Public Elementary School Teachers Experiences With Parental Involvement

A Narrative Analysis

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of public elementary educators and parental involvement by interviewing five educators from the same public elementary school. This study sought to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of elementary level teachers on parental involvement in education?

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each of the participants to gather data on their experiences. Four themes emerged from this study. They included: technology, information, motivation, and teacher education programs. The findings revealed that teachers have found technology to be crucial when communicating with parents and teachers apply information that they learn about the students onto their teachings whether behavioral or academic. Additionally, findings suggested that parents who are involved, help motivate their children to become academically successful and teachers highly suggest that teacher education programs should implement courses and strategies on how to communicate and involve parents. Recommendations for future studies suggested to include male as well as female teachers from different school districts in order to provide the foundation for another study examining how different parent involvement practices actually impact student behavior and achievement.

*Keywords*: parental involvement, strategies experience, technology, motivation, education programs
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to all who have helped me through this educational journey. The work I have presented in this dissertation represents the collective effort of many dedicated individuals in my life.

I would like to first acknowledge my professors and faculty at Northeastern University who have been instrumental in this process. I have truly learned what it means to be a scholar and a practitioner throughout my studies and am blessed to have studied under such educated and knowledgeable faculty. Most notably, I would like to thank Dr. Karen Medwed for pushing me and always providing the hope that I needed. You have been such an encouraging mentor throughout this process. I want to thank the classmates I met during this doctoral program that have become family. Tabby you have been my rock, shoulder to cry on, and encouragement throughout this entire doctoral program. Melinda, thank you for the constant encouragement and cheerleading! Tabby and Melinda, your willingness to listen, discuss ideas, and encourage me truly contributed to making this journey a more pleasant and successful one.

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I am extremely blessed to have a group of friends who consistently believed in me and supported me. Alain, Carolyne, Sandra, and Selena, thank you for encouraging me
and giving me the necessary distractions from my research. There are no friendships like the ones from childhood.

Most importantly, this journey would have not been possible without the support and sacrifice from my family. They have been my rock for my entire educational career. I am forever grateful to my parents, Agop and Sylvie Nadjarian, my first teachers and also to my older brother and best friend, Dr. Albert Nadjarian for seeing my potential and ability. I love you forever!
Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my family and friends, particularly my two loving parents. Without my mother and father continuously supporting me in all endeavors, I would not have gained the strength to persist in such a rigorous journey. The resilience you have both demonstrated and the sacrifices you have made to make sure our family always had the best of everything, are qualities I can only hope to some day exhibit.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

**Topic**

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore the experiences of public elementary school teachers in creating partnerships with parents and gather more information on parental involvement in education. Parental involvement will be generally defined as involvement in the education process by helping in school and helping with homework (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Although researchers have struggled to ultimately define the concept of parent involvement, the federal government has constructed a definition as a part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This definition was included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under the supervision of NCLB. Parental Involvement, in its 2004 publication, Action Guide for Parents and Communities, the federal government stated parental involvement is defined as: “Assisting in their child’s learning, being actively involved in their child’s education at school, serving as full partners in their child’s education and being included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child, and the carrying out of other activities such as those described in section 1118 of the ESA Section 9101 (32)”. Section 1118 is completely dedicated to parental involvement and it explains some strategies to engage parents in schools and in their children’s education. Some of the strategies included in the NCLB include: “Educating teachers, personnel, principals, and others, with the assistance of parents, on the value and utility of parental contributions, and how to reach out and communicate with parents as equal partners, implementing and coordinating parent programs, and building ties between the home and school; adopt and implement model approaches to improving parental involvement; and develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities” (2001, Section 1118, NCLB).
Research Problem

Research has found that parental involvement in a child’s education is crucial. However, according to research studies, there is a gap between parental involvement and in schools. Studies show that when parents get involved in education, children put forth more effort and improve achievement. Joyce Epstein, a researcher from John Hopkins University, has studied parental involvement and its positive effects on education for many years. With over 100 publications, Epstein went beyond the typical ideas and encouraged the building of partnerships between homes, schools, and communities. Her research findings led her to draw four conclusions about parental involvement. The first finding is that student success should drive involvement. Secondly, involvement should be present throughout the entirety of a child’s education. Thirdly, involvement is a process, not a single event. Lastly, parent involvement is not a substitute for quality education programs offered by schools (Epstein, 1990).

Other researchers such as Henderson & Berla, (1994) conducted studies between involved parents and performance contracts. They found that the districts with the most comprehensive parent programs scored the greatest. Data gathered from 135 schools indicated a positive correlation between high reading and math scores and a supportive environment with involved parents (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The findings of this study will benefit parents, educators, students, and schools. Although many research studies have been done addressing this issue in education, additional research is still needed to explore teacher’s experiences on parental involvement.

Justification of Research

Why is parental involvement crucial in elementary school? Why should it be studied? In 1989, Lareau conducted a study interviewing over 40 teachers from 20 schools in Northern California.
These teachers worked in five different school districts, both urban and suburban and taught in all three school levels, elementary, middle and high schools. Lareau discovered that the teachers “view their educational activities as embedded in a larger context” (Lareau 1989, p. 253). She also discovered that for classroom work to be sufficient, parental involvement must also be implemented at home. She used studies by Epstein (1982, 1987) and other teacher surveys as a foundation for her findings implying that teachers have a need for parent involvement in schooling to increase student learning. Not only did the teachers interviewed in Lareau’s study report that parental involvement was effective, but they also are different ways for parents to help with their children’s education. For example, several teachers reported that proper socialization of their children doesn’t just happen at school but also at home (Lareau 1989). Because of that, these teachers had the desire to “share the responsibility” of schooling with parents (Lareau 1989, p.248).

Authors such as S.M Lee, Kushner, and Cho (2007) listed some of the positive effects of parental involvement. Some of these effects include improved natural talents of students, enhanced school behaviors, increased achievement in adolescents, increased student aspirations, and increased math achievement. Although there are deficiencies in research due to the parental involvement definition, it is evident that researchers observed results in student outcomes when parents are involved in their student’s education. It is important to examine parental involvement more closely to understand more about the possible effects on student education.

**Deficiencies in Research**

Unfortunately, the definition of parental involvement has not been clear and consistent. The following sentence is a generalized and muddled definition of parental involvement. Parental involvement can be defined as parental aspirations for their children’s academic achievement
(Bloom, 1980), as parent’s communication with children about school (Christenson, et al., 1992; Walberg, 1986), as parents’ partaking in school activities (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), as parents’ communication with teachers about their children (Epstein, 1991), and as the guidelines parents implement at home which are school-related (Keith, Troutman, Bickley, Trivette, & Singh, 1993; Keith, et al., 1986; Marjoribanks, 1983). Because this definition is so broadly constructed, it has made it tough to draw overall conclusions across studies and it also contributed to unreliable findings in this part of research. Not only has parental involvement been operationally defined differently by various investigators, but so has the definition of academic achievement. There have been such different indicators studied for academic achievement ranging from global indicators, to school GPA, and more specifically such as individualized test scores in specific academic areas. As a result of this complex magnitudes of parental involvement and academic achievement, there has been inconsistency and gaps in the literature regarding the beneficial effect on parental involvement on student academic achievement. Some studies reported positive experimental relationships between parental involvement and students' academic achievement (e.g., Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Epstein, 1991; Singh, et al., 1995), and others reporting no measurable effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement (e.g., Bobbett, French, Achilles, & Bobbett, 1995; Ford, 1989; Keith, et al., 1986; Natriello & McDill, 1989; Reynolds, 1992; Storer, 1995). Because of the gaps and inconsistencies in the research, both about the existence of any positive effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement, and about the extent of such effect, there seems to be a strong need for more detailed and focused research.

**Relating the Discussion to the Audience**
This study may be especially valuable to teachers and parents at the elementary level. Exploring this topic places the researcher in the position as a change agent as the researcher investigates challenges and experiences of teachers with parental involvement at an elementary level. Lessons learned from this study will be shared with teachers, parents, and the school community. To see how others in the same situation may be experiencing the phenomenon of parental involvement and teaching, may be useful to educators’ understanding of their own personal and professional needs. They may also be interested in learning more about the value of parental involvement and the operational and successful practices of others as they are revealed in the study. After examining the teacher’s experiences, parents may come to realize the important roles they play in their children’s education. Hopefully this study will also become a source of encouragement for parents to build stronger relationships with their children’s teachers and vice versa. Teachers may also be able to grow from learning and applying the experiences of the other teachers onto their own practice.

Not only will the results of this study be beneficial for parents and teachers, but perhaps for the school districts. Within school districts, stronger understanding of parental involvement may be of great value. If administrators are more aware of the importance of the involvement of parents, they may be more willing to help teachers and schools bridge that gap. As Hatch and Honig (2003) advocate, schools wishing to be progressive on matters of pedagogy must establish and revisit their mission statements and create structures that support professional development.

The topic of this study could also interest those at the university level who are teaching or studying in the field of education. It would certainly be of relevance to those who are training future educators, specifically primary educators, to ensure that these future teachers receive comprehensive, pre-service training on the parental involvement concept.
Significance of the Research Problem

A study examining the strategies used to involve parents in their children’s education was important for several reasons. Due to many factors, many parents are not actively involved in their children’s education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2004), 471,000 students dropped out of school between 2000-2001. The unemployment percentage for dropouts in 1998 was 75 percent higher for dropouts than students with a high school degree. Dropouts contribute to several downfalls such as unemployment and decreased salary, leaving drop-outs to depend more on the government for welfare and food stamps, which eventually leads lower socioeconomic status.

Schools are becoming more and more diverse causing educators to face more challenges in balancing and meeting the needs of all their students. Schools and teachers cannot educate each child on their own. They need constant and active support from the collaboration of the community and families. The lack of parental involvement and changing school climate has led to students in American schools to fall behind. Increased parental involvement shows to have positive implications including higher achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy levels (Epstein, 1994). Families play a critical role in the education of their children. Working alongside with the school, parents and caregivers can help create a collaborative team to support their child’s success in school.

This study examines teacher’s perspectives on parental involvement in a child’s education and effective strategies to involve parents. Research has shown that working with the school, parents, and teachers can create collaborative partnerships that support students’ academic success. The implications of this study are to show the readers how teachers perceive and what
their experiences have been with parental involvement so that parents and educators can find more effective strategies to collaborate and work together.

**Positionality Statement**

This positionality statement was constructed to understand and explore the ways in which experience and opinion may influence both perceptions of elementary education and an approach to research. In order to maintain a neutral approach, the role of intuition, bias, and blind spots must be explored as they relate to topical interest, inclusion of sources, and methodological approach. As an elementary educator who has had countless interactions and experiences with parents, I need to consider my reasons for choosing this topic. To evaluate my own positionality on this topic, I will need to challenge any predispositions and biases I may have. According to Briscoe (2005) “Ideologies are largely constructed according to one’s experiences.” Personal bias will need to be isolated from my research in order to have the findings be taken seriously. To do this, I must first declare the bias to the reader, and then describe the steps I took to ensure neutrality in the research. This begins with a literature review that discusses all sides of the issues in a neutral tone. There is always a risk that personal beliefs may influence study conclusions and interviews with co-workers.

This topic affects me both at a personal and occupational level. I grew up in an educated household, my father being an engineer and my mother being a biologist. Education was always encouraged and valued. All throughout my elementary and secondary schooling, my parents would attend every PTO meeting, school event, music recital, art festival, and sport game. My brother became his class’s valedictorian, later completing two Master’s Degree and entering into one of the top medical schools in the country and becoming a medical doctor.
While in school for my Master’s in Teaching, I was working as a kindergarten teacher in a private school. While teaching at the private school, I noticed the strong involvement parents had in their children’s education. Once I completed my Masters and received my teacher’s licensure, I transitioned from teaching at a private school to public school. In general, parents were not as involved in their children’s education in the public-school setting. Reaching out to parents was never an issue. The difficulty came from parents reaching out to me. I could go through the entire school year without having a student’s parent ask me about their child’s strengths and weaknesses. As an educator, I would have to reach out a number of times to provide ample opportunities for the parents to get involved. After noticing the lack of parental involvement, I knew I needed to implement several methods to involve the parents. One of the ways I got parents to become more involved was through picking a “Star of the Week.” Throughout the year, all the students would have the opportunity to be “Star of the Week” The student who was “Star of the Week” would choose four or five friends along with their parents and I to have a pizza party all together in the classroom during lunch time on a Friday. This would give me the opportunity to get to know the parents while the children socialize amongst themselves. I observed that in several cases, parents opened up and were encouraged to reach out to me more and offer their time and talents to help in the classroom throughout the year.

Aside from teaching in the public sector, I also had much experience teaching music privately, and Sunday School. My music students who had involved parents, competed in competitions and performed in recitals more frequently than those who didn’t have involved parents. I observed similar results among my Sunday School students as well. It is my assumption parental involvement is essential to student success both academically and socially. Unfortunately, these experiences unveil biases that I may hold. Machi and McEvoy (2009)
discuss that through self-examination a researcher may realize and understand personal bias.

