angry.” The second parent said, “The classroom is the prison and the children are the enemies; they run the show.” Charbel believed
that an atmosphere of negative communication or lack of communication could be extremely
dangerous and difficult for a school to recover from, and that relationships would “run much
smoother” if the school implemented “better communication and better structure.” Nevertheless,
the majority of participants saw the lack of communication as negatively affecting parent–
teacher relationships in a number of ways, socially, emotionally, and academically. Both groups
recognized the need for better communication practices.

**Theme six: Creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts.** One
theme pertaining to improving family–school relationships was the need for a welcoming
environment that fosters collaboration. All the participants felt experienced enough with parental
involvement to offer suggestions for better family–school relationships. They all considered a
welcoming environment the cornerstone of a strong relationship. Several routes to creating a
collaborative and welcoming environment were mentioned. These included “building a stronger
PTO,” “offering more events for parents,” “providing more family functions and parent
workshops,” “involving parents in classroom activities,” “acting like parent professionals in the
classroom,” and having “parents working as a group.” The need for a stronger PTO was stressed
by two teachers, who believed that this could improve involvement. The teachers also suggested
that informing parents about school events could create more involvement opportunities and a
greater contribution to the school. Nawal commented,

> I think we need probably a stronger a PTO with more family involvement. I think our
PTO right now is starting to make the steps by having a Facebook page. I think if they
offered more newsletters or something, it would really pull those parents in to build up
the PTO and support the school more.
This teacher sees a benefit to having a stronger PTO and updating parents regularly, because parents can help improve the school. Reflecting on involvement efforts and parent–teacher relationships, Ali added, “I think we should have more parent workshops, more family things, and a better PTO. . . . We only have the ice cream social.” Two teachers noted that this was the only event offered by the school to bring parents together. Jack agreed with Ali: “I’ve love to see the school have more family functions. They do the ice cream social once a year.” He added:

We have the ice cream social coming up. That’s a giant one but that’s really the only one. They got away from doing all that. I mean, it’s everybody’s job to come together to work as a group. It benefits the kids. Also, I think if the family saw the teachers more in social atmospheres, in a welcoming environment, it would help get them to say, “Okay, I could come in. I could find time, I could volunteer.”

Though they are not part of the school’s regulations, Jack made recommendations for having parents and teachers work collaboratively for the benefits of the students. Interacting more with teachers at school events, and feeling a part of the community, would make involvement less challenging to parents, even those with busy schedules.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of teachers believed that parents wanted to be involved, but that some of them need more instruction, support, and encouragement. If parents are to work with teachers as partners in the education of their children, schools must provide them with the support they need. The teachers demonstrated the effectiveness of workshops for educating parents about their children’s school activities. Rania explained: “I do believe that all of the parents want to be involved, but some of them have difficulties. We need to be open to inviting them in the best way that we can. . . . We need more workshops.” Roula commented, “I
love working with the parents. It’s like one of my favorite things, because I really feel like most of the parents want to do genuinely right by their child. But not all of the parents know how.” Roula believed that parents might not instinctively know how to involve themselves in their children’s education. She **recommended** promoting parental involvement through “environment fun activities.” Nawal thought that workshops helped parents to gain background knowledge and professional development:

> We had a fabulous parent night here, where we invited parents to come to a workshop to learn how we’re teaching their children how to read and write. We had an excellent outcome from that. And so the parents came in and we provided a workshop for them to say “Okay, this is how we are teaching the kids how to read. We would love your help and your input.” We had prices, we had food, we had a place for kids to go, and the turnout was fabulous. It really was . . . for the relationships as well. I think that it’s very important to include the parents in their child’s education . . . to make them feel like professionals in the classroom. . . . And most parents are very willing to do so.

Roula reported that making a concentrated effort to engage parents would allow for increased interaction. She believed that involving parents in their children’s education required creating a school environment that invited parents to raise questions and voice concerns.

All of the parent interviewees recognized the importance of a welcoming environment as a cornerstone for strong family–school relationships. The parents also made suggestions on how to create a school environment that would nurture parent–teacher relationships. The majority of them agreed that the school should hold more events, as this could increase parental engagement. Roger remarked that the current school environment was “not a family friendly environment,”
and that the school should offer “more events for parents.” Charbel believed that the school needed to “organize more than one party throughout the year.” This would improve collaboration. When Charbel was asked what involvement efforts could foster parent–teacher relationships, he said, “Having, maybe, more events that would involve parents and teachers at the same time. . . . They do have one party a year, and it’s not enough. . . . Maybe one every two, three months.” Georgina added,

If they had some kind of activity inside the classroom, where they invited parents, guardians, or grandparents, this would be a good thing, and if they kept reminding parents about those events through monthly letters or emails, this could be great. Interestingly, Georgina not only recommended more events, but suggested updating parents regularly. The teachers also reported positive outcomes from giving information to parents.

In discussion parental involvement efforts that could establish better parent–teacher relationships, Mimo remarked that school events “make parents feel more appreciated, informed, and welcomed into the school environment.” She continued,

I would say yes, we need more events. Okay, we have the social cream social, but it’s not enough. Other public schools offer more events, and this is how it’s supposed to be. I remember when I got more involved; I realized that there were a lot of things going on inside the school that I did not even know about. As a parent, I need to feel connected . . . I need to trust people, because you have your child there. Have the parents come, I’d say, twice a year inside the classroom. Have something special with the child inside his classroom. This is a very good thing to do.

Like other parents, Mimo expected more events at the school. She felt that other public schools
offered more events for parents. She reported having a hard time understanding how the school worked. She also mentioned some of her emotional needs: as a parent, she needed to feel connected and to trust the people who worked at the school. This is another example of how parents perceive the importance of parental involvement.

Both parents and teachers believed that an in-depth examination of the strengths and weaknesses of parental involvement efforts was crucial to any attempt to enhance home–school relationships. They all commented on the needs of parents with socio-cultural circumstances that hinder their ability to participate in school events. During the interviews and again when reflecting on collaboration efforts, both groups recognized that a welcoming environment is a cornerstone of a strong family–school relationship.

**Theme seven: Improving home-school communication.** Another theme that emerged in the interviews was improving home–school communications. This theme was linked to involvement efforts for better family–school relationships. It was suggested that teachers ought to contact parents to discuss students’ academic performance and behavior. However, parents should also encourage this communication. The open-ended interviews with teachers indicated that parent–teacher communication occurred mostly in crisis situations. Two teachers indicated that parents initiated contacts more often when students had violated school regulations. Roula said, “I ended up knowing the parents of one of my students when he had a behavioral problem.” Rania claimed, “Parents will initiate contact if they feel as though their child might be being picked on, or something like that, more than over academics.”

On the other hand, Nawal said that initiating contact with parents more often could give them more opportunities for involvement. Noting the workload of some parents, she said,
Sometimes, I feel as though a parent wants to do the right thing and wants to help their child, but is unable to do so because of their situation at home. They may need to work two jobs, or . . . the child is in daycare for a long period of time, so I try to contact those parents at night and give them the opportunity to talk to me that way, but I usually I ask them before I start. I say, “All right if I call you at home tonight?”

Not only did teachers provide input on communicational needs, they made efforts to meet those needs. Teacher participants wanted to parents to support their children in whatever ways they could. Thus they considered the communication situations of all families (e.g., differences in language or culture) in order to build rapport and relationships. For instance, Ali stressed the importance of recognizing the preferred languages of his students’ parents:

I do have one parent who prefers all her communications in Spanish so I do try to get those things translated. Like, “We have Pajama Day Friday.” A five-year-old coming home and telling her mother that is one thing, but to see it on a note [is better], so I try to get that quickly translated so that she’ll have it.

Likewise, Nawal noticed that parents from different cultures demanded more information about involvement opportunities at the school. She commented,

Parents who come from different cultures, they’re not very familiar with the education system, so they need to know more. We need to communicate more often with those parents . . . and educate [them] about things in the school. That could be done by sending flyers in different languages so parents can understand more and become more familiar with the culture of the school. . . . This is important for the relationship.

Nawal believed that better communication could attract more parents, including those who are
not yet familiar with the school system. Flyers in multiple languages would reflect not only the school’s positive culture but the parents’ needs as well. This would be beneficial to the relationship. In the case of parents with full-time jobs, Rania stated,

The parents I knew who couldn’t come to parent conferences because they couldn’t take the time off—I tried to send home in detail a summary of the child’s performance, just as I would have done in the conference.

Roula took a similarly creative approach: “I tried to send home some of the game and things with children, knowing that [parents] probably didn’t have daycare for that night.”

Two teachers stressed the importance of establishing communication on a “positive note.” Ali said, “Usually, I start off with all my parents at the open house. I have a communication log, and I try to establish communication from that from the beginning by writing positive notes.” Jack added, “I wanted to get a good relationship with parents, a good rapport with them at the beginning.”

The data indicated that teachers who had taught their current students’ siblings would rely on the first child to maintain an open line of communication with parents. As Jack put it, “With parents whom I’ve had multiple siblings from, I established that communication from the first child, and it’s been nice to carry it through for the siblings.”

For communicating with parents about techniques for working with their children at home, the majority of teachers stressed the importance of sharing information with parents and reading stories to children. For example, Nawal noted the importance of information sharing as way for parents to become more informed and knowledgeable:

When I have [parents] come in for parent conferences, I show them what their children
are doing and try to preview what my role is and what the expectations are. Depending on
the child, I might . . . tell them just go home and start making stories part of [their]
everyday routine. . . . I think that this way, parents feel successful and more responsible.
Nawal was aware that her role affected not only her student’s learning, but also the parents’
ability to help their children; she thought that by talking about the students’ activities, she could
motivate the parents and help them feel successful and gain self-esteem. Interestingly, Roula
considered sharing information with parents to be part of mentoring. She stated,

I have a lot of handouts I give parents . . . it’s a kind of mentoring. I tried to break down
some of them. Don’t just read a story to read a story. These are the kinds of things that
you need to be talking to your child about, the questions to ask them. Further that simple
activity and make it a little bit more. . . . I’ve given them copies of games and lists of
activities that they can be doing with their kids . . . and it worked out.

By using learning activities tailored to families’ needs, teachers made class work more accessible
to parents. In the interviews, the teachers reported positive outcomes from communicating with
families by giving them specific information and tasks.

Two teachers’ thought that improved communication with parents would engender
parental empowerment and appreciation; parents need to feel supported by teachers. These
teachers believed that words of encouragement create healthy relationships. According to Ali,
parents “want to hear the good stuff first” and need to feel that they play a valuable role in their
children’s education. He added,

I have one mother who I think had some family problems . . . and was not really
involved. So I had to write notes for her saying, “Way to go today. You got [your kids]
on the bus. Good job.” She puts back a smiley face, “I know. I did it. I’m so proud of myself,” and it’s like, “Okay. Nice.” Sometimes that’s what you need to do. You need to empower parents and have positive communication with them.