Only through recognizing bias can a researcher control personal bias toward a result and produce research that is free of bias. I as a researcher should constantly explore my own stance towards the topic to ensure I produce research that remains uncompromised by my bias.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers have utilized different ways to involve parents in their children’s education. Due to existing research, there is a need for further exploration on teacher experiences with parental involvement.

**Central Question:**

*What are the experiences of public elementary school teachers with parental involvement?*

**Theoretical Framework**

Epstein’s framework of six types of involvement assists educators in developing schools and family partnership programs. The six types of involvement include *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.*

Parenting helps families establish home environments to support children as students. This includes parent education by having courses available for training parents. It also consists of family support programs that assist families with health, nutrition, and other services. Parenting helps bring the student awareness of family supervision and respect for parents. It also encourages positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values taught by the family. Lastly, it brings awareness to the importance of school and improving homework completion and attendance. Through parenting, teachers have a further understanding of student diversity by learning about family backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of children.
Communicating designs effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications not only about children’s progress, but also school programs. Communicating provides conferences for parents at least once a year, language translators to assist families, and regular schedules of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other types of communication. From a student’s perspective, communicating brings awareness of own progress and actions that are needed to maintain or improve grades.

There is agreement in the field of education for the need of parent and community involvement (Epstein et al., 2009). Epstein’s model has been reviewed extensively by the research community and has been approved by a variety of practitioners (Jordan et al., 2002). Epstein’s work is used by schools across the country as a framework for developing partnerships and is cited throughout literature regarding parental involvement. “When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 9). Education begins before formal schooling, and parents are recognized as a child’s first educator. Benefits of parental involvement does not only influence student achievement, but also influences parents, teachers and the school.

Based on the researcher’s questions and the purpose of my investigation, the work that relates closest to the study is Epstein’s. This research study uses Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement as its conceptual framework because this theory emphasizes the importance of building effective relationships between parents and teachers related to children’s development. Epstein claimed, “School, family, and community cannot alone produce successful students. Rather partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own success” (Epstein, 1995 p. 2). This theory was especially related because it
provides a conceptual lens for understanding home environment as the primary setting where learning is established and school activities are reinforced with the support of parental involvement. The use of Epstein’s Six Levels of Parental Involvement will require a qualitative research methodology to examine the central question of this study, which is what are public elementary school teachers’ experiences with parental involvement?

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*Epstein’s Six Levels of Involvement*

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<tr>
<th>Type 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Collaborating with Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist</td>
<td>Communicate with families about school</td>
<td>Improve recruitment, training work, and</td>
<td>Involve families with their children in</td>
<td>Include families at as participants</td>
<td>Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Families with parenting and child-rearing</td>
<td>programs and student progress through</td>
<td>schedules to involve families as volunteers</td>
<td>learning activities at home, including</td>
<td>in school decisions, governance, and</td>
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<td>skills, understanding child and adolescent</td>
<td>effective school-to-home- and home-to-</td>
<td>and audiences at the school or in other</td>
<td>homework and other curriculum-related</td>
<td>advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils,</td>
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<td>development, and setting home conditions</td>
<td>school communications.</td>
<td>locations to support school programs.</td>
<td>activities and decisions</td>
<td>committees, action teams, and other parent</td>
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<td>that support children as students at each</td>
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<td>age and grade level.</td>
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<td>Assist schools in understanding families</td>
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Type one refers to involvement of parenting and how schools can further help families with basic parenting skills while also understanding the families to encourage and support the children’s educational process. Epstein write about how schools can assist families in meeting their responsibilities as parents by providing them with knowledge and activities to strengthen their efforts to influence their children’s growth (Epstein et al, 2009). The school gathering information from families to help teachers understand their students and their student’s families is of great importance. When parents are open to sharing this type of information with the teachers, it creates and builds a trustworthy relationship between the families and the teachers.

Type two refers to parent-initiated and school-initiated contract in regards to programs and student progress. PTA meetings, folders of student work, report cards, emails, etc….all contribute to effective communication between home and the school. Effective communication between home and school have shown to yield positive results. This communication leads parents to develop a deeper understanding of policies, procedures, and programs within the schools (Epstein, 2001).

The third type of involvement consists of volunteering and serving in many areas to support the school programs and activities, allowing families and teachers to work together towards building the child’s education. Epstein touches upon various ways of volunteering both in and out of the classrooms. Volunteers can serve by attending and helping with school performances, assemblies, celebrations, and other student activities. They can also serve by assisting students, teachers, or administrators in the school (Epstein, 2001). When volunteers assist in the school, adult-child ratios increase which allows the teacher to provide more concentrated attention to students.
Learning at home is the fourth type of involvement. This type of involvement provides families the opportunity to assist their children in learning activities at home. These activities include homework and other curriculum related activities. According to Epstein, with the encouragement of families at home, student’s abilities and scores can be expected to rise (Epstein et al, 2009).

The fifth type of Epstein’s involvement is decision-making. Epstein finds it very important that families are not only included in school decision making, but also schools should develop parent leaders and representatives within the school. Parents can serve as representatives in the school council, PTA, PTO, and other committees. Through involving families in the school decision making, students become aware that their family’s views are valued and represented in the schools (Epstein et al, 2009).

The sixth type of involvement is collaborating with the community, which refers to coordinating resources and services from the community for the families and students. Epstein defines community as those interested in or influenced by the quality of education and not just those families with children in school (Epstein et al, 2009). The community can offer partnerships through businesses, cultural organizations, health services, recreational centers, senior citizen programs, faith-based programs, and other groups. Community collaboration can also be a great asset to the teacher who does not live in or near the community where they work. Collaboration may increase their knowledge of the community and its resources.

Epstein’s framework is a practical tool for this study because it is broad enough to encompass most kinds of parent involvement, yet descriptive enough to focus attention on specific forms of involvement. Using Epstein’s six types of parental involvement will help the researcher and readers further understand the interviewed teacher’s perspectives on parental involvement.
Conclusion

Teachers’ perceptions and experiences of parental involvement is the purpose of this research. This study will examine the perceptions of the effects of parental involvement in student success. The outcomes of this study will benefit teachers, parents, and community in the district as well as in the state. Results could also benefit future teachers who seek to improve their teaching methods. This chapter includes an introduction to, justification of and significance of the research problem, the research questions, the positionality of the researcher and the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter two provides a review of the current literature related to the topic of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this narrative research study is to examine the experiences of public school teachers in creating parent partnerships for student academic success. This study is necessary as academic achievement of students has been one of the greatest interest in America for many years since higher student achievement provides hope for a brighter future for American students (Epstein et al., 2009). The current status of national student achievement demonstrates that 471,000 students dropped out of school in the 2000-2001 school year. The unemployment rate for dropouts in 1998 was 75 percent higher for dropouts than students with a high school degree. Dropouts contribute to several downfalls such as unemployment and decreased salary, leaving drop-outs to depend more on the government for welfare and food stamps, which ultimately leads lower socioeconomic status (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004)

Research has shown positive associations between parental involvement in not only student grades, but rates of participation in advanced course, lower dropout rates, motivation toward school work, and valuing education. There are many reasons as to why this is such. Parents who
are involved tend to model effective learning behaviors, reinforce productive choices, and help set future goals (Gonzalez 2013).

Although there have been several factors identified that influence academic achievement and student success such as socioeconomic status, family perceptions, education level of family members, family involvement with homework, and parent and community involvement levels, there is a need to examine the experiences of teachers who are experiencing this partnership in order to further understand the effects of parental involvement.

**Key Definition and Perspective**

To examine the topic of parental involvement, it is necessary to examine how it is defined as well as perceived in the literature. There are various definitions and perspectives of parental involvement. Educators define parental involvement as being involved in the education process by helping in the school and helping with homework (Anderson & Minke, 2007). According to a study by Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte and Berttrand (1997), parental involvement is defined as presence at school, communicating with the teachers, or helping at home with homework. According to Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006) it is defined as any parental attitudes, behaviors, style, or activities that occur within or outside the school setting to support children’s academic and/or behavioral success in their currently enrolled school.

Parental involvement is the level of participation that a parent has on their child’s education. There are many parents who are significantly involved, while others aren’t directly involved in their child’s education. Parental involvement can be either reactive or proactive. Reactive involvement includes activities such as attending meetings, family activities, or volunteering. Proactive involvement includes activities such as helping with homework, staying informed in school events, and following a child’s progress (Olmstead 2013). Not only is parent
involvement beneficial to the student but to the school as well. Therefore, many school counselors are increasing their outreach to the parents (Gonzlaez 2013).

Given the definition of proactive parental involvement that calls upon parents to support with home assignments and following their child’s overall progress, it is necessary to examine models that exist for examining parent involvement. Parental involvement may be an important factor in the development of the foundation in children’s education. This study will gather information about teacher perspectives on effective parental involvement strategies which will be used to develop an action plan to utilize these strategies in classrooms, homes, and schools.

**Site and Participants**

Participants in this study include teachers from a public school in Massachusetts during the 2016-2017 academic year. Creswell (2012) writes, “it is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals” (p. 209). For this study, a sample size of 5-8 participants will be used. The Elementary school used in this study is located in a suburb, about 25 miles southeast from the city of Boston.

There are nineteen teachers at the school and 100 percent are licensed in teaching assignment. The school provides education from first to fifth grade. There are three first grade classrooms, three second grade classrooms, two third grade classrooms, two fourth grade classrooms, and two fifth grade classrooms. There is also a specialized classroom for students with special needs. This classroom is run by one lead teacher, and four teacher aids. There are roughly 242 students and the average class size is 19.4. The student to teacher ratio is 12.6 to 1. The attendance rate is 96.1 percent.
Most schools are assigned a level from 1-5. The school is a level 1 school, meaning that is highest performing. The town has a district level of 2. A district is assigned a level based on its lowest performing school. Schools and districts are placed into levels because it helps districts know which schools need more support. It also helps the state know which districts need more help. The PPI (Progress and Performance Index) combines information about narrowing proficiency gaps, growth, and graduation and dropout rates into a single number between 0-100. In order for a school to be considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps, the PPI for both “all students” group and high needs students must have a score of 75 or higher. Student groups include school and district accountability. High need students include those with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL) and former ELL students, or students from low-income households. The PPI for the particular school in this study is a 66.

Models of Parent Involvement

Research has shown positive associations between parental involvement in not only student grades, but rates of participation in advanced course, lower dropout rates, motivation toward school work, and valuing education. There are many reasons as to why this is such. Parents who are involved tend to model effective learning behaviors, reinforce productive choices, and help set future goals (Gonzalez 2013). Parent involvement can be either reactive or proactive. Reactive involvement in schooling consists of attending activities such as meetings, family activities, or volunteering. Proactive involvement includes parents in partaking in activities such as helping with homework, staying up-to-date on school events, and closely following a child’s progress.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HDS model) composed a theoretical model of the parental involvement process to connect parental involvement with student achievement. The revised
HDS model is composed of five major constructs. The five major constructs consist of parental motivations and perceptions regarding involvement and school responsiveness, learning mechanisms utilized by parents during involvement, students’ perceptions of parents’ involvement, students’ attributes, and students’ outcomes.

Specifically, the HDS model’s goal is to uncover the answers of three questions (Robins 2013). These questions include why do parents become involved in children’s education? What do they do when they get involved? And how does their involvement influence the students’ outcome?
Figure 2. Revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process

Table taken from IHMC Cmap Tools via

http://cmapspublic.ihmc.us/rid=1083273705620_1470268095_2465/HDS%20model_April2004.cmap
Types of Parental Involvement

Understanding the different types of parental involvement is crucial because it further allows teachers and schools to understand the type and levels of involvement with parents. Parents can either be school-based involved or home-based involved.

School-based involved parents means that parents must come in contact with their child’s school (Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998). This type of interaction involves activities such as attending parent teacher conferences, school events, or contacting and meeting with teachers. Gronlick and Slowiaczek (1994) explain that there is a difference between being involved with a child and being involved with a child’s education. Each type of school-based involvement contributes to a child’s academic success, meaning that being involved in a parent-teacher organization may yield different results than parents having contact with schools about student’s progress.

The other type of parental involvement according to Pomerantz & Ruble (1998), is home-based parental involvement. This explores ways in which parents utilize their resources and knowledge at home to build onto their child’s academic success. Some examples of home-based involved parent activities include helping their child out with homework, setting school related rules at home, and parent-child discussions about school. Research done by Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007 highly suggests that it takes both school-based and home-based involved parents for children to build a strong relationship between home and school environments.