Ali thought that when parents felt valued, they were more apt to bond with him. This example shows a simple, positive way of communicating that makes the partnership more meaningful. Positive communication through appreciation and empowerment is echoed in Rania’s example. She believed that the more valued parents feel, the more likely they are to collaborate:

I still have the parents whose kids’ backpacks are full and things like that. They come back, the papers haven’t been checked. I’ll try to give incentives for the kids, telling them, “I’ll give you a prize if you go home and tell your mom or dad to take care of that.” When they do, I’ll write, “Oh, thank you so much for cleaning up the binder. I really appreciate it. Thanks for working hard together.” Just kind of give that little push, more confidence too, and it’s worked well many times.

Teachers were aware that their roles affected not only their student’s academic learning, but the parents’ abilities to help their children. The teachers in the previous examples thought that positive communication with parents motivated them and helped them to feel successful and gain self-esteem. Both of the teachers reported that when parents felt empowered and valued, they seemed prouder of their children and more responsive to their needs.

Many lessons can be learned from the involvement efforts made by teachers to build and sustain positive relationships. A great deal of success was evident when teachers made extra effort to involve parents. Efforts at improving home–school communication included having parents initiate more contact with teachers, recognizing linguistic and cultural family needs,
sending information home, sending positive notes, sharing homework instructions, communicating positively via parental appreciation and empowerment, and encouraging basic aspects of parental engagement.

With respect to efforts to foster parent–teacher relationships, parents felt that improved communication was beneficial. However, the data revealed a mix of perspectives on the initiatives that could be taken by parents and teachers to improve communication. According to Nana, communication should be sensitive to the particular needs and circumstances of different families. She thought that arranging substitute meetings for some parents would be helpful:

If, for example, I cannot come to a parent–teacher conference, it would be good if the teacher would call me and say “Is everything okay? I need to talk to you. Do you have a time to come and see me? We need to talk about your daughter or your son.” Maybe something we can work [out] . . . like substitute meetings for parents.

Mimo noted that parents have different educational backgrounds and may lack the necessary knowledge or instructions for helping with homework. She considered consistent communication an important factor in maintaining strong partnerships between teachers and parents working in support of children:

I feel a lot of teachers will put more education on us parents to give to the children, but at the same time you should look at certain families who didn’t go to college or never did school, and they are working hard, but they have families. How they can help the child if they never did it? How can they work together for the benefit of the child?

Mimo thought that teachers needed to help parents understand homework concepts. She recommended that teachers send “a folder with stuff that the child does this week and with
explanations, how to do things.” In the above example, the parent showed the importance of written communication to establishing better partnerships. Nawal explained:

Sometimes, parents don’t even have the time to come in the afternoon, but if they send information, instructions, a separate folder for the parent, and say “Okay, that’s what we’re doing” and explain exactly what they are doing in school . . . so parents can follow up at home, this will bring parents and teachers closer.

On the other hand, Georgina believed that parent-initiated meetings regarding homework were vital to helping children learn. She added that such meetings would help parents build better relationships:

If I feel that I did not understand homework concepts enough to help my daughter, I call her teacher and leave a voice mail that I need to meet with her. . . . I want her to know that I am very involved and interested in working with her so we can help Joyce . . . but I think a higher level of communication is needed.

Improved communication on behavioral issues was also mentioned by two parents. Mimo emphasized the need for parents to feel listened to and understood by teachers. She said, “If my daughter is being picked on, I should be able to talk with the teacher. . . . [The] teacher should also encourage this communication.” Otherwise, she said, “I would think that the school is hiding something . . . and they don’t want [me] to know the truth about what’s going on. But I think if we communicate more, it works better.” She implied that trust is built through open communication. She described communication matters that she felt directly affected both children and parent–teacher relationships. Similarly, Roger described the school as the children’s “second home”; he said that kids “are in school through the year, [so] at home, every parent
should know everything that is happening in school.” He stressed the need for the school to provide information and ensure that children are safe by “working one-on-one with the parent.”

The detailed strategies recommended by parents for improving home–school communication included arranging substitute parent–teacher meetings, sending additional homework exercises with clear instructions about the concepts, improving parent–teacher connections, and informing parents regularly about their children’s performance and behavioral problems. The data showed that it is not impossible for parents and teachers to forge better relationships if they encourage each other and focus on the importance of communication. The conclusions from the data collected from the open-ended interviews with parents and teachers are presented by theme in the next section.

**Coding and Conclusions of Open-Ended Interviews by Theme**

Because this study was centered on home–school relationships, *communication* and *sharing information* were mentioned frequently in the interviews by both parents and teachers. All the participants stressed the importance of communication and information-sharing as ways to improve engagement and optimize children’s academic achievement. One participant said, “When they have the open house, I go there. I also go to the ice cream social. I like to communicate with teachers. . . . If [she] needs anything . . . [o]r if there is anything that I need to know . . . I could ask her.”

Another important theme to emerge from the interviews was *providing parental involvement for a brighter future*, indicating that both teachers and parents hoped that parental involvement in education would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and to children’s continued motivation for learning. As one participant put it, “If the parents are involved, the kids
feel more motivated, and they work harder at school.”

Three major themes emerged concerning the social and cultural factors that influence family–school relationships: *attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy,* and *gaps in home–school communications.* As for the first, there appeared to be many challenging attitudes and beliefs obstructing the ability of parents and teachers to form relationships. Reflecting on the quality of the interactions between parents and teachers, one participant commented, “I feel like we need to change that attitude and say, ‘Okay, these are the issues. What can we do to help? How can we fix this? How can we solve it?’” As for the second, the new school policy seemed to preclude both teachers’ and parents’ desires to engage in mutual collaboration. One participant said the following: “Over the last few years, we have been made to feel more like visitors. . . . There are a lot of regulations.” The last concern involved gaps in home–school communication. One participant said, “I think language is the big one. Unfortunately I’m not bilingual. While we do have translation services in the district, it’s a long process to get something.”

The interview participants were also able to discuss ways to improve home–school relationships. Two major themes emerged here: *creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts* and *improving home–school communication.* Both were considered significant requirements for healthy parent–teacher relationships. For instance, the comment was made that “[offering] more events that would involve parents and teachers at the same time” would foster parent–teacher bonds. Furthermore, despite their differences over the role of involvement efforts in improving communication, all of the participants consistently emphasized the importance of involvement efforts that required regular, two-way, meaningful
communication. One participant described communication as a catalyst for home–school relationships and said that communication efforts should also reflect the needs of parents from diverse backgrounds. That could be achieved, for example, by “sending flyers in different languages so parents can . . . become more familiar with the culture of the school.”

**Summary of Findings from Open-ended Interviews**

Several conclusions emerged from the data collected from the open-ended interviews with parents and teachers. Based on the research findings, it is evident that the teacher and parent interviewees prioritized communication and information sharing to improve engagement to optimize children’s academic achievement. They also expressed the hope that parental involvement in children’s education would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and the children’s continued motivation for learning. When reflecting on the social and cultural factors that influence the relationships between families and schools, both groups observed three major factors: attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, and gaps in home–school communication. In addition, two major themes (creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts, and improving home–school communication) emerged as significant requirements for healthy parent–teacher relationships. Those two elements are considered to be significant requirements for healthy parent–teacher relationships.

**Additional Insight from Field Notes and Personal Observations**

One additional insight was found in this study that did not fit into the previously discussed themes, since it was not evident across multiple transcripts. This insight was drawn from the field notes and was included because it was relevant to the study’s research questions and focus. An added dimension of the gap in the home-school relationship seemed to be the lack
of trust that the participants placed in special services. Interestingly, two participants spoke about the importance of developing mutual trust through communicating and addressing the various needs of students and their parents. One participant shared the following:

We have some children that need special services. And I really believe that the parents trust us that those special services will always be available to them. When we’ll say that we are going to do something, they trust that we’re doing it, especially if it’s in writing. And because of staffing and different logistics, that doesn’t always happen. So, if a student is on an IEP and he needs, let’s say, occupational therapy three times a week but the occupational therapist is out . . . this could break the trust.

The above excerpt illustrates that, despite educators having the best intentions, the trust between parents and teachers can be diminished in periods of high uncertainty and change.

Talking about trust as a powerful force that supports home-school relationships, another participant explained that she was disappointed in her relationship with her daughter’s school’s staff. She recognized that her lack of trust in special services had led her to put less effort into maintaining a relationship with the school, explaining, “My daughter receives all kinds of special services, but she’s not able to talk yet. I trust the people that she’s with that they’re going to help her and if they don’t do what they say, how I can trust them . . . how can I work with them again?” In both of the above cases, the participants mentioned the difficulty of building trusting, cooperative relationships with educators when children’s schooling does not seem to be going in the right direction. This has led the researcher to consider how the trust of and expectations toward special services affect the home-school relationship as a whole.

**Themes Identified by the Focus Group**
A focus group of three teachers and three parents was selected as a final data set in this case study. The focus group was used as a means of member-checking. The questions for the focus group (Appendix G) were created by the researcher based on the results and themes of the first two data sets. Many of the interview questions aligned with the theoretical lens of social capital theory. Additional probes were included to ensure the clarification or enable the expansion of a discussed subject.

With respect to protocols, the participants’ signed consent forms were received prior to the actual meeting. The focus group interview was scheduled to last an hour and a half in a quiet, private location where the participants could share their views openly. When the process of data analysis was complete, the results were shared via email with the interviewees for verification and the confirmation of identified themes. The participants did not make any corrections or changes to the transcripts that were provided to them. Also, the participants were given an additional opportunity for person-to-person meetings, emails, or phone calls to discuss the data from the open-ended interviews and the focus group or the data’s overall triangulation. Again, no changes were suggested. Throughout this analysis, all of the expected themes reemerged.

**Theme one: Communication and sharing information.** The focus group was able to affirm the previous conclusion that the participants perceived communication and sharing information as integral components of parental involvement in assisting students to meet academic success. They listed various forms of communication such as “email and phone calls” and spoke about traditional occasions for dialogue like the “open house, PTO meetings and the parent-teacher conference.” As one participant explained, “We have parent conferences, and that is an excellent opportunity to communicate and share information with the parent about how
their kids are doing in school, but also to find out any issues of concerns that the parents might have that might help me better instruct their child.” The participants in the focus group felt that they had to adjust their involvement efforts to accommodate their communication needs and looked to parent-teacher relationships as a resource for better partnerships. School interactions between parents and teachers were perceived positively; sharing more information was deemed an effective technique to increase parental involvement, allowing both groups to respond more efficiently to the various needs (e.g., academic, emotional) of the students. As one participant explained:

I think communication should be more frequent. . . . You need to share information. That way you know what’s going on and the kid will not come home and lie about things that happened in schools, and you have a good communication with the teacher. It’s most important because the teacher then feels free to call you if there is a problem.