Aside from Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement, Hester (1989) also suggested different types of parental involvement that are ranked from passive to active. The first step includes communication with parents, which encourages direct and personal interaction and communication between teachers and parents. The next type of involvement is parents as
teachers, which provides ways for parents to work with their child on learning goals through homework, school projects, and even administering assessments at home. The third type of involvement includes parents as supporters of activities, which encourages parents to get involved in school activities so that communication and relationships are formed with the school’s faculty and staff. Hester’s fourth type of parent involvement includes parents as learners, which is a unique type of involvement. With this type of involvement, parent education programs would be provided so that parents are educated and encouraged to cooperatively work with the school. Lastly, parents as advocates serve as emergence of a group of parents who are advocates of education and inspired to serve to help improve the schools. This would have parents focus on activities that may result in legislative and policy changes for school reform.

**Parental Involvement Roles**

Williams and Chavkin (1987) introduced six parental involvement roles, audience, home tutor, program supporter, co-learner, advocate, and decision maker. Audience implies parents supporting their child as a member of the school community. This can include participating in a book sale or responding to messages and announcements from the school. Parents can take on the role as a home tutor which means that they help their children at home, assisting with school work and other educational resources. Being a program supporter means that parents help out in the school by coordinating and participating in activities such as being a classroom volunteer, or organizing fundraisers, or chaperoning field trips. When a parent is a co-learner, they too strive to learn more about their child’s education by further understanding teacher’s methods or attending workshops provided by teachers or principals. Williams and Chavkin (1987) also encourage parents to be advocates and to have a voice when striving to change existing policies and practices in the school or the school system by voicing opinions on educational concerns and
issues. The role of decision making can be related to the role of parents being advocates. They are similar in which they both are encouraged to participate in school decisions by serving as board members or school committees.

**Benefits to Parental Involvement for Students**

**Cognitive Development**

Multiple studies have been conducted on the effects of parental involvement and a child’s cognitive development. Studies compare the cognitive development of children of highly involved parents to children of less involved parents. Research has concluded that children of highly involved parents yield higher cognitive scores than children of parents who are not as involved (McKey et al., 1985). A study done by Marcon (1999) showed that there was a positive correlation between parents’ high involvement scores and students developing academic skills. Children who had parents that were highly involved in their children’s schooling mastered basic skills in mathematics and science, verbal ability, and social and work habits.

**Motivation**

Studies of students from elementary school to high school show a positive and beneficial relationship between parental involvement and motivation. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) have cited multiple studies focusing on elementary grades that found connections between parent involvement and student variables such as academic achievement, send of well-being, attendance, student attitude, homework readiness, grades, and educational aspirations. Specifically, student motivation and parental involvement has recently been explored, meaning there hasn’t been much research done on the topic. Student motivation has been studied using a variety of different models, Fran (2012) focused on two prominent views: perceived self-efficacy
and intrinsic motivation. Self-efficacy refers to a student’s subjective judgments of their ability to learn and perform. Fran correlates those two-prominent views together. According to research, self-efficacy contributes to academic behaviors such as, persistence, effort, and academic achievement (Fan 2012). Children are always in constant contact with their parents, which is why parent involvement with their children is key to the children’s beliefs about themselves. Even if parents are not able to assist their children with a particular subject area or topic, they can still play a crucial role by encouraging feelings and attitudes towards academics. “[W]hen parents believe in children’s competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children’s initiations and problem-solving, children’s motivation is most likely to thrive,” (p. 295, Grolnick, 2009). Parents’ engagement will provide a powerful influence on a student’s motivational belief and their attitude towards school, which will affect their self-efficacy.

**Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Ginsburg and Bronstein (1993) measures parental involvement in relation to children’s motivational orientation. Their findings showed that parental involvement and supervision of homework was related to extrinsic motivation. The more parents were involved in their children’s homework by enforcing monitoring, and helping, the more the students reported being extrinsically motivated. Parents also reacted to their child’s grades with extrinsic rewards. When parents reacted to their grades with encouragement and words of praise, students were more likely to report an intrinsic motivation.

Studies conducted by Ames and her colleagues (1993) also found a correlation between parent involvement and children’s motivation by showing that children’s intrinsic motivation is
more positive when parents receive weekly communication from the teacher and when parents involved themselves in their children’s education. When parents show an interest and enthusiasm for what their children are learning, they provide a support system at home that reinforces the value of schooling. By encouraging such emotional support, parents establish a basis for their children’s motivation to learn.

**Proficiency Levels**

Epstein (2005b) recently assessed a school improvement model, the Partnership Schools Comprehensive School reform (CSR) model. The CSR model requires that schools must have about four or five action teams to improve the curriculum, instruction, management, and partnerships in the areas of reading, math, writing, and other school improvement goals. This model is based on Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1990) and includes activities for her six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995). For three years, the implementation of the model at a Title I elementary school was monitored. Results displayed that the quality of parent involvement activities improved and the percentage of students reaching high proficiency levels on state achievement tests in math, reading, and writing increased.

**Social Development**

Much research has been done on parental involvement and student academic success, but there has been growing research done on how parental involvement affects child behavior. Bandura came up with the social cognitive theory that suggests that children absorb messages about appropriate behaviors and socially accepted goals by observing and speaking to their parents (Bandura, 1977). When parents model positive attitudes on school and behavior, children learn through observation and follow. The more the children behave, especially at the school, the more their peers can learn and grow from what is being taught at school. A study done by
Fantuzzo et al., 2004 concluded that involved parents were associated with lower child conduct problems.

**Benefits of Parental Involvement for Teachers and Schools**

Wherry (2009) touches on the benefits of parental involvement both in the school and community. Some of these benefits include improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families, higher student achievement, and better reputations in the community. Also, schools will receive more support from the families. Due to higher student achievement, the schools will also gain a better community reputation.

Parental involvement is recognized by researchers, teachers, and parents as significantly imperative to the educational achievement of children; therefore, many schools have experienced high levels of parental involvement, yet many are still struggling to overcome the obstacles and build bridges for effective partnerships (Flynn, 2007).

Not only has research found that there been improvements in proficiency, but also schools and families have reported improvements in school attendance, higher educational aspirations, and reductions in retention, suspension, behavior problems, and years in special education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). In Cotton’s (2001) book there was information on The National Network of Partnership Schools conducted another “Focus on Results” study to learn whether school, family, and community partnerships improve student behavior and attitudes at school. Cotton collected two rounds of data from a variety of forty-seven schools, urban, suburban and rural schools. Seventy three percent of the schools were elementary and 27% were middle and or high school. Information was collected form schools before the partnership program was implemented. Factors that were examined in depth were, the quality of their partnership programs, their use of
family and community involvement practices, and occurrences of student discipline actions. There were several findings in this study, most important one being that the schools who improved their partnership programs had fewer students who were sent to the principal, received detention, and who received in-school suspensions. Another study included telephone interviews with parents of 910 k-12th graders conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (1997) indicated that when parents were highly involved at school, children were less likely to repeat a grade, be suspended, or be expelled. ‘Highly involved’ was defined as parents who participate in three or more of four identified activities during the school year. Another study conducted by Miedel & Reynolds showed that there were lower rates of grade retention when parents participated at least once a week or were involved in six or more activities in the school year. This research and findings recommend that larger school relationships help improve students’ behavior in school.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Although parental involvement is considered a significant influence of student success, there remains great obstacles. Some of these barriers include language, socioeconomic status, culture, and parent education levels. Although engaging families is imperative to student success, barriers arise making it difficult to develop and implement strong parent engagement. A study conducted by Drummond and Stipek (2004) highlighted the importance of parents helping their children in their reading, math, and homework. Findings showed that African American children are failing school at higher rates than other students, and factors related to this problem include socio-economic status, time given to students, and parent education levels.

**Socioeconomic Status**
Socio-economic status (SES) describes an individual's or a group’s overall position on a hierarchical social scale, defined by elements of wealth, power, social status, education, occupation, income, home and location (Mueller & Parcel, 1981). Researchers have found that parental involvement is lower in low-income communities than in higher income schools (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 2000; O’Connor, 2001). Unfortunately, low-income children with less involved parents don’t receive the amount of academic benefits that children receive from higher income homes. Children of low socioeconomic status (SES) are at risk for lower academic achievement (McLloyd, 1990). Children raised into socioeconomically underprivileged situations, particularly single-parent homes, are not as likely to benefit from the kinds of parental attention, activities, and resources that stimulate student involvement (McLanahan, 2004). Heckman (2011) claimed that disadvantaged mothers, as a group, “talk to their children less and are less likely to read to them daily . . . [they] tend to encourage their children less, adopt harsher parenting styles, and be less engaged with their children’s school work” (p. 80). For these children, the lack of involvement by their parents only leaves them farther behind their higher income counterparts. The definitions of parental involvement used most generally, focuses more on what the middle and upper classes can accomplish. The current parental involvement policies do not take in the needs of low-income children and their families. (Mapp, 2003). Students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to have parents who are always working trying to make ends meet for their families. Because they are often at work, they lack the time needed to participate on their children’s education both on and off campus (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). A study conducted by Desimone, L.M. (1999) on eighth-grade students to examine the effects of the students’ socioeconomic status on parental involvement. The findings of the study revealed that the students’ socioeconomic status influence parental
involvement and the students’ achievement. The higher the family income, the greater would be the parental involvement; and this enables the students to achieve high scores in mathematics and reading.

In 2000, Chattanooga, Tennessee had nine of twenty schools listed as the lowest performing schools in Tennessee. In one of the most notable reform efforts, Chattanooga turned many of their schools into high performing schools by 2005, by tackling the barriers of schools educating minority students from low-income backgrounds (Education Trust, 2013). These schools shifted from being rated the worst to “the fastest improving in the state. Another example is with Peabody Elementary in Missouri consisting of 99% low-income and 100% African American. Students outperformed the state in both reading and math and steadily increased their scores (Education Trust, 2003). Also, Elemont Memorial Junior-Senior High School is an establishment comprising of about 90% of minority students with 24% receiving free and reduced lunches. This school outperformed the state of New York in major core subjects in reading and math. There were several common themes amongst these schools one of them being the school’s is recognition of parental involvement in its mission statement and its educators recognizing the value of a parent’s role.

**Time and Family Structure**

Constantino (2003) found that the largest barrier to family engagement is time. Many families claim that they have minimal time for their children and even less time to involve themselves in their children’s school life. This especially holds true for single-parent families, in which there is one parent, guardian, or family member responsible for the children. A study conducted by Grohnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (2006) conducted a study examining the factors of engaging parent participation in their child’s education and revealed that children
from single-parent families were less involved compared to children from two-parent families. These results could be due to single parents having financial demands, which require one or more jobs to provide for their family. Therefore, single parents may have limited time to engage in their child’s education due to financial strains and other burdens.

Parent’s Education Level

Trotman (2001) examined factors that affect parental involvement such as family structure, parent socioeconomic status, and parent educational level. Trotman stated that lower levels of parent education, as well as work needs, are related to lower levels of parent participation. According to the National Institute of Health, the education level of a parent is an important predictor of a child’s educational achievements. Parents who are educated raise children who have healthy perceptions about their academic ability. Educated parents also tend to engage their children in intellectual activities that help them develop a healthy perspective on learning. A 2005 study by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan by Eccles found that a parent's education directly effects standardized achievement testing scores.

Parents with higher education levels tend to speak to their children using more complex and varied vocabulary, predicting better reading skills (Hoff, 2003). Parents with higher education levels generally have both higher educational expectancies and visions for their children’s educational future. In turn this predicts greater educational attainment for their children (Alexander et al., 1994).

Psychological Characteristics

Researchers are not only asking how parents engage, but also trying to understand why parents are motivated or not motivated to be engaged. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997)
shared that parent involvement is motivated by two beliefs: role construction and parental efficacy. Gronlick et al. (1997) concluded that when parents feel as efficient or important in the role of a teacher to their child, they are more likely to involve themselves in their child’s education. Parents who understand that being involved is more than just an activity, helps shape the role in which parents see themselves.

Another important psychological factor that affects a parent’s role is the relationship of the parent’s self-efficacy and referring their perceived level of effectiveness in helping their children in school. Bandura (1992) explains that the concept of self-efficacy refers to how well one uses judgments to plan and implement courses of action necessary to deal with potential situations. As in, what parents believe about themselves reflects their type of behavior that they will execute on behalf of their children. Self-efficacy theory states that parents make their decisions to become involved based on their perception and meaning of the types of outcomes that will follow their actions (Bandura, 1997; Hoover Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992).

In effort to overcome the barriers preventing parental involvement schools need to find strategies to involve parents. According to Wherry, 2009 “The answer is to stop treating parents like ‘clients’ and start treating them like ‘partners’ in helping children learn.” The following section includes several strategies that can be used to encourage the schools, teachers, and parents to be further involved.