Consistent with the data in the open-end interviews, the focus group participants stressed the importance of “one-on-one communication” in building relationships. One participant shared:

When I sit down for the screening in September and I tell the parents I have that developmental history and it says, ‘Are you concerned about your child’s sleeping? Do they play well with others?’ that’s very important to me. I sit down with them and I go through everything. If they circle, ‘Yes, he’s having a hard time sleeping,’ that’s when I say, ‘Why do you think they’re having a hard time sleeping?’ and they really start to open up, because it’s one-on-one, it’s very personal.
The focus group participants perceived effective parent-teacher communication as an opportunity to create successful partnerships. They also agreed that communication should be “positive,” as it can set the stage for more collaborative interactions later. As one participant elaborated, “Even if I’m having an issue communicating, there’s always a way to be able to communicate in some way . . . to be positive in your communication [and] say the good stuff first.”

Not as much data emerged, in this final phase of data collection, on communication and networking beyond traditional events such as volunteering inside the classroom. Despite this, however, the information given was consistent with the previous data collected, and it confirmed the conclusions from the open-ended interviews. According to one participant, “Volunteering is face to face interaction and is open. It develops more of a trusting relationship [because] you get to know everyone . . . and chat with everybody.” Another participant added, “You think like you are responsible big time about your child education beside your interaction with these people, she can inform you how to do the job.”

Communication and sharing information proved to be key factors in the success of family-school partnerships. Employing various communication strategies, encouraging information sharing, building rapport and trust in relationships through one-on-one, positive, and consistent communication, conveying a joint interest in children’s learning, and accommodating various communication needs were also highlighted and discussed.

**Theme two: Providing parental support for a brighter future.** Coinciding with the data collected in the open-ended interviews, the focus group took the view that parental involvement is the cornerstone of a student’s success. The focus group participants recognized
children’s need for educational support, putting emphasis on parental involvement practices. According to one participant, “It is fabulous if a parent can be involved with helping their child with their homework or at least checking their homework to see what we’re learning in school.” Another participant went on to say, “What we would love the parents to do would be to reach to their children at night . . . some interactive games and not video games, but other learning activity games, even games as simple as Candy Land and the game Sorry, Trouble, anything involving math or reading games.” One participant commented, “I help my daughter all the time because I want her education to go far.” In the future, one participant hoped that, “My kids will have a better idea about the types of job they want to pursue down the road. Maybe three years from now, I am planning to sit down with them and start this conversation.” Another participant added, “It makes a huge difference to have [a] parent involved. . . . Here you can see the difference . . . an improvement when parents respond. . . . We want the kids to feel that we both care about them.” Along with parental involvement, however, the participants in the focus group acknowledged the fact that initiatives need to come from both parents and teachers. According to one participant, “If they feel as though their child is not meeting school academic expectations, they may schedule a meeting with me and say ‘What can I do to help?’ . . . I am very open to that . . . we need our students to succeed.” The statements of the participants in the focus group drew attention to the often overlooked necessity of schools and families sharing the responsibility of assisting children in developing the skills to lead stable lives.

**Theme three: Attitudes and beliefs.** The participants in the focus group collectively discussed their perceptions of the impact of attitudes and beliefs on parent-teacher relationships. They first conversed about their experiences with school personnel, some expressing concern
with what they referred to as a lack of positive attitudes toward the students, the school, and/or the parents. They then attributed this failure to negative attitudes within parent-teacher relationships. One participant shared the following:

There are different types of teachers. There was a teacher in my daughter’s class a couple years ago, but she only, she wasn’t a homeroom teacher, she was only from science, so she would come twice a week only. That teacher [was] always a problem with parents and students and she actually, if she had a problem with the child, for example, and you come to school to talk to her, she’ll be, ‘Here, this is the list of psychologist, you need to take your son or daughter there.’ You don’t do that. That teacher don’t work in that school no more because a lot of people complained.

The participants in the focus group also spoke about the need for some individuals to change their attitudes. One participant commented, “It is often difficult to get along with all people all the time . . . but with some effort [such as] keeping positive attitudes, it’s not impossible.” They shared the belief that relationships in schools would be stronger if “everyone keeps a positive attitude.” Other participants said that they were reluctant to establish a conversation with individuals who were not very likely to cooperate, expressing “frustration” when they met with people who did not have pleasant attitudes.

On the other hand, the participants expressed gratitude for those who showed genuine care and respect. They felt that keeping positive attitudes and beliefs would empower them to have more personal conversations and to “seek input.” As one participant explained, “I could call the teacher anytime . . . and when I go to the school, I will be able to talk with her . . .” At other times, they spoke about the link between positive attitudes and parental involvement. One
participant shared, “I noticed it right now in the other school, when the teachers are welcoming you to come anytime, you never hesitate . . .” This quotation establishes that teachers’ positive attitudes may also have implications on a personal level; more specifically, they might affect how parents contribute to their children’s learning. Another participant spoke about the different cultural beliefs that some parents may have toward schooling, expressing that, “Especially in elementary classes, I find that a lot of parents . . . reflect back from their own experiences where it was mostly play. I think a lot of families [are] just unaware of what the expectations now are.” Whilst most participants showed an understanding of the relative weights of attitude and beliefs in forming relationships, in some ways they held different views of the subject. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants appeared to agree on the beneficial effect of maintaining positive attitudes and beliefs.

**Theme four: Unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy.** Similar to within the open-ended interviews, the participants in the focus group addressed the negative consequences of the new school policy. They expressed the idea that, instead of facilitating the collaboration between parents and teachers, the process of parents’ participation in classroom activities seemed to have become “complicated” and “lengthy” for both groups. One participant commented, “I think I want to come in and say, ‘Yes, I have tomorrow off, can I come in?’ But because it’s such a process, I don’t feel like I can do it.” Another participant added, “I think if we take that barrier away, we would have a lot more of relationships [and] more of parents willing to come in.” A third participant expressed the following: “When we’re having a special day coming up, I have to rummage through my list, email the office to say is this one CORI cleared? It is a long process to get going. We have gotten away from a lot of parents coming in because of that, I think.”
Also, the participants believed that the new school policy had limited their ability to establish “close relationships.” Currently, the school allows the chance for the teachers to make connections with many of the parents during the open house and via phone, emails, and scheduled meetings, but there is very little opportunity for face-to-face communication. As one participant reported, “Unfortunately, after the open house, we do not have regular invitations inside the classroom . . . and get to know each other.” Another participant added, “We do not have this face-to-face interaction as part of a strong partnership . . .” Another participant shared the following perspective about the effects of the school policy on the current school environment: “Because of the CORI, I don’t think it’s that warm, fuzzy environment that it used to be.”

All of the participants considered strong parent-teacher relationships to be a key component of student success. They also noted that there is room to expand the parent-teacher interactions and communication beyond formal interaction during traditional events. As in the open-ended interviews, the focus group participants expressed concerns regarding the challenges faced by both parents and teachers due to the implementation of the new school policy. It is unclear, however, whether these challenges are due to the new school policy or to the negative attitudes and beliefs surrounding it.

**Theme five: Gaps in home-school communication.** While aware of the many benefits of establishing working relationships between parents and teachers, the participants in the focus group did see gaps in home-school communication. They were able to identify many constraints that are in the way of effective parent-teacher communication. Since they were consistent with the previous data collected, these constraints confirmed the conclusions drawn from the open-
ended interviews. Socioeconomic factors, time constraints, language barriers, and poor translation services were all discussed and restated as possible obstacles to parent-teacher relationships. According to one participant, “A lot of parents are working and they are hard-working people. They don’t have time to keep in touch.” Another participant said, “There is a misconception of parents that are not that involved with their children. I really feel like some people are a little judgmental of those parents. . . . Many parents are busy and they don’t have time to communicate on a regular basis.” The time given to teachers to convey important messages to parents seems to also be limited, according to one participant who said, “It’s really hard to find the time to explain it all. That’s why I think the computer comes in so handy now with the email because I think kind of jot that all down and email it at the same time.” The participants also explained that, in addition to socioeconomic factors and time constraints, cultural and language differences also presented challenges to effective communication. As one participant said, “Before I learned how to speak enough English, I was always worried about interacting with other people. I was trying to stay away from talking or making relationships with people who weren’t from my culture. . . . They may get me wrong.” Another participant went on to say, “In my room there’s a language barrier there too, and [parents] don’t feel comfortable coming into an English-speaking classroom . . . and it’s hard to get someone [to translate] right away.”

The participants took the view that increased communication and trust is linked to improved home-school relationships. They also showed that the school did not seem to be examining or fully considering the gap in home-school communication that was hindering the development of strong parent-teacher relationships.
**Theme six: Creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts.** The participants in the focus group were able to discuss the various ways to increase collaboration by creating a welcoming environment. They focused attention on the potency of the school’s efforts to involve parents. They showed that, despite the school being located in a relatively underprivileged area, its leadership could create a cultural environment that exemplified collaborative relationships in myriad ways. For instance, comments were made that the presence of “more family things, more school events, stronger PTO, teamwork, [and] volunteering opportunities” would help parents to engage in the educational process and become an important part of the school culture. One participant said, “I remember that I had a friend who lived in a different city, and she told me that she always volunteered in her son’s class. I was always like, ‘I really want to do this,’ so I asked my daughter’s teacher, and she said, ‘We don’t do it . . .’” She added, “I think [what] would be very helpful, again, is having activities inside the classroom for the parents. Have the parents come . . . have something special with the child inside his classroom . . . this would break any barriers between the teacher and parents. This is a very good thing to do.” Another participant explained, “I wish I could have parents in more often to volunteer, but we can’t, and that’s the school, that’s not just me . . .” It seems clear that, unless the school leadership facilitates the process of collaboration, “teachers alone cannot [foster] . . . a welcoming school environment."

The important point to reiterate here is that the majority of the participants expected collaboration to produce positive results, but knew that performance can be hindered when parents and teachers do not establish working relationships “as soon as possible.” One participant explained the benefits of early collaboration with parents, stating, “Especially kindergarten, this
is the year to get the parents in and get them involved, get the parents’ association. You need to get them, grab them. That’s the year. You’re going to have them for eight years, so you want to get the parents at that age . . .” This example shows a glimpse of what can be accomplished through early collaboration between parents and teachers. As is evident from the excerpts given above, early collaboration among parents and teachers needs to become a priority.

Other participants thought that early collaboration opens the doors for a better experience in communicating and becoming “emotionally engaged with each other.” Nevertheless, due to the current school culture and practices that might limit the abilities of parents and teachers to participate in regular communication and/or collaborative activities, many participants were in favor of creating a more welcoming environment that acknowledges the role of the parents and teachers as partners. This view was also common in most of the teachers’ as well as the parents’ open-ended interviews.

**Theme seven: Improving home-school communication.** In addition to creating a welcoming environment, the participants were also resourceful in explaining the benefits of improving home-school communication. In sharing their experiences related to communicating with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the majority of the participants talked extensively about these individuals’ intimidation and consciousness of their limited abilities in English. They explained that these parents have often received fewer of the language experiences necessary to build a strong vocabulary. This affects their abilities to assist with their children’s learning and to collaborate with school staff. One participant explained the situation precisely by saying, “I think parents are a little afraid to volunteer to come in sometimes because [they] think I’m going to have them sit in the reading group and try to teach
the kids how to read.” She added, “I think that if it’s well communicated, ‘No you’re coming in just to kind of be an extra warm body that can help manage, pick up the toys that fall down, and things like that, like common sense things’ . . . it helps.” Another participant commented, “I really feel most of the parents want to help their children . . . I know that from my friends . . . But not all of the parents know how . . . they [may] not have enough information about things in schools, I think. They want ideas on what they can be doing at home.”

It became evident from the discussions that the issue of understanding English and conforming to the prevalent cultural values lies at the heart of the communication barrier between parents and teachers. Since many parents demand information, the participants were explicit in reflecting on various communication efforts that could lead to increasing parental engagement and accountability. These efforts included recognizing linguistic and cultural family needs, sending flyers home in different languages, sending additional homework exercises with clear instructions about the concepts being taught, and informing parents regularly about their children’s performance and behavioral problems. One participant explained, “I have a family right now where the parents are from India and they’re always coming in, asking me, ‘What should we do?’ I always communicate with them. They’re so worried that he’s not doing well in school. But he is.” The participants collectively agreed that communication challenges may be eradicated through parental appreciation and empowerment, which they considered to be an important aspect of developing meaningful parent-teacher relationships. Statements such as, “There’s nothing to worry about,” “He’s doing great,” “Feel free to reach out to me,” and “That was nice of you” were mentioned often during the discussion.

Furthermore, the participants discussed the importance of “staying up-to-date,” “in
touch,” and “informed” during the process of building successful partnerships. As one participant illustrated, “If we’re both on the right page, if we communicate together, it’s only going to help our kids.” Another participant added, “If I have struggling students, I bring these parents in and let them know they’re struggling; ‘This is what I do and this is what you need to do to help them as well.’” The participants believed that one-on-one and open communication may serve to motivate both parents’ continued support and teachers’ abilities to better understand the various challenges facing some parents (e.g. language, culture, social factors). One participant commented that, “More communication is what we need. You know, not everyone is born with a book on how to raise or teach children.” Another participant said, “Not that the work is not important, but I think sometimes you certainly put your family first, and find the way to get into school for just 5 or 10 minutes, show your face, and communicate with the teacher.” Despite the different perspectives about involvement efforts to improve home-school communication, all of the participants consistently emphasized the importance of establishing a culture of expectations around communications to increase teacher and parent accountability.

Again, no changes were suggested throughout this analysis, all of the expected themes reemerged. Also, all of the original conclusions from the open-ended interviews and field notes were confirmed. One additional insight was drawn from the focus group discussion and was included because it was relevant to the study’s research questions and focus. In fact, participants in the focus group thought that early collaboration could set the stage for continued partnerships.

**Summary of Findings/Triangulation of Data**

Several conclusions emerged from the triangulation of the data collected from the open-ended interviews with parents and teachers, the field notes, and the focus group. Based on the
research findings, it is evident that the teacher and parent interviewees prioritized communication and sharing information as two main strategies to improve engagement and optimize children’s academic results. In addition, both teachers and parents expressed the hope that parental involvement in their children’s educations would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and the children’s continued motivation for learning. When reflecting on the social and cultural factors that influence the relationships between families and schools, both groups observed three major factors: attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, and gaps in home–school communication. One additional insight from the field notes was related to the participants’ lack of trust in special services. In addition, two major themes (creating a welcoming environment to support collaborative efforts, and improving home–school communication) emerged as significant requirements for healthy parent–teacher relationships. Also, it was noted that early collaboration could ultimately set the stage for continued partnerships. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Findings

Chapter Five provides a summary of the key findings of this study and highlights what these findings imply for both the literature review and the theoretical framework. Additionally, it discusses the findings’ implications for current educational practices and future research. This descriptive qualitative case study allowed the researcher to explore the ideologies of both teachers and parents regarding the quality of their interrelationships and the ways that they care for children in one urban elementary school in Massachusetts. The data was obtained through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers (the primary data source), field notes, and a focus group. The research was guided by Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction. Specifically, the overarching question of this study was this: How do parents and teachers interact with each other and build rapport to foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools? Using elements of Bourdieu’s theory, three sub-questions guided this study’s collection and analysis of data:

1. What are the alignments of parents’ and teachers’ hopes for their children?

2. What social and cultural factors do teachers and parents observe that influence the relations between families and schools?

3. Which types of involvement efforts do teachers and parents observe that help to establish and foster parent–teacher relationships?

Each research question reflected key findings that were grounded in the literature. In addition, the findings from the research questions showed a significant relationship to Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction. The next section highlights what these findings imply for both the literature review and the theoretical framework.
**Research Question #1:** How do parents and teachers interact with each other and build rapport to foster parental involvement in urban elementary schools?

The teacher and parent interviewees relied on communication and information-sharing to improve engagement and optimize children’s academic achievement. But, it was noted that there is room to expand the parent-teacher interactions and communication beyond formal interaction during traditional events.

**Literature.** The results from examining parents’ and teachers’ views regarding home-school relationships showed that each group encouraged their children’s educational progress through open communication and information-sharing. Both teachers and parents recognized the need for engaging in active communication. The research that was highlighted in the literature review reveals the importance of home-school communication in providing students with the opportunity to succeed (Ahmad, 2010; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1987; Horn, 2003; Lattimore, 2013; Nesman, 2007; Perna & Titus, 2005; Ramirez, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). Also, this study’s data revealed that the participating teachers recognized the need for the inclusion of multiple languages, communication media, and information-sharing systems to foster parental involvement at school. The teachers used specific strategies to communicate with non-English speaking parents (e.g., providing translation services, recognizing parents’ communication style preferences, accommodating each individual student’s social situation based on information given by the parents, asking a third party for clarification in case of ambiguity, and reducing the use of educational jargon). They realized that immigrant parents and parents from multicultural backgrounds may need extra assistance before they can actively participate in American school
systems. This research supports Ahmad’s (2010) finding that parents expect and require a variety of communication strategies and formats. Ruiz (2009) shows that more than one communication strategy can be effective in increasing outreach with parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, Nesman (2007) found that presenting information to parents in an easy and understandable manner can make them more likely to respond and participate in school functions.

Also, it was determined that, while some of the formalized communication that occurred during traditional events (e.g., open houses and PTO) can be considered effective in promoting parent-teacher relationships, the available communication opportunities were not meeting all of the parents’ needs or offering teachers the ability to build close relationships with parents and exchange information that could affect the students’ learning. Epstein (1987) reports that many home-school communications are institutional interactions involving “parent–teacher associations, open houses, newsletters, or general invitations to a school play or activity,” but most teachers and parents prefer personal interaction (p. 27). Also, the research in this area shows that the American school system, specifically in urban areas, often encourages teachers and parents to operate on a more formal level than some parents from different cultures (e.g., Hispanic and Mediterranean cultures) are accustomed to or expect (Ahmad, 2010; Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Ruiz, 2009). This statement was true of Palermo Elementary school, since few parent-teacher interactions occurred beyond traditional events and most of their communication was formal and institutionalized. While it would be difficult for teachers to establish close relationships with all parents, engaging them in ongoing communication needs to be a priority. The participating teachers in this case study seemed to
effectively inform parents of their expectations for involvement and academic success. The research of Perna and Titus (2005) supports the need for parents to be informed of the social and academic expectations of their children's school systems.

In this case study, it was important to note that informal communication with teachers and other parents allowed some parents to assess their children’s academic performance closely and to establish more confidence in communicating with teachers and the school community. This view supports Ramirez’s (2003) assertion that working-class parents need more time and assurance than higher-income parents to build trust and to establish working relationships with their school communities.

Moreover, one finding that emerged from the teachers’ as well as the parents’ experiences was that the communication with parents emerged as a complex process that was underpinned by the school’s policies and climate. Both the teachers and the parents that were interviewed advocated for more face-to-face interactions and personalized relationships. Therefore, the inability of parents and teachers to build informal relationships could greatly impact their attempts to optimize children’s learning.

**Theoretical Framework.** This research was guided by Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction and used the theoretical lenses of capital and habitus. The theory of cultural capital helps to explain the underlying dynamics of the practices and interactions of parents and teachers in the contexts of home and school. The notion of habitus can aid in illustrating the underlying logic that shapes teachers’ and parents’ perceptions, communication practices, and interactions in the school context. More specifically, both theoretical tools illustrate how parents and teachers employ their capital and habitus to interact and communicate
reciprocally. Employing Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural reproduction, Lee and Bowen (2006) assert that parental involvement in school systems “utilizes social capital by increasing information [sharing], skills (i.e. how to help with homework), [and] access to resources” with the aim of improving parents’ capacity to assist their children’s learning (p. 201).

The findings that emerged from triangulating the data suggested that the teachers used formalized and institutionalized communication procedures to establish contact and relationships with parents. The teachers at this particular elementary school utilized a variety of strategies to get parents involved and informed about their children’s learning, including frequent updates via phone and email, parent meetings, and open houses; despite this, however, home-school communication seems to be a complex process that is underpinned by factors such as time constraints and linguistic and cultural differences. Nevertheless, the teachers who were interviewed took specific initiatives to improve their communication practices, practices that may be inscribed in their habitus and include promising strategies for improving student achievement.

Also, the findings indicate that communicating and sharing information with teachers and other parents allowed some parents to enhance their social and cultural capital; they then employed this to better understand the school’s culture and to build trusting relationships. In other words, unlike the research on the effects of class and cultural differences on home-school relations that shows that individuals with less cultural capital experience barriers to institutional resources (Connell et al., 1982; Crozier, 1998; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 1998a), differences in social class and power did not here appear to be a barrier against parents mobilizing their social and cultural connections. The parents who participated in this study demonstrated the significance
and relevance of appropriating their capital and habitus in order to interact, communicate, and network with teachers through school visits. The stronger the network between teachers and parents, the more likely it is that they are able to communicate and cooperate to benefit the students. However, it does seem that the school follows certain general procedures for parental communication.

This case study highlights the importance of cultural capital and habitus in shaping parent-teacher interactions and communication. Based on its findings, it is clear that the cultural capital that can be built through communication, sharing information, and fostering relationships might contribute to a climate of collaboration and trust that aids students’ academic performance.

**Research-Question #2:** What are the alignments of parents’ and teachers’ hopes for their children?

Both teachers and parents expressed the hope that parental involvement in children’s education would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and the children’s continued motivation for learning. Although both the parents and teachers in this study considered themselves to be partners in education, the teachers tended to emphasize children’s academic and behavioral outcomes while the parents referred more often to the psychological and emotional aspects of their lives.