**Strategies to involve parents**

LaRoucque (2011) classifies parental involvement into three categories; school involvement, cognitive-intellectual involvement, and personal involvement. School involvement includes activities that take place at school or participating in school-related activities at home, such as providing help with homework or projects. Cognitive-intellectual involvement refers to exposure
to intellectually stimulating activities that parents engage in with their children, such as reading together. Personal involvement refers to parents knowing what is going on with the child at school or what the child is studying or working on during school hours (LaRocque 2011).

While examining those three types of involvement, it was found that school involvement was the most noticeable type of involvement. LaRocque conducted a study on low-income African American families that was significant because it contradicted studies done before. Past studies have shown that low-income African American families had stronger association with academic outcomes when parents had a greater involvement in home-based activities rather than school involvement. These findings highlight why schools initiating and making an effort for family-school contact is so effective.

**School Strategies**

Parents’ perception on involvement relies greatly on teacher’s attitudes and actions. Unfortunately, teachers often categorize diverse background parents as uninvolved and disinterested. There must be a trust and mutual respect between the home and school. Teachers can describe and set as a standard what exactly are parental expectations. Also, teachers can ask for specific requests. Studies show that parents are more likely to respond to specific requests. That being said, some teachers fear parental involvement. According to LaRocque (2011), fear and mistrust are barriers arising from ignorance and the lack of relationships. If there are barriers, then they need to be addressed.

LaRocque highlights something very important. Teachers and schools must avoid using children as interpreters for their parents. This action can upset the balance and authority in the parent-child relationship. As an alternative, other parents who speak the same language can be used as a bridge. Some other strategies to communicate with parents include translating
newsletters and adding photos and videos (LaRocque 2011). Lastly, schools must also recognize cultural and economic differences of families. Addressing physical barriers can go a long way, such as scheduling parent teacher conferences to accommodate the family’s schedule. Also, teachers can provide many meeting times, so parents are encouraged to come in and not feel like they are on a strict and fast-paced schedule.

Zedan (2011) examined parent involvement in children’s education among the Arab Israeli population. About four hundred parents participated completing a parent involvement questionnaire which was used to measure the degree of involvement. They too discovered that the more the parent was involved, the higher their children’s achievement was.

After running the study and examining the results, the analysis showed that there is an outstanding difference in the factor of parent participation between parents of boys and parents of girls. The factor was much higher among parents of girls than parents of boys. There was also a significant and positive correlation between the general involvement of parents and the achievement of both the boys and girls. They also found a significant level of parent involvement according the student’s age level. Children in elementary school had a higher involvement than students in secondary school.

Olmstead (2013) explains the difference between reactive and proactive parental involvement. One type of proactive involvement is communicating with the teacher through email or staying informed about school events. In order to stay informed, phone messaging systems and websites are technology tools that can be used for parents to be informed. Teachers were also willing to use this tool as well. Another tool that was used in Olmstead (2013) study was the access of textbooks online. Lastly, parents could get access to student’s courses, homework assignments,
grades, and attendance through portals. The portals allow parents to directly communicate with teachers.

**Teacher Strategies**

LaRocque (2011) mentions three barriers that must be overcome: emotional, language, and physical. Historically, parents who are from diverse backgrounds have felt excluded from the education system. They may have some mistrust for the school system. The teachers can play an important role in regaining that trust. Teachers can ask parents what are the expectations they have for the teachers, rather than the teachers just having expectations for the parents. Teachers can also interact with parents regularly so that parents can feel more comfortable and confident in the school setting. Parents are more likely to be involved when they feel welcomed and valued. Sometimes parents don’t feel like they can support their children’s education, because of their own level of education. Teachers can reassure parents that the support doesn’t have to be with understanding the content itself, but the support can come from providing the children a regular time and place to do their homework, or ensuring that the children complete their homework, or contacting the teacher if the children seems to be struggling with their homework. Parents can often times feel intimitated by the professional language used in schools. The language can appear to be very academic, scientific or abstract. In the next, the researcher writes about what research has shown on parental involvement with their children’s homework. Not only is it the responsibility of the parent to be involved with their children’s homework, it is also the responsibility of the teachers to educate the parents on how to assist their children with their homework. Teachers can help parents and family members how and why it is crucial to monitor children’s homework (Toney, Kelley, & Lanclos 2003). In addition to providing strategies on effective homework monitoring, teachers can also provide the support to families which will
increase the effectiveness of parental homework monitoring. Some examples of this support include homework sign-off sheets for parents or even advice on how to detect signs of distraction and frustration.

**Parent Strategies**

To be successfully involved in a child’s education, parents must commit to a consistent routine, such as checking homework and maintaining household rules (Jeynes 2011). Another important aspect of parental involvement is communication between the children and parents. Communication is not something that happens overnight. It takes years to develop. Open communication can lead to living in a home with a loving atmosphere. Parental style is also an important factor because showing love and support, yet having discipline and structure can lead the children to grow and motivate them to succeed in school (Jeynes 2011).

According to Shumow and Miller (2001), parents and teachers working together on homework assignments can increase levels of student achievement and motivation. Helping children with homework not only allows students to understand the topic they are learning at school further, but it also bridges the gap from school to home by having parents know what their child is learning in school. A study conducted in Taiwan in 2000 required parents to get involved in monitoring what their children learned in school and at home. This study was conducted by Hsuing (2000) and found that student motivation and interest was increased with an integrated homework approach to teaching. Specifically, students became “more happy” with science as they began to discover the relationship with the subject at home and not only at school.

Hoover-Dempsey et. al (2001) suggests eight ways in which parents can involve themselves in their children’s homework. First, parents can interact with the student’s school or teacher
about the homework. This includes communicating with teachers about their child’s progress, performances and homework and also following through with the school’s or teacher’s requests. Secondly, parents can establish physical and psychological structures for the child’s homework performance. Establishing a routine and enforcing rules and expectations will allow students to have a more fluent experience. Thirdly, parents can provide a general oversight of the homework process. Not only will this allow parents to be available for their children, but it also allows them to detect any frustrations or a difficulty is facing. Fourthly, parents can respond to student’s homework performance. This will allow parents to recognize any difficulty their child is facing and also be that support system by offering their children rewards for their efforts or completion. Next, parents can engage in the homework processes and tasks with the students. Parents will actually be involved and working with the student by assisting or tutoring humor her. Parents can engage in meta-strategies in order to teach themselves and their children how to break down the content through understanding their children’s development. Parents can also engage in interactive processes by modeling or demonstrating appropriate learning processes and by problem solving. Lastly, parents can teach their children how to regulate emotional responses to homework.

Another strategy to further involve parents is having parents become actively involved in the PTA/PTO. Since many parents work throughout the day, it is sometimes difficult to be a part of classroom volunteer activities. PTA allows parents to gather after work ours and gives them a voice through a robust regional, state, and national structure that provides resources, training, and guidance. PTA groups give teachers and leaders to have the opportunity to collaborate, network, and fundraise.

Perceptions of Parental Involvement
There are different theoretical perspectives of parent involvement (Fan and Chen, 2001). Most research concludes that parental involvement plays a crucial role in the education and development of students. Furthermore, research suggests that teachers and principals hold perceptions that can affect the level of parent involvement and their child’s education (Anfara & Brown, 2003; Smerekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Turney & Kao, 2009).

**Teachers Perceptions**

Teachers attitudes, beliefs, and actions toward parental involvement have been found to be a pivotal factor of parental involvement (Addi-Raccha & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Griffith, 1998; Lawson, 2003; Watkins, 1997). Perceptions have been developed through history, culture, and specific school practices (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). The perceptions that teachers hold about parents and to the extent in which parents should be involved can either help or hinder the level of involvement from a parent. Dauber and Epstein (1993) conducted a quantitative study and came up with the following conclusions. The first discovery was that teachers are the key factors, but not the only factors in building school programs. They also found that programs are stronger in schools where teachers perceived parental involvement as something of great importance. Teachers agreed that involved parents were crucial for not only student success, but also teacher effectiveness.

Along with parent efficacy, teacher efficacy has also been shown to play a crucial role in the their perception of parental involvement. Teacher efficacy refers to their own beliefs and attitudes about their own teaching. Teacher efficacy has been defined as “the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance” (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977, p. 137). In Epstein’s and Dauber’s study conducted in 1991, it
was found that schools with more confident teachers and higher self-efficacy levels, use more practice involvement strategies to reach and involve parents.

**School and Principal Perceptions**

Schools and principals have a to make sure that their “school” unit is achieving their ultimate mission and goal. Principals are responsible to create an involved parent environment that connects families with the schools for the students to succeed academically. More and more research shows that principals play an important role creating a bridge between the students’ homes and school (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Gordon & Louis, 2009).

According to a study done by Flynn and Nolan (2008), the researchers recommended that increasing parent involvement begins with the principals promoting a school climate that welcomes families and invites them to participate in classroom activities, be active in decision-making committees, provide workshops for both parents and teachers, and to offer assistance to parents. Anfara and Brown (2003) refer to principals as an external bridge builder between homes and the school. Beck and Murphy (1993) made a list of expected principal behaviors and roles. The first role of a principal should be a master teacher, someone who is concerned with instructional content. Principals should also be the administrative agent, concerned with curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. The next role highlighted by Beck and Murphy (1993) is gamesmen. Principals being gamesmen means they should be concerned with being the bridge between school environment and external environment. Principals should also be maintenance mangers, which means they should be concerned with programming, planning, and operations. Lastly, principals should be missionary, meaning they should be concerned with meeting the social needs of all including students, staff, and parents. Results from Beck & Murphy (1993) suggested that principals who take on the gamesmen role had parents feel
empowered by the schools. Results showed that principals’ perception of being the master teacher role were associated with parents also feeling more empowered and having a greater PTA attendance as well as helping with their child’s homework. Principals who perceived themselves in the missionary role were perceived from parents as positive school climate. Principals who associate themselves with more of the administrative role, were perceived as parents as being informed and parents helping with homework.

**Technology as a Means of Communication**

The use of technology requires a proactive involvement from both the parent and the teacher. Most types of proactive involvement can be achieved through the use of technology. Research studies show that technology is an effective tool to promote the involvement of parents.

Although the No Child Left Behind Act has encouraged parents to be involved in their children’s education, it is ultimately the school’s responsibility to provide and support parents with chances to become further involved (Smith et al., 2011). The use of technologies for communication between parents and teachers is a unresearched area, yet it can play a significant role in parental involvement. Generally, studies done in the past have shown that technology offers a means for promoting parent/teacher communication and parents are underutilizing technology as a way of communicating with teachers (Center for the Study of Educational Policy, 2004; Herrold & O’Donnell, 2008; Rogers & Wright, 2008). Technology provides plenty of communication opportunities that are “not limited by school hours or location” (Brewer & Kallick, 1996, p. 181). The majority of Americans (95%) own a cell phone of some kind. People can use cell phone technology to access various forms of information and stay connected to one another (Brenner 2013). Specifically, smart phones allow people to access and retrieve information quickly and conveniently (Smith 2010a). Similarly, from a survey research design
study completed by Koch in 2010 where parents were asked to identify their preferred method of communicating with schools. In the study, 85% of the 153 parents participants believed that communication between home and school through the use of electronic devices was the “most convenient way to communicate with the school” (Koch, 2010, p. 89). The following recommendations were made from the study: it is the school’s responsibility to support parental involvement with the use of technology such as, email, web sites, and student information systems, while recognizing parental limitations and barriers to using electronic communications, schools should make a strong effort to create effective electronic communication between school-to-home and home-to-school, and teachers and schools should continuously show support for the use of communication devices such as email, web sites, and student information systems as opportunities to improve parental communication and involvement (p. 94).

Online textbooks, links to educational websites, and teacher websites all provide parents with the resources that they need to engage in their child’s learning. Blogs, wikis, and emails help provide parents with a two-way communication with the school. There are countless applications that involve parents with their children’s learning. Some of these applications include, the Remind 101 application which allows teachers to send blast text messages our to parents reminding them of an exam or a school activity. Another application is called Classroom Dojo, which allows teachers and students to build an online classroom that children and families can access from home. The SeeSaw application is a social media application that resembles Facebook and Twitter. Parents can communicate with teachers publically or privately through messaging and both teachers and families have the ability to upload photos and videos of student work. Another application used to keep track of information parents provide is called TeacherKit. This application is used to take attendance, track grades and behaviors, and to set up
detailed student profiles that can include health or allergy issues. This too has a way for parents and teachers to communicate privately instead of through email or text messaging.

Constantino (2003) concluded that working parents are finding it difficult to be involved in their children’s academics. Because of this difficulty, teachers and schools need to start utilizing electronics to communicate with parents. All these types of communications through emails, applications, and websites allow parents to keep in touch with the teachers and schools. It takes hard work from both the school and the parents to achieve this goal. Websites need to be updated regularly, messages need to be sent out constantly, and photos and videos need to be uploaded on a daily or weekly basis so parents are encouraged to keep up with the use of technology in the classroom.