**Literature.** Parental involvement reaps a number of benefits related to student success; it has been linked to “stronger academic achievement, higher educational aspirations, [and a] more positive perception of education” (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002, p. 2). The participating teachers and parents in this case study collectively wanted parental involvement to be a long-lasting investment that could help develop relationships with the potential to aid
student learning. This finding is supported by an abundance of literature on parental involvement (Hujala et al., 2009; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Putman, 1995). Hujala et al. (2009) show that teachers perceive parental involvement in early childhood education to be an active agent that helps teachers and parents to develop relationships that can foster children’s social, emotional, and academic wellbeing. The teachers in this case study said that initiating parental involvement activities early in childhood can provide children with strong foundations for their upper school years. Additionally, in a study by Lewis-Antoine (2012), 100% of the parents who were interviewed believed that active parental involvement and consistent parent-teacher contact had an effect on home-school relationships; they also asserted that this, in turn, could be translated into students’ motivation for learning.

Moreover, the participants in this case study described their role as partners in the educational process. They considered themselves to belong to learning communities that are based on trust, the commitment to cooperation, and the goal of empowering students to reach their full potential. Putman (1995) highlights the importance of building relationships within learning communities, also focusing on trust, common interests, and meeting established goals.

Although both the parents and teachers in this study considered themselves to be partners in education, the teachers tended to emphasize children’s academic and behavioral outcomes while the parents referred more often to the psychological and emotional aspects of their lives. Katz (1984) and other researchers (Getzels, 1974; Powell, 1989; Reed et al., 2000) have described and defined the disparate roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents, claiming that they maintain different relationships with the same child. While the role of teachers is based on professional knowledge of techniques to support learning, the role of parents is more
subjective because it involves more than academic support (Katz, 1984). Parents have primary custody of and are responsible 24 hours per day for their children’s psychological and emotional wellbeing (Katz, 1984). They are also morally responsible for their children’s actions (Katz, 1984). This difference in positions might help explain the study’s findings related to the second research question.

**Theoretical framework.** Researchers and sociologists have often conceptualized parental involvement in their children’s schooling as a form of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Dumais, 2006; Lee, 1993; McNeal, 1999; Poertes, 1998; Prins & Toso, 2008; Yan & Lin, 2005). Bourdieu (1977) conceptualized cultural capital (e.g., networks with other parents and teachers, an understanding of the school system and educational jargon, and contact with school personnel) as a significant factor in determining student performance. In a later study, Bourdieu (1986) further contends that cultural capital is then translated through parents’ greater involvement with the child. With respect to parental involvement in their children’s education, Bourdieu (1977, 1986) articulates three mechanisms through which children can benefit from parental involvement. First, parents who are involved in their children’s education convey the message to their children that education is valuable. This message becomes embedded in their children’s habitus, and the children are more likely to become convinced of the benefits of education themselves. Second, parental involvement provides parents with more networking opportunities. Involved parents establish relationships and networks with other parents and teachers. This is related to Poertes’ (1998) assertion that social capital consists of “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (p. 6). Finally, Bourdieu’s last mechanism by which
children benefit from parental involvement is that involved parents are given more opportunities to gather information about their children; when parents and teachers discuss a student’s academic or/and behavioral problems, parents are given a greater advantage to intervene more effectively (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986).

After studying the patterns and perceptions of early childhood cultural capital and parental habitus, Dumais (2006) claimed that one aspect of parental habitus involves parents’ expectations of their children’s desire to pursue higher education. Furthermore, he argues that parents who are convinced of the benefits of their involvement are more likely to stimulate their children to do well in school by helping them with their homework, creating a positive learning environment, and building positive relationships with teachers. This could provide a possible explanation for this case study’s findings concerning parents’ perceptions of the importance of their involvement.

Both the teachers and parents who participated in this case study viewed parental involvement as a crucial element not only of a student's future success, but also in parent-teacher relationships. While the teachers portrayed most parents as involved in one way or in another, there was variation in how the teachers and parents established the role of habitus by sharing their experiences. Nevertheless, both teachers and parents hoped that parental involvement in children’s education would lead to better parent–teacher relationships and the children’s continued motivation for learning. They also observed three major factors that influenced parent-teacher relations: attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, and gaps in home–school communication. These are all discussed in the following section.

**Research Question #3:** What social and cultural factors do teachers and parents observe that
influence the relations between families and schools?

When reflecting on the social and cultural factors that influence the relationships, both groups observed the following three constructs: attitudes and beliefs, unwelcome feelings due to a new school policy, and gaps in home–school communication. One additional insight from the field notes was related to the participants’ lack of trust in special services.

**Literature.** The findings from this case study resonate strongly with the research and writings of a number of scholars in the field of educational sociology who examined the major barriers to effective home-school partnerships (Ahmad, 2010; Al-Shammari & Yawkey, 2008; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Comer & Haynes, 2014; Crozier, 1998; Dor, 2012; Duschesne & Ratelle, 2010; Epstein & Munk, 1999; Graue & Brown, 2003; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Lo, 2008; Park, 2008; Ratelle, 2009; Reed et al., 2000; Taylor, 1968; Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Valdés, 1996; Yanghee, 2009). Based on the various viewpoints of the participants, the results of this case study indicate that parents and teachers are more capable of communicating and collaborating with each other when positive attitudes and shared beliefs are exhibited and reinforced on both sides. Specifically, the teachers in this case study reported that some parents become defensive when their children have behavioral problems. They further asserted that parents are less defensive when they are willing to collaborate. Whereas collaboration between teachers and parents may improve student behavior, a substantial body of research supports the negative relationship between students’ behavioral problems and family-school dynamic (Ahmad, 2010; Crozier, 1998; Dor, 2012; Duschesne & Ratelle, 2010; Graue & Brown, 2003). Focusing on family-school relationships, Dor’s (2012) findings indicate that many challenges that are commonly faced by teachers result in ambivalent relationships with parents. The teachers
in Dor’s study expressed “personal emotional difficulty” in their interactions with parents who employed “criticism, ungratefulness, and lack of appreciation” when their children experienced behavioral difficulties (p. 932). This might have decreased the level at which teachers and parents engaged with one another. Graue and Brown (2003) presented similar results based on teachers’ beliefs regarding the lack of teacher-parent connections. They reported that the participating parents became defensive when they focused on their emotional needs rather than the needs of the children. Graue and Brown’s findings are also consistent with the findings of this case study in indicating that teachers recognize the sensitivity required when talking to parents about their children’s behavioral problems.

Likewise, the parents in this case study discussed the ways in which attitudes and beliefs shaped their interactions with teachers. In conversing about their experiences with school personnel, some expressed concern with what they referred to as a lack of positive attitudes toward the students and their parents. They then attributed this failure to negative attitudes within parent-teacher relationships. In Theodorou’s (2008) study, parents who noticed teachers’ negative attitudes felt uncomfortable in the school environment and reluctant to get involved. Waller (1932) wrote that “the fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other” (p. 68). Crozier (1998), on the other hand, asserts that a willingness to talk candidly and to collaborate increases positive attitudes and beliefs for both parents and teachers and improves their satisfaction with their interrelationships. These findings are similar to those within the studies of Ahmad (2010) and Duschesne and Ratelle (2010) in asserting that home-school relationships are formed and maintained by positive attitudes and beliefs and the willingness to collaborate.
Besides attitudes and beliefs, the new school policy was considered by both groups as a second major factor that could set the tone for the quality of parent-teacher interactions. Both groups reported that parents were no longer able to acquire a sense of belonging in an atmosphere where they did not feel comfortable, valued, or welcome. The new policy caused a significant decline in parents’ at-school involvement. The findings from this study align with Yanghee’s (2009) study, which also asserts that parents feeling unwelcome can damage their willingness to collaborate with schools. Duschesne and Ratelle (2010) also claim that parents’ negative perceptions of a school environment can be associated with inconsistent parental involvement. It was also evident in this case study that the teachers’ ability to gain parental input and support and to communicate with parents successfully had been lessened by the new school policy. Comer and Haynes (2014) conclude that some school policies discourage parents from spending time in classrooms. Relatedly, the teachers in this case study indicated their concerns regarding the continued decline of parental engagement in classroom activities. These findings strongly resonate with Ahmad’s (2010) exploration of teachers’ perceptions of institutional environments and their relationship with the communication dynamics of parents. According to Ahmad (2010), negative parental perceptions of a school environment present a major barrier to effective collaboration in the school setting.

Along with the negative effects of the current school environment on home-school relationships and communication, the teachers in this case study considered factors related to socioeconomic circumstances, time constraints, and language and translation barriers to be major hindrances to consistent home-school communication. Researchers such as Brewster and Railsback (2003), Lo (2008), Turney and Kao (2009), and Valdés (1996) have presented similar
results related to teachers’ beliefs regarding the lack of teacher-parent communication. Those studies indicate that parents may feel uncomfortable during their interactions with school officials because of time constraints, language or cultural differences, a lack of adequate translation services, or their previous experiences with school (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Lo, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Valdés, 1996).

One additional insight from the field notes was related to the participants’ lack of trust in special services. Epstein and Munk (1999) and Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) found that the parents of students with special needs often lack an adequate level of communication with teachers. They further contend that an increased level of communication with the parents of special needs children could promote input toward the child’s education from all members involved, helping to build more trusting relationships between them.

Also, this case study’s findings regarding how parents perceive a lack of communication and behavioral problems in school are similar to the findings from Park’s (2008) and Lewis-Antoine’s (2012) studies. The participating parents in this case study expressed concern with the delivery of pertinent information. They advocated for better home-school communication policies and practices, particularly regarding students’ behavioral difficulties. One possible explanation for this finding is that parents who communicate openly and regularly with teachers are better equipped to address their children’s misbehavior. Park (2008) and Chen and Gregory (2009) assert that parent-child discussions significantly reduce the likelihood of children’s misbehavior. Likewise, Cortez and Flores (2009) assert that parents need detailed knowledge of their children’s academic and behavioral performances to facilitate parent-child discussion.

**Theoretical framework.** Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social and cultural reproduction
demonstrates how the actions and attitudes of individuals shape the opportunities of others. In this case study, the participating parents and teachers both wanted to improve the outcomes for students and be strong partners with schools, though they varied in their current practices. Unlike those parents who considered any school occasion to be a chance to network with fellow parents or teachers, the majority of the teacher participants suggested that some occasions (like when parents are in the playground) are not appropriate for complex communication. This difference in perspective could be attributed to differences in the use of capital and habitus. Lasky (2000), however, describes parent-teacher interactions as emotional practices that “are shaped by [the] influences of culture and relationship and inextricably interconnected elements of status and power” (p. 843).