**Conclusions and Future Directions**

Research shows that parental involvement improves student’s motivation, self-efficacy, and success levels. The evidence shown in this literature review shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and student success. Although there have been vast amounts of research done on the importance of parental involvement, the research on how strategies to get parents involved is limited. When parents are involved, students report more effort, concentration, and attention. Although parental monitoring of homework and use of extrinsic rewards in reaction are inked to extrinsic motivation, providing encouragement and praise is also linked to intrinsic motivation. The research lacks on examining ways in which parents can feel comfortable being involved in their child’s education, without feeling like they are crossing any boundaries. Sometimes parents are hesitant to get involved because they are unaware of the amount of involvement is appropriate for their child’s education. Developing a greater understanding on how to get parents involved in their child’s education can lead to an
improvement in student performance, motivation, and self-efficacy. Therefore, further research must be conducted to develop methods for parents, teachers, and the schools.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore teacher’s perceptions and experiences with parental involvement in a public-school system. Parental involvement will be generally defined as involvement in the education process by helping in the school and helping with homework (Anderson & Minke, 2007). This chapter further explains the research questions, the research design and tradition, and the methodology used for data collection and analysis. A description of the study site and participants are also included, along with noted study limitations and measures undertaken for validity and credibility and the protection of human subjects.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following question:

*What do elementary level teachers believe about parental involvement in education?*

This is a qualitative oriented question that permits for the examination by which teachers share their experiences with parents and students. The researcher asks this question to support the study in establishing common themes found among teachers regarding their experiences of parental involvement, as well as their ability to integrate these experiences onto their teaching habits. The results can be used for further studies related to parental involvement.

Research Design
Given that the focus of this study is on teachers’ experiences and perceptions, qualitative research is the most appropriate method of investigation. Creswell (2012b) suggests qualitative research gives meaning to a social or human problem to be explored. Creswell explains that in qualitative research there needs to be a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” that “can only be established by talking directly with the people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered” (Creswell, 2013b, p. 48).

The following chapter includes a qualitative method descriptive narrative approach for completing this study. Qualitative research designs typically include any combination of four basic types of data collection procedures which include interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. The author begins this chapter by explaining why a qualitative method would be the best approach used to align with her research questions.

**Research Paradigm**

The constructivist paradigm aligns with the goals of the research because it focuses on understanding the “lived experience from the point of view of those who live it day to day” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129). The constructivist researcher’s intent “is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 20039, p.8). Crotty (1998) identified several assumptions such as meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Regarding parental involvement, teachers construct knowledge through their experiences and interactions with their student’s parents.
Implementation of new parental involvement strategies requires significant attention by both parents and teachers.

A qualitative approach is used to investigate the following central and sub-questions:

**Central question.** What do elementary level teachers believe about parental involvement in education?

There are several reasons as to why the researcher is choosing the qualitative approach as the best methodology for answering the central question. The researcher sought to discover how parental involvement in an elementary level can influence students. Since qualitative research data is collected through examination, specifically examining teachers’ perceptions in this study, this research method is strongly compatible with this study. Also, the study’s goals are to portray if or if not parental involvement influences students through centering its focal point around the understanding of the phenomenon. In qualitative research, unfolding the phenomenon entails comprehensive narrations of the activities, context, processes, and participants (Andersen & Taylor, 2007; Patton, 1990). Linking these ideas and concepts into the methodology confirms that the most suitable research approach for this study is qualitative.

**Research Tradition**

A qualitative narrative approach is effective at bringing to the forefront experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own experiences and perceptions. It is a reflective analysis of life-world experiences (Von Eckartsberg, 1986; Moustakas, 1994). Studies that involve capturing people’s beliefs, feelings, practices, experiences, and the atmospheres and contexts in which they act and respond are often likely to be carried out as qualitative studies (Wiker, 2008). More specifically, a qualitative narrative study can be viewed as a subtype of a
qualitative study (Chase, 2008). As defined by Clandinin and Connelly 2000, narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural contexts. By using the actual words spoken from the interviewees, the research will aim to convey a sense of those participants’ experiences in its depth, richness, and texture. Through collaboration and social interaction between research and participant, over time, narrative inquiry can be achieved (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). There are two major principles that narrative analysis entails. Firstly, narration is a major way in which people make sense of their experiences, how they construct themselves, and how they create and communicate meaning. Secondly, personal narratives are inevitably social in character. To achieve the goals of this narrative study, both voices the interviewer and the interviewees voices need to be heard. “Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experiences should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.19).

Just as most narrative inquiries are started, the researcher will begin with asking participants to tell their stories. Participants can tell their stories in multiple ways, they can respond to the structured interview questions, or by engaging in conversation or dialogue (Cladinin & Huber). Narrative studies are of great importance in teacher education. It is especially involved in the process of becoming a teacher and in constructing one’s professional identity (Heikkinen et al., 2004). Regarding this study, teachers can tell their stories and discuss their experiences by engaging in conversation with the researcher.

**Recruitment and Access**

This study is a participatory research study. Participants who are chosen to participate in this study will be members of the Prescott School community. The teachers who chose to
participate will not only discuss their experiences, but they will also be given the opportunity to further reflect on their experiences. According to Cornwall and Jewkes 1995, there are four modes of participation in participatory research. The first mode is contractual—which is when people are contracted into the projects of researcher to take part in their enquiries or experiments. The next mode is consultative when people are asked for their opinions and consulted by researchers before interventions are made. The third mode is collaborative, which occurs when researchers and local people work together on projects designed, initiated, and managed by researchers. Lastly collegiate participation occurs when researchers and local people work together as colleagues with different skills to offer, in a process of mutual learning where local people have control over the process. Study participants will be asked to participate via email given by Prescott School’s administration. The email will include relevant information such as the background of the researcher, the purpose of the proposed study, the participant criteria, how the results would be used, how the identity of participants would be protected (Creswell, 2012). Teachers who are interested will be asked to respond by phone or email. Those teachers, who respond and meet the criteria for participation, will be sent consent forms to review. The consent forms comply with Northeastern University Institutional Review Board guidelines and include relevant information such as the purpose of the study, an outline of the data collection procedures, measures that will be taken to protect the anonymity of participants and the potential benefits to participation in the study. The consent form also outlines the voluntary nature of participation in the study and clearly states the participant’s right to withdraw from the study. The consent form questions will be further discussed in the next section.

Protection of Human Subjects
Clandinin (2007) claims that the ethical practice within narrative research includes respecting the dignity and well-being of others. The process for research study approval by an Institutional Review Board is designed to “ensure that the research meets ethical guidelines and does not in any way impinge on the rights of the individuals being studied or harm them in any way” (Butin, 2010, p.103). All the requirements set forth by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects are met in this study. No collection of data from any human subject will take place prior to IRB approval. In addition, the anonymity of all participants will be maintained by using pseudonyms. The researcher will choose female and male names that are different from the names of actual participants and will use these names in place of the participant names from the time of transcription to the time of publication of the research study. Therefore, there are no risks to individuals participating in this study. At the completion of this study, all videotapes will be destroyed. Participants who are interviewed will agree to participate in the study because of their interest in the research subject. There will be no pressure from the researcher and participants can choose to opt out of the study whenever they feel like doing so. The results of this narrative study will provide meaningful research on teacher’s experiences with parental involvement.

Research should be grounded on participants’ freely informed consent. It will be made clear that participants of this study have the right to refuse to participate and the potential ways in which data might be used (Corti et al., 2000). The following were example questions for participants: taken from (Northeastern University Informed Consent Template, 2013):

1. Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

2. Why is this research study being done?

3. What will I be asked to do?
4. Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

5. Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

6. Will I benefit by being in this research?

7. Who will see the information about me?

8. If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

9. What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

10. Can I stop my participation in this study?

11. Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

12. Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

13. Will I be paid for my participation?

14. Will it cost me anything to participate?

15. Is there anything else I need to know?

**Data Collection**

One-to-one semi-structured interviews will be conducted with each study participant. The researcher will make sure to convey semi-structured interviews so that the participants could “elicit detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings (Smith et al., 2009, p.57) and “to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p.341), allowing “the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p.90).
Each participant will be offered the choice of an in-person interview at a location and time of his or her choice, at a time that was convenient for him or her. Interviews will last no more than 60 minutes. Participants will be given a choice of an in-person interview or a video interview to maximize the number of teachers willing to participate in the study. All interviews will be digitally recorded.

Prior to beginning the interview, each participant will be reminded of the consent form and will be asked if he or she has any questions about consent. Each participant who chooses to engage in a video interview will be sent an unsigned consent form and as such will be asked if he or she consented to participate in the study before any interview questions were asked. Participants who chose in-person interviews are likewise reminded of the consent form and are asked to sign it before the interview starts. The researcher designs the interview questions after careful consideration of what the interview might cover, as well as consideration of difficulties that might arise in the interview process. The sequence of questions will be carefully developed to ensure that more general questions are asked initially so participants could build on their views later in the interview process as key questions are posed (Merriam, 2009). The pre-planned questions serve as a guide for the semi-structured interviews and are written to be open-ended to allow for meaningful narrative responses (Butin, 2010) and for follow-up questions or elaboration.

**Data Storage**

Digital recordings of interviews will be saved on a digital recording device. Immediately following the conclusion of each interview, the digital file will be transferred from the digital recording device to the password-protected hard drive on the researcher’s personal laptop. Once the interview file is successfully saved, the file will be deleted from the recording device.
Interviews will then be transcribed in full by a transcription service called Rev.com. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, all data files, transcripts and researcher notes will be identified only by the assigned pseudonym. The document containing the participants name and assigned pseudonyms will be destroyed. Signed consent documents will be stored for three years following the end of the study. The locked up signed consent documents will be returned to the participant or destroyed upon his or her request in accordance with Northeastern University Institutional Review Board guidelines.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of organizing and storing data in light of ones increasingly sophisticated judgments, that is, of the meaning-finding interpretations that you are learning to make about the shape of your study. (Glesne, 2006, p. 149). In this study, teachers share their different experiences and challenges they are faced with when involving parents. The researcher will begin by writing brief notes with a notebook and pen upon immediately leaving the school. Later on, the researcher will write even more detailed notes while going back and listening to the digital recordings. After writing down further detailed notes, the researcher will either transcribe the interviews verbatim and an analytic memo will be written to summarize ideas about each of the interviews or will use a transcription service. Transcribing each interview will take around 5-7 hours. The researcher will make sure to complete notes and transcription before moving onto any other interview in order to provide a clearer memory and understanding of each interview.

The researcher will begin her data analysis by using the process of coding in order to draw out themes. These themes include information transmitted, places that are transmitted, and opinions on what is helpful (or not helpful) information given by parents to teachers. The coding process will make it possible to identify patterns that can be used to help construct participants’
narratives. This process will be used to develop a narrative inquiry that has a beginning, middle, and end. The uniqueness of the participant stories will help determine the plot, structure, and theme (Polkinghorne, 1995). Several rounds of coding will take place in order to reduce data into semantic units of meaning to form relationships (Creswell, 2007). Coding will be used to reduce data by assigning a short word or phrase to show a part of the data (Saldana, 2009).

**Trustworthiness**

Minimizing researcher bias is important to guaranteeing trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is one of the main components to this study. Without trustworthiness, a study is no longer valid. Trustworthiness includes two components, reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of the research. Maxwell (2005) states, “Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted” (p. 105). In this study validity is achieved by randomly selecting teachers through email. An email will be sent to all the teachers at the Prescott School and whoever responds with interest to participating in the study will be chosen. This random selection also offers the greatest option that the representative sample mirrors the larger group.

Trustworthiness will also be achieved by implementing two other strategies, peer–review and member checking. Peer-review will be used to remove any of the researcher’s potential bias. Member checking gives the participants the opportunity to approve particular aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Merriam, 1998). Participants will be asked to edit, clarify, elaborate, their words from the narrative. It also enhances trustworthiness by placing the participant and the participant’s experiences.

There will be a couple other approaches that will be used by the researcher to minimize bias in this study. Firstly, the researcher will use the process called bracketing. Bracketing is a
method used in qualitative research to lessen the potentially harmful effects of biases that may taint the research process. More importantly, it also facilitates the researcher reaching deeper levels of reflection across all stages of qualitative research such as selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings (Creswell, 2007). More specifically, the researcher will begin a reflexive journal even prior to defining the research question. This way preconceptions are then identified throughout the research process (Ahern, 1999). Maintaining the journal can enhance the researcher reflexive stance. The reflexive journal can include the researchers’ reasons for undertaking the research, assumptions regarding gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Hanson, 1994). The researcher is having a peer who is going to have a look at a piece of the data analysis and look at the piece of the raw data transcription to confirm that the way the researcher is interviewing and reading her participants is enforced by their opinions and not by her own biases. This will help the researcher bracket and self-check her own biases. The researcher will give a piece of her data and analysis to her peer members so that they can confirm that they are comfortable with the way in which the researcher is presenting and that the researcher is truly capturing the teacher’s experiences. Without trustworthiness, this study cannot be fully appreciated.

Conclusion

This qualitative study sought to examine the experiences of teachers with parental involvement in a public school, elementary level. Although various studies have examined parental involvement in education, through vivid and explorative data, this study examines the application of parental involvement experiences. The methodology is used to address both research questions that guided the study. About eight teachers will be interviewed and the results of the individual interviews will allow the researcher to formulate findings that would be used to
address the purpose of the study. Through qualitative design, more specifically narrative study, the aim of this research study is to examine teacher perceptions and experiences in regards to parental involvement in an elementary level. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to provide data necessary to analyze and answer the research question. The researcher will guarantee value and trustworthiness through implementation of measures that ensure validity of data sources, protection of participants, and proper organization and supervision of data.

**Chapter Four: Research Findings**

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher’s experiences with parental involvement. This chapter outlines the narrative findings from interviews that were conducted with five female educators in a public school in Massachusetts. Interviews provided a framework for discussing the lived experiences that these educators faced with parental involvement. These experiences were told from the perspective of public school teachers; therefore, this is their reality and understanding. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the educators’ profile information coded in pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Participants varied were all part of the same school district, but taught at different grade levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4:1 Educators’ Profile Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first part of this chapter is broken down into a summary of each of the educator’s stories through explanation of their background as well as current positions as educators. The next part of the chapter breaks down the major themes that have emerged from the interviews: technology, which describes the use of technology when communicating with families; information; when information provided by parents can help teachers reach out and understand their students further, both academically and behaviorally; motivation which touches upon the level in which parental involvement can be both effective and ineffective; and lastly teacher education programs; which emphasizes the importance of educating and providing teachers on strategies to communicate with parents. The interview data offers a lot of experiences and perspectives that can be shared with a variety of school districts.

Research Question:

The following research question guided this qualitative narrative analysis:

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers have utilized different ways to involve parents in their children’s education. The following research question was explored:

Research Question:

What do elementary level teachers believe about parental involvement in education?

Data Collection and Participant Profiles
The participants were selected randomly through email from one school. Interviews were conducted in person. In a narrative study, the researcher initiates and facilitates the participant’s story-telling through the use of open-ended questions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin state that because time and experience are critical in a narrative, stories are told by allowing time and experience to work into their analysis. All participants were female educators and the research generally began each interview asking participants a little about themselves and how they became a teacher before jumping into questions concerning parental involvement. If their narrative went too far from the research focal point, the researcher would try to lead the participant back on topic. All participants expanded on their stories as the research relationship developed (Riessman, 2008, p. 55). Data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with five public elementary educators from the same school from the same district. The five participants were all from the same elementary school in the same school district. This district was a suburb with five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school located approximately 25 miles southeast of Boston. The elementary school from which the participants came was first grade through fifth grade with approximately 200 students. The socioeconomic levels of the families who attend this school varies from low to high. The participants were asked to share their journey as educators and their experiences with parents. All participant names have been changed as well in order to provide the level of anonymity promised in consented forms.

**Carolyne**- Carolyne is on her 10th year of teaching at the school. She changed her career from human resources to become an educator 10 years ago. Carolyne stated

> Once I had children, I didn’t care much for my human resources career. I wanted to more for my family. Even though my undergraduate degree was in psychology, I decided to go
back to school and get my Masters in Teaching. I enjoyed the course work and felt that I was making the right decision going into elementary education so that I can be further involved in my children’s lives.

Carolyne used to teach first grade up until two years ago when she was asked to transition into second grade. Her students come from diverse backgrounds and learning levels. This past year, six out of the eighteen students were from Indian descent, 2 were from Lebanese descent, and 2 were from Latin America. Her class was comprised of students of ranged significantly academically. Even though her classroom was not the inclusion classroom, four of the eighteen students were on IEPs which presented a huge challenge, making the incorporation of parents crucial, especially in volunteering efforts.

Sandra has been teaching at the Prescott for 13 years. Sandra has taught 4th and 5th grade for 6 years and became the lead special education teacher for the past 7 years. Out of all the teachers, she uses technology the most in her teaching and communicating with parents.

I used to teach 4th and 5th grade for about eight years. I was asked by a friend to help out in a special needs classroom and I fell in love with it. I have been teaching special education ever since. I chose to leave the general education classroom because I felt like the PACC program at the school was in need of more help. I absolutely love spending time my children and interacting with their families.

Sandra described her journey to becoming an educator as a “whirlwind.”

I actually went to school as a biology major, wanting to be a marine biologist. After struggling with my first two biology and anatomy and physiology courses, I decided that graduating as a biology major was not for me. So I switched my major to sociology and
then switched it to psychology with the hopes of clinging onto one last hope of staying in the medical field and becoming an occupational therapist. After graduating, I began to apply to O.T programs while working as a teacher in a private school. I realized that I always was a teacher at different stages of my life and at the last minute applied to a Masters in Teaching program. Here I am! I am so grateful that I chose this route and not biology. I can’t imagine my life not being a teacher.

**Selena** has been teaching first grade for twenty-five years and has the most teaching experience out of all the participants. For all twenty-five years, she taught at two different schools in the same district. The involvement of the parents of her students tend to differ from year to year.

I have always wanted to be a teacher. It is not something that I thought about. There were so many teachers when I graduated from college and everyone advised me not to become a teacher. I had to go into my undergraduate program as undeclared and during my junior year I transitioned into the school of education. It wasn’t until years later that I went back to school to get my Masters in Teaching. I have been teaching for twenty-five years and it’s been the best job for me.

Out of all the participants, Ms. Selena has the most in person interactions with the parents. She emphasized that although she uses technology as a means to communicate with parents, she also love the personal interactions with them. She joked and said that she is known as “the at the door teacher.” If any of the teachers are looking for her after school, she is the one at the door making speaking to the children’s parents.

**Sylvie**
Sylvie has been a teacher at the same school for the last 5 years. Throughout her time at the Prescott she went from being a 3rd grade teacher, to a 5th grader, and this year she will be a second-grade teacher. Just like Carolyne, her students came from diverse backgrounds with parents who have different levels of involvement.

After graduating from college, I was recruited for a college admissions position. I was not an education major, and I had no education training in undergrad. I was a sociology and political science major, and was about to go to law school. I passed my LSATs and at the very last moment I had a change of heart. I worked in college admissions for 11.5 years and eventually became the director of admissions. I was very successful being the director of admissions. I was making great money and had a staff of 13 people who worked for me, but I felt like the organization that was running the school did not have the best interest of the students. At age 35, I left the money and I left the power to go back to school and pursue education. That is how I ended up a teacher.

Valentina

Valentina has been a teaching at the Prescott School for eight years. She taught ESL for four years and then was transferred to 3rd grade and has been teaching 3rd grade for four years. Out of all the participants, Valentina has had the smoothest interactions with the parents of her students, with only some minor instances of unhealthy involvement.

I actually went to Westfield State College as a journalism major, but prior to that I have always wanted to be a teacher. At orientation, I said “no I want to teach.” I have always wanted to teach, as a little kid that’s something I always wanted to do. My mom is a former teacher. I don’t have a direct answer as to why, it is just something that I always
wanted to do. Watching my mom, it just felt like the right fit for me. And now, as a mom myself, I am so glad that this is the path I chose. Not only am I doing something that I love, but it is also so nice to have the hours that are convenient for my kids and the same days off. It is just awesome. At Westfield State College, I did my undergrad in elementary education and started teaching right away. I did my practicum at a school that needed a first-grade teacher and the principal liked me and hired me. I started teaching at 22. I got my Masters while I was teaching. I worked in many different schools, before working at the Prescott. I also taught 2nd grade at an inner-city school in Chicago for two years. Since I had my ESL certification, I was hired to teach ESL at the Prescott for four years before teaching 3rd grade. My passion for teaching has only grown throughout the years and I really can’t see myself doing anything else.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

The participants came from different backgrounds and had different experiences and perceptions about being female educational leaders. Although they had these differences, there were several common themes that emerged from the interviews. The researcher’s thorough analysis of each individual transcript and comparison of data across all transcripts resulted in the emergence of patterns and themes. Final analytical decisions made revealed four super-ordinate themes. The themes included:

1. *Technology*: which describes the use of technology with communicating with families
2. *Information*: information provided by parents can help teachers reach out and understand their students further, both academically and behaviorally
3. *Motivation*: which touches upon the level in which parental involvement can be both effective and ineffective
4. *Teacher education programs*; which emphasizes the importance of educating and providing teachers on strategies to communicate with parents

**Theme 1: Technology with parent involvement**

Throughout the interviews with these participants, it became apparent that these teachers were trying to evolve with the technology to further communicate with parents. All five participants use technology to communicate with the parents, however four out of the five stated that their preferred method of communicating with parents revolves around technology, whether through email, one-way texting apps, classroom websites, or online newsletters. Sylvie explains how important incorporating technology has been in her classroom, especially using the “Reminder” application.

To be honest with you, I use blast communicating. I hit all channels with the reason being that I figured out that there is not really one way to communicate with parents. Unfortunately, in this day and age parents have so many different preferences for how they communicate. The way that I do a lot of my communication is through the “Remind” app. You can do one way or two-way texting, and this year I am leaning towards changing my account and enabling two-way texting. This will be my fifth year using it and I really like it because in modern technology, parents always have their phones and it is very easy to send a quick reminder to events that are going on at school. For example, tomorrow’s Patriot’s Day! Don’t forget to wear your Patriot’s colors or Patriots clothes. Aside from the texts, I like to accommodate for all parents by sending texts, emails, and a physical paper copy. The problem with paper copies and elementary students is that they are likely…very likely not going to make their way to their parents.

(Ms. Sylvie)
Sylvie also mentioned another application for providing digital newsletters.

I try to avoid sending home newsletters with my students, because let’s face it, they are kids and chances are they won’t make it home to the parents. Instead I use Office Mix which is a sight that lets me make video newsletters. I can upload a video of me integrating PowerPoint. It’s great because you can see both me and the PowerPoint at the same time, allowing parents to make a deeper connection on what topics were taught.

(Ms. Syvlie)

Sandra, Carolyne, Sylvie, and Selena use the “Reminder” application to send either one or two-way texts. They all seemed to use the apps for blast texting rather than individual texting. Blast texts are sent to remind parents of events happening at the school, field trips, and even reminders to help prepare their children for upcoming tests or presentations. Valentina not only uses the “Reminder” application for group blast messages, but she also uses it to text parents individually if something needs to be addressed immediately.

As a parent myself, who for many of the days has to run out of work by 3:30, I don’t have time at the end of the day, and if my preparation hour was at 9 a.m to call a parent and tell them “hey your child really struggled with math today, please go over the math problems with them for 10 minutes.” It is nice because it takes five minutes from my time when I have to be with my own kids. I think as a parent, it has made my correspondence with the parents better because I feel guilty. Like if something happened at lunch and I didn’t get the chance to call I would feel really bad if I did not get the chance to touch base with the parents. And many parents don’t check their emails until the next day. Parents can directly contact me without having my cell or home number so that the problem that is addressed doesn’t have to be left unaddressed. (Ms. Valentina)
All five teachers often use emails to communicate with parents. Carolyne shared reasons as to why prefers emailing the most. Carolyne stated:

Parents seems to be most comfortable sending emails. I will usually receive emails from parents if they want to reach out to me. If there is an issue that their child has, they tend to shoot me a quick email asking for a phone or in-person appointment. Emails are generally sent when an individual parent want to speak to me or vice versa. They are not sent to address what the “Reminder” texts address. I don’t need to get a hundred emails from parents at a time. (Ms. Carolyne)

Out of the five participants, Sandra was the only teacher that sent out a daily communication log at least three times a week. The daily communication log consists of videos or links to websites that parents can use to further communicate to their children what was taught in class. The daily communication log also acts like a twitter account for school that parents can see pictures and announcements taken that day or throughout the week. Another application that Sandra has been using is Seesaw.

I use Seesaw application the reason being several of my students come from English as a second language home so the application enables parents to see pictures and videos of what their child is able to do. If a child has ADHD, parents can show their child’s doctor what they are capable of doing and what their performance is like. This application can act like a private Twitter account so parents can’t see videos of other children. There is an option to make the videos and pictures private for individual families or for the entire class to see. My focus is the continuity between home and school. The Seesaw application provides more of a one-way communication while the other methods such as email or texts are geared towards two-way communication. I really want to emphasize the
use of technology and parent-student engagement has really raised the stakes. Parents are much much more engaged when they see a picture or a video of their child posted online rather than just a note that says we are working on colors this week. When they see their child enjoying the academics through video or pictures, they are much more engaged.

(Ms. Sandra)

Sylvie explained about why she uses virtual apps that create virtual classrooms or virtual zoos for the children to browse and learn both in school and at home.