Additionally, Bourdieu’s (1973) theory emphasizes the contrast between an individual’s habitus and the institutional habitus (e.g., the dominant culture of the school or educational field). This case study’s findings demonstrate that, while parents’ habitus and perceptions of the school environment often align with those of teachers, the role of the institutional habitus (e.g., the school climate, culture, and policies) determines, shapes, and informs teachers’ practice. The institutional habitus of the school and the prevailing structure of practice underscore the collective habitus of most teachers and parents. With respect to building partnerships, both groups saw the current school environment as a factor that limited parent-teacher communication and collaboration. This implies that the existing institutional habitus was not oriented toward the various aspects through which effective partnerships can take place. In this sense, the new school policy has depleted not only the teachers’ capacity to build effective home-school partnerships, but also the parents’ ability to appropriate their social and cultural capital and resources to
successfully manoeuvre through the uninviting environment of the school. In other words, differences in parental habitus and institutional habitus can result in parents feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Moreover, Bourdieu (1973) maintains that individuals who are rich in capital such as education and language have more opportunities to build ongoing relationships with members of society (Bourdieu, 1973). According to Bourdieu, schools value the cultural capital of the dominant group, and the knowledge of the upper and middle classes is considered capital that is valuable to a hierarchical society. This belief may be embodied in the school culture, influencing people’s knowledge, perceptions, and habitus (Bourdieu, 1973). According to Lareau (1987), middle-class parents enjoy a cultural capital and habitus that is more congruent with the typical social group, giving them an advantage when communicating with school personnel. Additionally, the majority of barriers to parental communication that were mentioned by teachers in this study were related to the parents’ socioeconomic circumstances and their linguistic and cultural differences. Such factors create gaps in home-school communication. Additionally, many in-school factors determine and influence the nature and extent to which teachers make contact with parents. For the teachers in this study, time and resource constraints (e.g., translation and special services) often prevented them from building trust and consistently communicating with parents. In this sense, the teachers saw the structural and functional constraints of the school as huge barriers to communication. This indicates that the structure and culture of a school has power over the resources of individuals (Bourdieu, 1973; Lareau, 1987).

**Research Question #4:** Which types of involvement efforts do teachers and parents observe that help to establish and foster parent–teacher relationships?
A welcoming environment that supports collaborative efforts was said by both groups to be a significant requirement for healthy parent–teacher relationships. Some components of a welcoming, collaborative environment would be a stronger PTO; a larger number of events for parents, family functions, and parent workshops; parental involvement in classroom activities; professional behavior in the classroom; and teamwork between parents and teachers. Participants also noted that early collaboration can set the stage for continued partnerships. In addition, they consistently emphasized the need for an improved system for home-school communication.

**Literature.** There are significant similarities between how parents and teachers perceive school efforts and family involvement in education. In the context of establishing family-friendly schools, the climate of a school was seen as having a significant effect on family-school partnerships (Batey, 1996; Moles, 1996; Tomlinson, 1996; Zorka, Godber, Hurley, & Christenson, 2001). This is particularly true when there are “social distances” between homes and schools, or when “there is a history of poor relationships between families and the school” (Virginia Department of Education, 2002, p. 23). Researchers such as Batey (1996), Moles (1996), and Tomlinson (1996) realized the importance of a welcoming climate, claiming that it creates the conditions that are necessary for positive parental participation. As evidenced by the teachers’ transcribed data in this study, parents who view the school setting as a positive, welcoming environment also tend to focus more attention on what is most important for their children’s social, emotional, academic, and behavioral wellbeing. This can also motivate parents to work hard with the teachers toward a common purpose. A wealth of evidence supports the idea that family-school interactions should be centered on what each partner can do to foster collaborative relationships, thereby improving the development and learning of children (Comer,
Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996; Lontos, 1992; Osher, 1997; Zorka et al., 2001).

However, the important point to reiterate here is that the majority of the participants in this case study valued family involvement, but reported the need for more school efforts to be made, in particular, with parents from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, special efforts could be made to communicate with and encourage the involvement of parents who are not fluent in English. Both parents and teachers suggested that more events and activities should be sponsored by the school and structured to fit parents’ diverse needs (e.g., providing translation services, incorporating the parents’ sociocultural values, and arranging substitute meetings for them). Existing research on this topic has proven a number of involvement efforts to be effective in creating positive family-school working relationships, such as “respecting and valuing [parents’] diverse contributions” (Ellis & Hughes, 2002, p. 5), encouraging parents to act like professionals in the classroom (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Walberg, 1984; Walker & Maclure, 2005), implementing two-way communication (Dor, 2012; Epstein, 2001, 2008; Horn, 2003; Lareau, 1987; McGrath, 2007), establishing communication “on a positive note” (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 482; Ferrera, 2009; McGrath, 2007), providing multilingual translation services (Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Lo, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009), changing schedules to accommodate parents and families (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003) and implementing parental involvement programs and practices that address the needs and values of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Davies, 1991; Gomez & Greenough, 2002; Trumbull et al., 2001).

The participants in this study valued the input of both home and school and focused on what both parents and educators can do to promote better relationships. In this sense, the
participants addressed the need to exchange information that enables both educators and families to assist children’s learning. A review of the literature in this area revealed similar suggestions by parents and teachers, such as sharing homework instructions (Liontos, 1992; Tam & Chan, 2009; Valdés, 1996), updating parents regularly about school events (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004) and improving teachers’ practices through increased knowledge of children’s family, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances (Christenson, 1995). Likewise, both groups in this case study believed in the likelihood that behavioral and academic interventions would be more successful when shared between the home and school environments. In the absence of effective parent-teacher communication, students can engage in more high-risk academic failure and behavior (August, Anderson, & Bloomquist, 1992; Webster-Stratton, 1993).

Furthermore, the data from this case study indicates that communication efforts have some relevance to how parents interact with teachers and schools and vice versa. Research studies have found that how parents and teachers communicate can explain the ways that their partnerships play out in practice (Becker & Epstein, 1982; McGrath, 2007). Although some parents and teachers may be unable to form personalized relationships because of many factors (e.g., a fear of conflict with educators, previous negative interactions and experiences, linguistic and cultural differences, economic and time constraints, or outside commitments), research studies have documented the positive effects of one-on-one communication in building confidence in relationships (Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), promoting positive attitudes (Christenson & Cleary, 1990; Dor, 2012), and fostering a non-deficit perspective when addressing educational and behavioral concerns (Adam & Christenson, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004; Metcalf, 2001).
The parental empowerment that schools must provide through the development of better communication approaches is paramount to this research. Such approaches must address and empower all families, including those who are socially underrepresented. The teachers in this case study spoke positively of reinforced communication, saying that, in many instances, it helps parents to become a part of the academic culture and to feel valuable. Family empowerment is a process that “begins with encouraging [a] parental sense of self-efficacy (i.e., parents able to see their ability to contribute)” (Virginia Department of Education, 2002, p. 46). The cumulative impact of these research findings underscores the importance of family empowerment in contributing to higher quality home-school interactions (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Harris, 2011; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Lontos, 1992; Lo, 2012). When developing communication practices, researchers such as Christenson and Hirsch (1998) and Sheridan, Cowan, and Eagle (2000) note that enhancing parental self-efficacy beliefs can help parents to view themselves as adequate in their teaching roles. Furthermore, researchers like Ellis and Hughes (2002) and Lewis and Foreman (2002) see focusing on the strength of the family as a catalyst that enables families and educators to work together to achieve a positive school climate aimed at improving student learning.

Along with embracing a culture of empowerment and appreciation, efforts like volunteering and collaboration seemed to be effective for both groups. In this regard, Lewis and Foreman (2002) assert that, in order for school personnel and parents to collaborate, “they must begin from a base of mutual respect and caring” (Lewis & Foreman, 2002, p. 22). The findings in this case indicate that, when parents support school activities and functions, they tend to have a greater understanding of the various challenges that teachers experience (e.g., limited time,
curriculum, and class sizes) when it comes to giving individualized attention to students. Also, the parent interviewees viewed their participation in school activities and events as an important factor in building lasting relationships; they believed that participation reaps certain benefits, such as allowing them to share valuable information with teachers and other parents in order to aid their children’s educational development, to build trust, to foster their social networks, and to show interest in their children’s education. These benefits were also expressed in other studies. For example, the longitudinal assessment of teachers’ perceptions of parental involvement in children’s education and school performances that was conducted by Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) supports the notion that volunteering inside of the school setting can enable parents to acquire a better understanding of the teacher’s responsibilities and the school’s curriculum and policies. To illustrate the benefits of parental involvement to home-school relationships, Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed and analyzed 85 studies that documented the positive effects of parental involvement on children, families, and schools. They described volunteering and collaboration as two mechanisms through which potential barriers to constructive relationships could be identified and addressed. Henderson and Berla (1994) also found that the collaboration of parents and teachers in the learning environment helps both groups to circumvent blame when students experience learning and behavioral difficulties. A concerted effort to help parents and teachers work together has been proposed as a key building block in developing trust, understanding the demands placed on both educators and parents, and discussing what can be done at home and at school to achieve the students’ goals (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Comer et al., 1996; Liontos, 1992; Osher, 1997; Zorka et al., 2001). In particular, establishing proactive and early collaboration at the beginning of the school year
emerged as a promising way to optimize the interrelationships between parents and teachers (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004).

**Theoretical framework.** Bourdieu (1989) posits that the school environment, or field, has a considerable impact on the ways in which educational stakeholders form social ties (p. 39). He further contends that, depending on the environment and the school structures, collaboration may form a good starting point for interactions between parents and teachers (Bourdieu, 1989; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In any given school environment, it is the stakeholders (i.e., the teachers and parents) who restructure the environment through involvement efforts and practices and who thus act either “individually” or “collectively” (Ahmad, 2010, p. 150). This requires an in-depth understanding of the culture and social values that shape the school environment and are embedded in the habitus of the people who interact there. Bourdieu also stressed the necessity of understanding the habitus of individuals (Bourdieu, 1989) in order to define their environment. He argued that it is through their interactions within that environment that individuals establish social relations based on social and cultural norms (e.g., collaboration, empowerment, respect for cultural values, dialogue, relationship-building), which shape their beliefs and lead to meaningful practices (Bourdieu, 1989).

This seems to indicate that it is a lengthy process to restructure the habitus of parents and teachers towards alternative practices in order to form more effective partnerships and build trust. This may explain why early collaboration was suggested as an effective strategy for establishing family-friendly schools.

The data in this study indicate that, in addition to collaboration efforts, communication efforts too can shape how parents, teachers, and schools interact. The way that participants
imagined working best with each other involved regular, two-way, meaningful communication. For instance, the findings show that communication with parents is a structured component of most teachers’ practices; however, these same teachers asserted that effective communication is impossible without an adequate understanding of the parents’ cultures and values. And because schools’ communication practices are so fundamental to their involving parents in the education process, such understanding could minimize the effects of class and culture differences on home–school relations (Ahmad, 2010; Bourdieu, 1978).