I think the Class Dojo app is pretty neat. I consider it my online classroom in which I can decorate and set up the way I would like. I let students help me decorate their Dojo classroom, which sparks more of an interest when I pull it up on the Smart Board. I use it because it encourages students to be kind, work hard and help others. It also gives my students a voice by allowing them to showcase and share their learning with videos and pictures. Parents can easily access this app and see the videos and pictures shared by not only their child’s but also the entire class. The best part about the app is that teachers can message me privately, without exchanging my number! This app makes learning fun and it also builds a bridge between school and home. I’ve had kids tell me that they showed their cousins or friends who came over to their home a tour of their virtual classroom. It’s really cool to see them share what we made in the classroom outside with their friends and families. Another program that the children use both in school and at home is accessing the Virtual Zoo. Discovery Animal Planet has a section on their site where kids can access a virtual zoo. It’s really cool because they can look at pictures and videos of animals in their natural habitats as well as learn how to use and read maps. I’ve had
several kids come up to me and tell me that they watched those videos with their parents at home during their TV time. (Ms. Sylvie)

All teachers were quick to respond when asked if they shared their personal cell phone or home phone numbers with parents. They all responded saying “Absolutely not!” or “Never!” Sylvie explained her reasons why she does not give out her phone number to parents.

Absolutely not, that is a full no no. It is unprofessional and it is a liability. There are boundaries. I think it might be because of my administrative background and being in education administration for so long, I am constantly thinking of the legal, ethical and professional boundaries. For me there is a very clear line that I do not cross with social media and things like that. I will not friend a parent who has children in the school. There is no social media contact whatsoever. I have had several friend requests and I don’t deny them, I just ignore it. I think parents should know better than to cross that line, but if they don’t I won’t allow that line to be crossed. What I like about the Reminder app and the Class Dojo app is that it doesn’t give much room for parents not to be professional since everything on the apps have to do with their child’s learning. I found that to be really helpful. (Ms. Sylvie)

This question lead to accountability and why the teachers choose to communicate through text and email rather than in-person or through the phone. Several of the teachers brought up unpleasant experiences they had when reaching out to parents through phone on in-person interactions. Selena explained an experience that stood out.

Several years back, about three years ago, I had a student who struggled academically. He would not finish his work and his was distracted. His mom would constantly call the
school wanting to speak to me. She first accused me that curriculum was too hard, that the curriculum was inappropriate for their age, then it was teaching style. Because we were speaking over the phone or speaking in person, the mother began to twist my words and there was no proof of what was said. After explaining to the principal, the situation, the principal highly encouraged that I try to have more interactions through email rather than on the phone or in person for my own protection. (Ms. Selena)

Sandra also described why speaking to parents through the phone was her least preferred method of communication.

With a phone call, things can be taken out of context. People have taken my word and sort of run with it. It is because nothing is written down. Like if you have an email, you have a running record of what was said. I had trouble with a parent last year. I was encouraging a parent to have their child tested and she wouldn’t have it. She filed a complaint to our principal and claimed that I insulted their child. This would have all been avoided if there was a running record of what was said. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not like I refuse to speak to parents on the phone, I just make it known at the beginning of the year that is isn’t my most preferred way of contact. Throughout the school year, you also learn which parents to avoid speaking over the phone with to avoid any sort of miscommunication. (Ms. Sandra)

Sylvie was the only participant to bring up the topic of consistency.

I think that if you you ar are going to use technology in and out of the classroom, there needs to be a certain consistency. You can’t tell parents that you are going to use technology and then not be consistent. I have parents that work 80 hour weeks and rely on updated websites or
reminder notifications. I think times are changing and it is getting more and more difficult for families to have just one income. Most of my students’ families rely on my communication via technology. I make it simple for them to access and to understand so that when they are with their kids at home, it is easy for them to connect with what their kids learned in school that day or week. (Ms. Sylvie)

**Summary.** All participants reported how useful using technology as a tool is when communicating with parents. Most of the participants preferred the “reminder” application to send out quick notifications to parents throughout the week. Participants felt that through technology, especially texting, parents can more easily be involved in their child’s education. If parents see a video or a picture of their child learning, that will spark the interest of the parents and motivate them to look into what the children are learning at school. All participants were quick to respond when asked if personal cell or home phone numbers were distributed, emphasizing that giving out personal numbers can cause problems with boundaries.

**Theme 2: Information**

Information provided by parents seemed to influence all teachers and their teaching styles. Sylvie and Sandra went into detail about instances when parents withheld information about their child and how it has affected her teaching abilities.

Last year a parent withheld medical information on their child. Sometimes parents decide not to disclose to the school if a child is diagnosed with ADHD. It happens all the time, every year I had somebody. The parents don’t disclose it, they don’t provide any documents. If they are not going to go through that process with the school or request a 504 plan, it is very important for me to have that information so that I am be able to plan
accordingly with my instructions and modify how I am mainly delivering information or helping with being able to direct them or break apart the assignments that I am doing.

(Ms. Sylvie)

Aside from informing teachers of any medical attention a child may need, Sandra touched about being informed of what may be going on in the family.

It is helpful for parents to communicate with me if something major change or major events personally that are happening in the family. Often times that is going to affect the student’s ability to be successful. If there is a nasty divorce going on and the child is back and forth between mad and hostile parents that often many times manifests in ways in the classroom. These family issues tend to affect the child not only behaviorally but academically as well. (Ms. Sandra)

Selena and Valentina also mentioned that if children are going through major changes in their lives, it is helpful for her to know how to interact with that child.

Children are being tested outside of schools. Parents will come to me if there was a death in the family, like a grandparent or if something is going on like divorce. You know, some kids change so quickly. They are fine one day and all of a sudden, I see their whole mood change. Kids go through a lot of things and they don’t always tell you, some kids tell you everything. If a child comes up to me and tells me “you know my mom and dad were yelling at each other all night and I couldn’t sleep” then I know why they are having a hard time concentrating or doing their work. (Ms. Selena)

Valentina mentioned that sometimes parents don’t really take into consideration how much a change in family dynamic or a death can affect their child.
Carolyne and Valentina mentioned that she sends out a questionnaire or an interest survey at the beginning of the year, asking parents to fill out several questions that had to do with their children. Some of the questions relate to personal interests of the students. Carolyne said:

It helps to know what the children’s interests are so that I can incorporate their interests into my teaching. For example, I had one student that loved animals, especially dogs. I would integrate dogs into either math word problems or find fiction or non-fiction literature on dogs. I found that the topic would spark the child’s interest and would be more likely to engage in classroom discussion. The interests can be anything, whether they are animals, sports, music, etc…It is refreshing to see the children get more involved and to pay attention during a not so fun math lesson because of an interest they may have not necessarily to the math problem, but to the interest included in the math problem. So I am a huge supporter of parents sharing their child’s interests with me. It’s been such a life saver when teaching, especially difficult and not so fun topics. (Ms. Carolyne)

Valentina stated:

I send home an interest survey at the beginning of the year asking questions like, how does your child learn best? Or what are their interests? In 3rd grade, we move so much more into non-fiction so it is nice to know like Oh Stevie likes football! It is good to know so that I can help him pick out a biography on a football player, or a book on a football team. I do always keep it in the back of my mind, but since a lot of the curriculum is so planned for us, there is only so much teachers can do that is extra. (Ms. Valentina)
Valentina brought up another perspective on how information provided by parents would be useful.

There have been times were parents have shared information that I did not see. For example, I had a student that I thought got along so well with another student. The two girls were always together, running around, playing. I got a phone call from the girl’s mother asking to keep an eye out on the other friend since she has been bullying her daughter. I always assumed they were best friends. Little did know they were “frenemies.” Sometimes I do not know what is going on deep inside students so when parents give me information saying, “you know my daughter is really having trouble with this student” I take it very seriously. I make sure to not seat them close to each other in the classroom or to have them work in the same groups when doing group work. Not only is this information behavior based, but it can also be applied to academics. I like knowing my students’ interests so that I can find ways to incorporate their interests into my teaching. I obviously can’t customize everything towards their interests, but from time to time I like doing so. (Ms. Valentina)

Carolyne shared the sort of questions she sent home at the beginning of the year for parents to answer for Carolyne to have a better idea on her students and their interests.

On the first week of school, I send home a paper filled with questions for parents to answer about their children. I find this to be really important so I always send a reminder app to make sure I get them back. The first year I did it, it wasn’t taken as seriously as I hoped and believe it or not it actually made teaching much harder and bumpier throughout the year. I really needed the information provide on that sheet of paper. One of the questions I ask on that sheet is like “what do you see your kid’s greatest
strengths?” and I’ll ask them to tell me about them. I also ask parents what they would like their child’s experience to be like for the upcoming school year with me? And if they don’t understand that questions, I’ll ask them to share a story they would like to hear coming from their child. Previous years, I have asked what was the best way the parents would like me to be in touch with them. After a couple years, I took that out. It just wasn’t feasible for me to accommodate everyone’s communication needs. At the end of the questionnaire, I give them the opportunity to add on anything that they would like. I find this to be the most beneficial part because here is where parents will touch upon all types of information like personality traits or I don’t know …. Struggles their child may have? I would have the answered sheet with me in the family’s folder during the P.T.O meeting just in case I had any questions on what was written about their child or to show parents that I do take their involvement and thoughts on their child seriously. (Ms. Carolyne)

Selena added a valid point at the end of the interview. It was a comment that wasn’t directly associated with a specific question that was asked. She mentioned:

I have had countless parents throughout the years come up to me and complain to me about how things are run or done at the school and yet we are struggling to find parents to be part of the PTA board. I get so mad them when they complain. I tell them they need to get involved and attend the PTA meetings because their voices are heard by the principal and other school leaders. IF they don’t attend these meetings, then nothing is guaranteed to change. I am really happy with our PTA and they really do seem like they connected to both families and the school. Parents just need to take advantage of this tremendous
opportunity that they have to be a part of an organization that is so will to hear them out.

(Ms. Selena)

**Summary.** Although participants had different views on what kind of information provided by parents influenced their teaching style, they all agreed that when information is provided it affects how they teach and generally improves their teaching. Some of the teachers explained that it was good to know what the children’s interests were so that they can apply the children’s interests into their lessons. Other teachers explained that it was useful to know if children were going through any life altering changes or problems at home so that teachers are aware that the children may either need a break, or need to be pulled aside during to be checked on.

**Theme 3: Motivation levels**

Drawing upon their own experiences with students, participants all agreed that students who have involved parents tend to succeed and have higher motivation levels than those who do not have involved parents. They all agreed there was a certain level of involvement that contributes to students having higher motivation levels and there is a certain level of involvement that contributes to students having lower motivation levels. If the level of involvement exceeds a certain point, that can backfire and cause a student to have less motivation. Sandra spoke of the accountability on both the child and the parent when parents are involved. Sandra stated that:

A parent showing their interest, their concern, and the value of education is a really important message to send to their kids. It also sends a message to the students that we are all on the same page and we are all working together. There is a shared interest and that we all want you (the children) to be successful. More importantly, there is a shared accountability on both the parents and the children. Children won’t feel like they are in
this alone. For example, I had a student that her parents had absolutely no value to education whatsoever. They could care less. They only would care about that she was happy and dressed pretty. She was late to school all the time and out all the time. It completely impacted that student’s ability to be successful because she was not getting a lot of the key concepts. She had little to absolutely no level of motivation….well why would she if she wasn’t receiving the encouragement from home? I recently heard that this student was asked to stay a year back and the parents denied her falling behind. (Ms. Sandra)

Sylvie also touched upon how engaging and reinforcing homework with their child can further motivate them to succeed and to also not fall behind both academically and socially.

The homework that I give is very purposeful. The homework reinforces what we worked on during the day so that it is going to help install those skills and concepts so that the children do not forget them. If they are not partaking in it and there is nobody at home who cares that you are not doing it or does not understand the value of it then they will be missing out on the other things that the children are work on and understanding. It is really sad to see when children are falling behind academically because of the involvement. Not only does it affect their success at school, but the lack of encouragement and reinforcement can also lead to them falling behind socially. (Ms. Sylvie)

Sandra and Valentina both mentioned that parents who are involved with the home-school communication progress at a faster rate.
I think we work in a school and a school district where we are really encouraged to communicate with parents what was taught to the students frequently. The principal is constantly encouraging us to build professional relationships with the parents and the families, by inviting them to school events and also sending home information that was taught at school. When parents actively read my daily communication blog and implement what is on the site, their children tend to progress faster. For example, if I teach the children about non-fiction literature, parents can bring their child to the library and say “we are going to get a book that is non-fiction because I know you are working on non-fiction literature at school.” I know that those children are learning about non-fiction literature at a faster rate. The children who do not have that school-home continuity are progressing at a much slower rate. They are only learning like half of much as the kids with the communication. (Ms. Sandra)

Sylvie shared a story about a parent that was involved last year and how it impacted her teaching.