Grounding his work in Bourdieu’s (1978) theoretical framework of social class and capital discourse, Ahmad (2010) posits that cultural differences can create gaps in communication if teachers use their own cultural approaches to interact with culturally and linguistically different students and parents. This could diminish the quality of their relationships and affect the students’ learning experiences. Ahmad and other researchers, such as McLeod (2009) and Lareau (1987), support Bourdieu’s argument that parents from different social and cultural backgrounds pass on different types of cultural capital (e.g., language, knowledge, skills) and habitus (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, experiences) to their children. These children thus may not be able to transmit clear messages between home and school, which may explain why their cultural capital does not always help them succeed academically (Bourdieu, 1978, 1989; McLeod, 2009). The participants in this case study gave examples from their own experiences, describing home-school involvement efforts in which they had needed to gather information from each other to better interpret and understand their children’s needs.

**Implications for Educational Practice**

This case study has revealed that several factors affect home–school relationships. If the
barriers are identified and understood, they can be overcome using effective partnerships models.

All of the participants in this study maintained that the school environment is currently not as welcoming as it should be. Teachers and parents should not be held accountable for being unable to collaborate effectively and communicate regularly with one another. Rather, changes are needed in school practices and in the climate for communicating with families. It is to be hoped that educational leaders will develop strategies or interventions for engaging more of the parents of children who attend urban elementary schools.

All of the participants in this study also maintained that effective communication is essential to strong school–home partnerships and to increased parental involvement. This may require thoughtful consideration. There needs to be a new plan including more organized efforts to communicate with all the members of the school community and bring them into active collaboration. Ultimately, it is the school leadership team that will guide teachers and parents toward reaching their potential through effective communication practices. Also, given the central and determinative role of parent–school relationships, both parents and teachers could become aware of the pitfalls that they might face in their interactions. This research could further their mutual understanding of how they each view their roles in the education of their children.

As a researcher and scholarly practitioner, I am considering the possibilities for developing my professional voice in that field. In fact, there are a multitude of implications for my practice. I am planning to offer professional development for the community of teachers in this specific school environment. My plan is to motivate them to start a candid dialogue and then tease out this conversation in a way that could shift their internal practices. I also plan to use the beautiful voices of my participants and publish articles on parental involvement in local
newspapers. Because the challenges to effective partnerships are numerous (Christenson, 2002; Lewis-Antoine, 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009; Trumbull et al., 2001) and require further research, conferences that focus on effective home–school partnerships would be also interesting.

**Implications of Findings for Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of both teachers and parents on the quality of their interrelationships in urban elementary schools with respect to how they both care for their children. The data obtained from the interviews provided a rich understanding of some of the major challenges to home–school relationships, but it also demonstrated that two other important stakeholders, the student and the principal, need to be represented in future studies. There has been little research on students’ views of the parent–school relationship; future studies could examine how students perceive the role of their school’s leadership team in nurturing the parent–school relationship and whether a positive parent–teacher relationship accounts for academic success. Furthermore, the principal plays an important role in this relationship, through working with the teachers to support collaborative efforts and identifying communication strategies that promote a climate of trust and caring for both the teacher and the parent. The role of the principal was not addressed in this study and requires further research.

**Revisiting Postionality**

Writing my doctoral dissertation was a long journey. Listening to the insights of the participants and honoring their voices were among the most important steps I took, as were the description, analysis, and interpretation of the data. It is true that every school is different, and the conditions are never the same from one to the next. However, the narratives I examined in this study provided enough information to let me make some reasonable conclusions. As a
teacher, I found that the meanings I constructed from the data helped me develop new ideas for ways to build rapport with parents. And as a researcher, I learned more about the complexity of collecting, organizing, and interpreting data, reporting findings, and putting it all together in a narrative form that helped me think of ways teachers and parents could interact more efficiently and build more effective partnerships. The similarity among the statements made by different participants in this study was quite surprising, and reflected the participants’ honesty and integrity in the interview process.

Looking back as a researcher, a scholarly practitioner, and a teacher, I came to recognize more fully, throughout this journey, the importance of good relationships with parents and how these account for student success. Restoring these relationships through open and non-threatening dialogue was found to be a fundamental step toward creating effective partnerships.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study support the literature on home-school relationships and communication. It lays out the importance of a caring and respectful environment for building strong bonds and communication channels between parents and teachers. Although the participants in this case study claimed to have good relationships, parent–teacher interaction seemed to happen only with difficulty outside of formal school events. Both the parents and the teachers expressed the worry that the new policy had created a less welcoming environment, one in which they were no longer able to communicate and discuss opportunities for increased parental involvement. A new plan thus needs to be organized that will promote a climate of trust, collaboration, and caring for both the teacher and the parent.

This case study also highlights the importance of cultural capital and habitus in shaping
parent–teacher interactions. It is clear that the cultural capital that can be built by communicating, sharing information, and fostering relationships can contribute to a climate of collaboration and trust that would improve students’ academic performances. As a result, there needs to be a change in the beliefs, attitudes, and cultural expectations that surround communication and collaboration at Palermo Elementary School.

Further research on this topic would explore whether there needs to be an overall change in the communication and collaboration policies and practices. This study could also be replicated at another elementary school to determine whether the communication and collaboration efforts suggested by the teachers and parents could help home–school relationships be built more effectively.
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Dear participant:

I am interested in exploring the way parents and teachers interact with each other. Specifically, I am interested in learning about the major barriers that hinder parent-teacher relationships in urban elementary schools. I also interested in knowing what role the cultural and social factors play in shaping the relationship between teachers and parents. Furthermore, my particular interest is in finding out what activities are performed by teachers and parents in school and home in regard to their relations with children.

For the above, I require your help to participate in interview and discussion. I also request to observe some activities, and setting in home and school. The information would better my understanding to those issues and factors, which affect relations of home and school.

I would keep all the information that will be provided in audio and written formats confidential and all the names would be kept anonymous. All this is to ensure complete secrecy of the data. Transcripts and audiotapes would later be disposed of.

Researcher Arij Rached
Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Principal Investigator: Billye Sankofa Waters, Ph.D.

Student Investigator: Arij Rached, Doctoral Student

Title of Project: The Ideologies of Teachers and Parents Regarding Family-School Relationships in Urban Elementary Schools: A Case Study

Dear Participant:
You are invited to take part in a research study. This form will inform you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you wish to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the relationships between parents and teachers in urban elementary schools.

Why is this research being done?
This study focuses on the relationships between parents and teachers with a particular interest in understanding how parents and teachers interact and communicate with each other with respect to how they both care for their children. Through this study, we hope to gain insights into how to foster better family-school partnerships.
This case study will allow us to identify the real challenges and benefits of promoting stronger and more positive parent-teacher relationships.

**What will I be asked to do?**

With your consent, the researcher will interview you. The research will be held in a quiet place of your choice. The interview will last approximately an hour and be compromised of 15 open-ended questions. The questions will also be sent to you in advance. As a part of qualitative research, you will be asked to approve particular aspects of the interpretation of data to establish trustworthiness. In addition, other questions will be emailed to you in order to allow you time to gather college documents that may help answer the questions.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

Your interview will be held at the location of your choice. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Upon transcribing the data, you will be asked to clarify any data in the transcription. This process will only take 15 minutes of your time.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

There are no known risks associated with the procedures of the study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures; however, the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown risks.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits to the study participants. However, the overall potential benefits from conducting this study is that it may help educational leaders develop strategies or interventions programs to build and sustain solid relationships between parents and teachers. This study also may help researchers fill the gap in present literature and integrate these aspects
to better understand the complexity of relationships between parents and teachers from different lenses.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential, to the extent allowed by law. If the researcher feels you are a threat to yourself or others, legally the researcher must report the information to the appropriate authorities. All interview participants will be given a pseudonym and the location where the interview occurred will not be identified. Only the researchers of this study and a confidential transcription service will see information about you. Data will be transcribed by, REV.com. Their website is located here: https://www.rev.com/. This form will be maintained in a locked drawer for three years after completion of the study. Your information will be combined with other information from other people taking part in the study to establish themes. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see the research information from this study. This is done to ensure that the research has been conducted properly. The researcher would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see the information. No special arrangements will be made for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

You can contact the Principal Investigator, Billye Sankofa Waters, Ph.D. at b.sankofawaters@neu.edu.
You may also contact the Student Investigator, Arij Rached, at rached.a@husky.neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as participants?

If you have any inquiries about your rights in his research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

You will not be paid for your interview.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There are no monetary costs for your participate in this study, but there is a small time commitment to participate in the interview.

Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

I agree to take part in this research

......................................................... ..............................................
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

.........................................................
Printed name of person above

......................................................... ..............................................
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent Date

.........................................................
Printed name of person above
Appendix C

Teacher Participant Questionnaire

Q1: Are you between the ages of 22 and 65

Q2: How many years have you been teaching in urban elementary schools?

Q3: What grade level(s) do you currently teach?

Q4: Do you currently teach an elementary class in which at least 40% of your students are from low socio-economic backgrounds?

Q5: Have you participated in family-school partnership programs?
Appendix D

Parent Participant Questionnaire

Q1: Are you a parent between the ages of 18 and 65?

Q2: How many adults and children live in your household?

Q3: What is your marital status?

Q4: What is your highest education level achieved?

Q5: Do you have at least a child who qualified for free or reduced lunch
Appendix E

Open-Ended Interview for Teachers

Interview Protocol
Institution: __Northeastern University______________________________
Interviewee (Title and Name): __________
Interviewer: ____Arij Rached EdD candidate__________________________
Date: ______________
Location of Interview: __XYZ School_____________________________

Previously attained background information

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes). Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for digital audio recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experience of implementing effective family-school partnership programs.
My research project focuses on parental involvement with a particular interest in understanding how the school-family partnerships work at the elementary school level. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how to implement effective partnerships between school and families successfully. Hopefully this will allow us to identify ways in which effective programs for parental involvement can be implemented successfully and learn what some of the pitfalls of the process are.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to digitally record our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview.

I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The recorded interview will be transcribed by a transcriptionist, but only a pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to the digital audio recordings and they will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at Northeastern university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will
be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form).

Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

Interviewee Background (objective is to build rapport and collect background information).

**Interviewee background**

Question starters for teachers

Tell us about your past life up until the year 2014 going as far back as possible?

1. How did you come to enter the profession of becoming an elementary school teacher?
2. Describe a key experience that you believe influenced your decision to choose this career?
3. Are their additional key experiences/situations that influenced your career choice?
4. Please describe your earliest experiences with students of low-income families and parents going as far back as you can remember and continuing up until the present time.

**Parental Involvement:** One of the things I am trying to learn in my study is about the barriers to effective parent-teacher relationships. I am also interested in learning about various strategies that can foster this relationship, specifically in urban areas.

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me, I just want to let you know that there are no right or wrong answers and every teacher is different. I will not be evaluating you all. I am just trying to get a picture of parent teacher relationships in schools.

1. What are your hopes or aspirations for your students?
Probe: What are your views on the role you play in the classroom that it takes to educate your students?

Probe: As a teacher, do you combine your personal experiences with your knowledge of child development and your familiarity with your students and their families to build strong opportunities for learning and development?

Probe: How do you perceive your role as a teacher in building a good relationship with parents?

Probe: Do you think your role as a teacher is important and why?

2. **Can you describe the kind of relationships you have with parents?**

   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that an interaction with a parent went well.
   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that an interaction with a parent did not go well.
   Probe: How did you solve the issue?

3. **How do you develop your approach to parent relationships?**

   Probe: Was there anything in your teacher preparation?
   Probe: What about past experience?
   Probe: Did learning from other teachers/staff play a role?
   
   Probe: Does the behavior of the student influence your relationship with parents?

4. **In your opinion, what is the current culture/environment of the school?**

   Probe: How this culture affects parent’s participation and vice versa?
   Probe: What are some of the ways of interaction of parents with teachers in the present social and cultural environment?
   Probe: Does Palermo Elementary School do anything to encourage parent-teacher interaction? If so, what? If not, should they?

5. **How does the school view parents?**

   Probe: What influences that view?
   Probe: What do you like about the way your school/teachers deals with parents?
   Probe: Are there school policies about interactions with parents?
   Probe: If so, what are they?
   Probe: Do you talk with teachers about parents?
   Probe: If so, how?

6. **What are the ways in which you communicate with parents?**

   Probe: Email?
   Probe: Phone?
   Probe: Notes?
   Probe: In person?
   Probe: Do you find enough time to communicate with parents?
7. **What are your feelings about communicating with parents?**
   Probe: Is there anything you would want to change about interactions/relationships with parents?
   Probe: If so, what?

8. **Is there anything you wish parents would tell you more about?**
   Probe: What is most helpful about what they say?
   Probe: Why?
   Probe: What do you wish parents would stop telling you/tell you less about?

9. **How do you communicate with parents who speak little or no English?**
   Probe: Do you have good relationships with those parents?
   Probe: Do you think they are interested in helping their children succeed at school?

10. **What are some of the challenges you face during your interactions with parents?**
   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that you initiated a meeting with a parent?
   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that a parent initiated a meeting with you?
   Probe: Can you describe a typical encounter?

11. **Can you describe an activity, program, or home-school strategy that you use (or have used in the past) to support parents as they work with their children at home? What do you think about these programs?**
   Probe: Do you think these programs are effective? Why or why not?
   Probe: What would you include in a program created to help diverse parents achieve a higher level of parental involvement?

12. **Can you describe the role that the school can potentially play in fostering two-way connections between parents and teachers in service of student well-being and achievement?**
   Probe: What factors do you believe contribute to the ability/inability of the school to build better home-school partnerships?

13. **In your opinion, what resources and/or support do you need to enhance home-school partnerships with diverse parents?**
   Probe: Do you think the school offers those resources/opportunities to parents?

14. **What do you hope to learn that you feel will help you more effectively establish home-school partnerships with diverse parents?**
15. How do you feel you can improve your home-school program(s) to support student learning?
   
   Probe: What questions and/or advice would you offer to your principal to make Palermo Elementary School a better learning environment?
   
   Probe: What advice would you offer your colleagues/parents?
   
   Thank you very much for your time and participation. If you can think of anything else that you would like to add, just let me know.

   I will be sending this digital recording to be professional transcribed and as I stated earlier, your actual name will not be used. I will then send the transcription back to you for verification before I use it. Is this ok with you? Thanks again and you will be hearing from me soon.
Appendix F

Open-Ended Interview for Parents

1. What are your hopes or aspirations for your children?
   Probe: Do you think your role as a parent is important and why?
   Probe: Can you describe some ways you invest in your children’s education?
   Probe: Does your values and customs influence the types of activities that you present for your children to help him/her achieve better academic success and if yes, how?

2. Can you describe the kind of relationships you have with teachers?
   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that an interaction with a teacher went well.
   Probe: Can you tell me about a time that an interaction with a teacher did not go well.
   Probe: How did you solve the issue?

3. How do you develop your approach to teacher relationships?
   Probe: Do you think you have a good relationship with teachers?
   Probe: Do you think that teachers are interested in helping your child succeed at school?

4. In your opinion, what is the current culture/environment of the school?
   Probe: How this culture affects your participation in school activities/events?
   Probe: What are some of the ways of interaction of parents with teachers in the present social and cultural environment?
   Probe: Does Palermo Elementary School do anything to encourage parent-teacher interaction? If so, what? If not, should they?

5. How does the school view parents?
   Probe: What influences that view?
   Probe: What do you like about the way (s) your school deals with parents?
   Probe: Are there school policies about interactions with parents?
   Probe: If so, what are they?

6. What are the ways in which you communicate with teachers?
   Probe: Email?
   Probe: Phone?
   Probe: Notes?
   Probe: In person?
   Probe: Do you find enough time to communicate with teachers?
   Probe: If not? How often and when do you communicate with teachers?

7. What are your feelings about communicating with teachers?
   Probe: Is there anything you would want to change about interactions/relationships with teachers?
Probe: If so, what?

8. Is there anything you wish teachers would tell you more about?
   Probe: What is most helpful about what they say?
   Probe: Why?
   Probe: What do you wish teachers would stop telling you/tell you less about?

9. How do you communicate with your child’s teacher when you don’t understand the instructions or what is being said?

10. What are some of the challenges you face during your interactions with teachers?
    Probe: Can you tell me about a time that you initiated a meeting with a teacher and why?
    Probe: Can you tell me about a time that a teacher initiated a meeting with you and why?
    Probe: Can you describe a typical encounter?

11. Can you describe an activity, program, or home-school strategy that you use (or have used in the past) to support you as you work with your child at home? What do you think about these programs?
    Probe: Do you think these programs/strategies are effective? Why or why not?

12. Can you describe the role that the school can potentially play in fostering two-way connections between parents and teachers in service of student well-being and achievement?
    Probe: What factors do you believe contribute to the ability/inability of the school to build better home-school partnerships?

13. In your opinion, what resources and/or support does the school need to enhance home-school partnerships with parents?
    Probe: Do you think the school offers those resources/opportunities to parents?

14. What do you hope to learn that you feel will help you more effectively establish home-school partnerships?

15. How do you feel you can improve your home-school program(s)
    Probe: What questions and/or advice would you offer to the principal to make Palermo Elementary School a better learning environment? What advice would you offer to other parents/teachers?

Thank you very much for your time and participation. If you can think of anything else that you would like to add, just let me know. I will be sending this digital recording to be professionally transcribed and as I stated earlier, your actual name will not be used. I will then send the transcription back to you for verification before I use it. Is this ok with you? Thanks again and you will be hearing from me soon.
Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

Opening script:
“Good afternoon and thank you for taking the time to join me to talk about parent-teacher relationship so that I can better understand your perceptions of it.
You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been actively involved in parent-teacher relationships. I would like to know what you like, what you don’t like, and how home-school relationships might be improved.

I would just like to go over the guidelines for this focus group before we start. There are no wrong or right answers but different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view and ask question if you have. You do not need to answer any question if you do not feel comfortable. Also, it would be awesome if we all listen respectfully as others share their views. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to digitally record our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview.

I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The recorded interview will be transcribed by a transcriptionist, but only a pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to the digital audio recordings and they will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at Northeastern university, you must sign the form I have with me. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.

Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour, 30 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

If you cannot, and if you need to take a phone call please do so outside this room to keep confidentiality and please join us as soon as you can. My role as facilitator will be to guide the discussion. Do you have any questions at this time? Well, let's begin.”
1. How do you communicate with teachers to improve students’ opportunities to succeed in elementary classes? How do you communicate with parents? How do you work/communicate with non-English speakers? What communication strategies do you use?

2. If you communicate back and forth with parents/teachers, what are the topics? When and how often do you communicate? What information do you share mostly? What information do you miss? Have you ever had hard time to share any information and why?

3. How do you connect with teachers/parents? How do you connect to your children’s/students’ future lives and careers? Increasing parental connections is a goal – any thoughts or recommendations? What are you hoping from?

4. What is done to form relationships? Do you believe your peers (parents/teachers) have good relationships or lack of them?

5. What are the one or two aspects of parent-teacher communications that have been disappointing or in need of improvement, and why?

6. Do you have trusting relationships with teachers/staff/parents in the building? Are you comfortable developing trusting relationships? What could break the trust? What could reinforce it?

7. What kinds of beliefs/attitudes do you have as a result of experience(s) that had emerged due to direct personal experience with parents/teachers? How did those attitudes/beliefs affect/change your relationship with teachers/parents?

8. Have you ever considered changing your attitudes/personal beliefs in order to better establish or maintain good relationships?

9. Are you familiar enough with the school, culturally and socially to be able to provide parents/teachers any help they may need?

10. How do you let parents/teacher know they can feel comfortable establishing personal relationships? Can you tell me about a time you offered help- and what the outcome of the situation was?
11. What changes in parental involvement have occurred in the last 5 years in the elementary schools? Do you see any connections between these changes and the current school environment?

12. What are your feelings about these changes? Do you feel comfortable coming to the school building/inviting parents?

13. What changes in your relationships or interactions with other teachers/parents have occurred from the implementation of the new school policy?

14. What one or two recommendations do you have for improving parent-teacher communication and overall relationships?

15. What involvement efforts are you learning from other to improve your relationship with parents/teachers? Collaboration/communication efforts – what could be done to form better relationships?
Appendix H

Flyer for Teachers

A Doctoral Student at
Northeastern University
Department of Education
Is conducting A Research Study on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Ideologies of Teachers and Parents Regarding Family-School Relationships in Urban Elementary Schools: A Case Study</th>
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At Northeastern University

-If you are an elementary teacher between the ages of 22 and 65, and
-Have participated in family-school partnership programs and
-Have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in urban elementary schools.

You may qualify for a research study examining the quality of relationships between teachers and parents in urban elementary schools. Eligible teachers will participate in 60 minutes face-to-face interview at the school or at a convenient off-campus location.

Participation is absolutely voluntary: you do not have to participate if you do not want. If you are interested to participate in this research study, please feel free to call Arij Rached at: rached.a@husky.neu.edu
A Doctoral Student at Northeastern University Department of Education Is conducting A Research Study on:

**The Ideologies of Teachers and Parents Regarding Family-School Relationships in Urban Elementary Schools: A Case Study**

At Northeastern University

- If you are a parent between the ages of 18 and 65, and
- Have at least a child who is qualified for free or reduced lunch

You may qualify for a research study examining the quality of relationships between teachers and parents in urban elementary schools

Eligible parents will participate in 60 minutes face-to-face interview at the school or at a convenient off-campus location.

Participation is absolutely voluntary: you do not have to participate if you do not want.
If you are interested to participate in this research study, please feel free to call Arij Rached at: rached.a@husky.neu.edu