I had a parent last year who taught at another elementary school before changing her career to finance so she truly understood what teachers go through. She was such a gift to my class because she had a bunch of connections with the community. She would get parents and encourage them to come in and volunteer with different activities throughout the year. I just couldn’t thank her enough. I would write thank you cards to the parents immediately after they would help out just to show my appreciation and let them know it was not taken for granted. I learned that the cards and appreciation encouraged not all but most of them to come back and volunteer. Not only did the parents get involved, but when the kids saw their parents giving their time to be a part of their educational life,
they too were encouraged and happy to be at school. It was so awesome to see the
excitements the kids had when their parent would step into the classroom for sensory
corners or reading small group discussions. I would have to say, through my
observations throughout the years, the kids who had their parents come in often would be
the ones most excited to be in school. I have seen complete attitude shifts once parents
were involved (Ms. Sylvie)

Valentina mentioned a student who fell really behind academically because the mother
was always a no-show and continue to explain her views on what she thought it meant for a
parent to be involved enough for the child to progress, academically and behaviorally.

I think it is important for parents to just be present. They don’t have to do homework with
their children, they don’t have to check it, they don’t have to look at it. The children can
just circle the problems that they do not know, but just have a time set aside for the parent
to let the children know that they have homework. I love to read. I tell my children “okay
kids we are going to have 15 minutes of reading time.” I don’t even think the parents
have to read to their children, but the parents and children are just sitting down together
reading individually it is role modeling for the children. (Ms. Valentina)

Selena shared an experience about one of her students who had a mother that was overly
involved.

I had a student who had great potential, but he was just so lazy! He would do nothing in
class and yet he would always come into school the next day with his homework
completed…just not in his handwriting. His mom would constantly do his homework for
him and he would come into class not knowing what was going on and fail all his tests. In
situations like this, parents are destroying their children’s motivation levels causing them to be so lazy and ultimately causing them not to succeed. (Ms. Selena)

Carolyne indirectly mentioned how parental involvement can affect a child’s intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels.

I think kids who have involved parents sometimes get motivated because there are rewards or prizes when they accomplish something. I think that changes over time. How do I phrase this? Kids eventually get into a routine and if something is expected from both their families and teacher, then kids are more likely to progress. They may start off not caring to progress, but once they see the support of both their school and families, they will be more likely to do so. (Ms. Carolyne)

Sandra also indirectly touched upon intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

I had a student that would only do his work because he would be rewarded at home for whatever progress he made or good grade he got. It came to the point where he was being showered with all sorts of gifts and even money! I told the parent that it was great that he was motivated and improving his scores, but he should be expected to try hard and get good grades without all these types of rewards. I encouraged the boy’s dad to not give him as many awards and as much money whenever a good grade was sent home. The father did agree to follow my advice. I think he did so because the boy continued to progress throughout the year and he is now is 5th grade and continues to do very well. Either his father stopped rewarding him as much or the father told him not to tell his teachers about the rewards! I have asked teacher if the boy has mentioned the rewards, but they hadn’t heard anything.
Valentina also touched upon the topic of over-involvement and how that can cause laziness in a child.

I had a couple parents who were at my door every day after school. They would each stay for about 10 minutes or more to and have an informal conference with me. One of those parents was so involved that she would actually do the work for her child. It was almost hindering him learning anything. She would just do his homework and when it came time to take a test he would just flat out fail. I assigned a project called “all about you,” which was designed to be a fun project for the children. It wasn’t academic, it was just supposed to be fun. While presenting this project, this student couldn’t read what was on the poster and actually said “I don’t know what my mom wrote here.” Obviously you can help your child, I expect my students to get help. But there is a fine line between helping and actually doing the project yourself which hinders your child’s learning. From what I heard, that particular boy is still struggling until now and he has fallen very behind. (Ms. Valentina)

**Summary.** All participants mentioned that there was an extent to how parental involvement can motivate or backfire a student academically, socially, or behaviorally. Parents can sometimes be too involved causing them to do their children’s work for them and hindering their ability to learn, while other parents are involved just enough so that their children are encouraged to learn and value education. The literature explains that teachers can help parents and family members how and why it is crucial to monitor children’s homework (Toney, Kelley, & Lanclos 2003). Hoover-Dempsey et. al (2001) also suggest ways in which parents can involve themselves in their children’s homework.

**Theme 4: Teacher education programs**
There was a common response between the participants when responding to integrating parent involvement in teacher education programs. All participants either contributed to ideas for incorporating parental involvement with teacher education programs or showed support to the topic.

Sylvie stated:

Times have changed. Especially for new teachers, coming out of school who have never done this before, it is really really important for them to be trained on how to communicate with parents. Just like there is an orientation process for new teachers, there should be some sort of training on how to be able to communicate with parents, how to deal with certain difficult situations, how to approach things in a way that is very sensitive or um…empathetic, but also honest. (Ms. Sylvie)

Valentina mentioned that as a mom, she can now detect or understand if a parent has any problems or concerns. When she did not have children, it was harder for her to understand what parents are going through.

I took a psychology class during my masters and there was some emphasis on the parent and how to cope with parents who have children with learning disabilities. That course briefly touched upon that psychology which was definitely not enough. Sometimes teachers have to bring up really difficult conversations that are either behavioral or academic and telling a parent that their child is not quite …cutting it is really hard and sensitive. You need to be sensitive but also don’t want to ignore or make it so light-hearted that they are not going to take the severity that there may be a possibility that the child may need to be tested, need extra help, or stay back. It definitely helps that I am a
parent, but most of us aren’t parents by the time we start teaching…. we are young. Not that we are not sensitive, but we just don’t think about certain things. I think that having a course that sort of prepares a teacher for certain scenarios that come up, would be very helpful. College or grad students could then learn what parents are going through so that if a parent acts in a certain way, students will be able to properly respond to the parent without having a problem escalate or not be solved. (Ms. Valentina)

Selena went as far to say that there needs to be a course dedicated solely to parental involvement, especially for young teachers who have not had children of their own yet.

I think taking a course on how to communicate with parents during my undergraduate years or masters would have helped me a lot, especially at the beginning of my teaching career. The course should not only be aimed at strategies on how to involve parents, but it should also touch upon the psychology of how parents think. If I took a course during school, before I had children of my own, I think it would have helped me avoid certain situations with parents back in the day. Have you ever thought about also having a parent education program? Parents can come in after school one day and speak to a panel of teachers or the principal on how they can further help out their child or the school. A workshop or a teacher discussion panel can be held. I think that would be just as important as a teacher education program. Parents can’t just be told that they need to be involved in their child’s education. Just like teachers need training, so do the parents. I think having a panel of teachers to answer parent questions can also avoid any misunderstandings or hesitancies that parents have when communicating with teachers. For example, a parent can ask the teachers I don’t know… um “what do you think is a healthy way of getting involved? Where is the boundary drawn? Or parents can ask
advice from the teachers on how to be involved or even ask teachers what sort of help do they need the most throughout the year. This will also give teachers the opportunity to explain to parents why their involvement in their child’s education matters and why it is crucial to do so. (Ms. Selena)

Carolyn mentioned that courses should be offered as well as teacher training workshops during curriculum development days.

Sometimes the workshops that we are required to attend provide information that may or may not be useful to all of us. For example, we were asked to attend a math workshop, I think either last year or the year before. The math curriculum coordinator of the district addressed strategies that should help us. Since all grades were invited to that workshop, all teachers came from different grade levels, which turned out to be a complete waste of time for me. My students barely knew how to add and subtract and I was being taught different strategies on how to teach division word problems. They should have separated the teachers by grade level or found a common topic to teach us all such as effective strategies on communicating with parents. Curriculum Development Days should be geared towards having all teachers learn from one another and sometimes that does not have to be just academically focused. Topics like parent communication can apply to all of us. (Ms. Selena)

Summary. Finally, participants either wished that they had parental involvement taught in teacher education programs or gave ideas in which parental involvement can be incorporated into teacher education programs. Some teachers mentioned that they had some sort of training, but wish they had more before becoming an educator. Others provided ideas on what teacher education programs can do to further prepare educators on how to communicate with parents,
such as providing scenarios. There was one participant who shared that it would be beneficial for both the parents and the teachers to have a parent education workshop or panel so that parents can ask and clarify expectations.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research study was to examine public school teachers’ experiences with parental involvement. The common experiences shared by these elementary educators offered insights into experiences with parental involvement. All participants shared the importance of technology when interacting with parents, information provided by parents that influence teaching, Motivation levels, and integrating parental involvement teaching into educator programs. All participants reported how useful using technology is as a tool when communicating with parents. Although participants had different views on what kind of information provide by parents influenced their teaching style, they all agreed that when information is provided it affects how they teach. All participants touched upon how parental involvement can influence a child’s motivation levels whether academically, socially, and behaviorally, whether it was being too involved or too little involved. Finally, participants either wished that they had parental involvement taught in teacher education programs or gave ideas in which parental involvement can be incorporated into teacher education programs.

The following chapter will be a discussion of the research findings of the themes and sub-themes. It will explore their relation to the previous research highlighted in the literature review of this study. Also, implications for further research and for practice in the field of education concerning teachers and parental involvement will also be discussed. The chapter will end with a conclusion and personal reflection.
Chapter Five: Discussion of the Research Findings

This chapter summarizes this study and discusses its findings. It includes understandings about the participants that illustrate the conclusions and findings, implications of this study, suggestions for future research to explore new ideas and questions prompted by this study, suggestions for future practice, and the researcher’s personal reflections on this study. These participant’s experiences and narratives on parental involvement provided much needed insight into the educational field. This research project addressed public school teacher’s experiences with parental involvement. The goals for this study was to gain a further understanding of teacher’s experiences on how and when they communicate with parents. The researcher used the lens presented by Epstein (2009), Six Types of Parental Involvement to explore teacher’s experiences with this phenomenon. The researcher used a qualitative narrative approach to this study, which allowed her to focus deeply on teachers’ experiences with parental involvement. The narrative approach allowed the researcher to collect stories from teachers about their lived experiences and then analyze them to construct themes in order to further understand the impact of parental involvement, strategies on how to implement parental involvement, and effects of parental involvement.

Research Question

The following research question was explored:

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers have utilized different ways to involve parents in their children’s education. The following research question was explored in order to uncover the lived experiences of the participants.

Research Question:
What are public elementary school teachers’ experiences with parental involvement?

This narrative study explored the stories of female educators and their experiences with parental involvement. To examine this study, a qualitative narrative study was selected as the methodology because it allowed the researcher to analyze and interpret the data retrieved from interviews with participants. In a narrative study, the researcher initiates and facilitates the participant’s story-telling through the use of open-ended questions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin state that because time and experience are critical in a narrative, stories are told by allowing time and experience to work into their analysis. All participants were female educators. The five participants were selected through email and data was collected through semi-structured interviews that allowed teacher participants to respond to open-ended questions. The literature and the interviews not only shared strategies to incorporate parental involvement with a child’s education, but also provided reasons as to why some strategies are more effective than others. This narrative, qualitative approach was able to dig deeper into parental involvement in public elementary school education and it also gave audiences a new insight into parental involvement. In order to further understand the narratives, this study used Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement for its framework.

In this study, the participants each had something valuable to contribute to the analysis. While their perspectives and experiences may have varied from one to another, they were still valuable. Therefore, it was imperative to hear the participant’s entire stories, opinions, and ideas.

Theoretical Framework

To examine this study, Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement (2009) was selected. The theoretical framework, Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement (2009) supported the
analysis of this study providing a view point of participants’ experiences and perspectives. Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement includes:

1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at Home
5. Decision Making
6. Collaborating with the Community

Collaboratively, the participants touched upon all six types of parental involvement.

**Restatement of the Analysis**

The five participants shared details of their experiences in their personal lives and with parent involvement during the semi-structured interviews. The data that was collected was transcribed verbatim by the research. After the data was transcribed, each individual transcription was analyzed by the researcher for emerging patterns and themes. Analysis of the transcriptions and the researcher's analytical notes led to the researcher's final analytical decision of the four themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>The use of technology with communicating with families</td>
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Information

Information provided by parents can help teachers reach out and understand their students further, both academically and behaviorally.

Motivation

The level in which parental involvement can be both effective and ineffective.

Teacher Education Programs

The importance of educating and providing teachers on strategies to communicate with parents.

<table>
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<th>Discussion in Relation to Previous Research</th>
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<td>This section will discuss how the themes found in this study relate to prior research written in this study's literature review. This research study fills gaps in existing literature as there has been limited prior research conducted concerning the incorporation of parental involvement in teacher training and the incorporation of technology with parental involvement.</td>
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<th>Technology</th>
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<td>All participants expressed that one of the most effective ways to communicate with and involve parents is through technology. However, each participant had a different preference on what kind of technology to use. Ms. Selena preferred email, while Ms. Carolyne and Ms. Sylvie preferred texting through the “remind” application. Ms. Carolyne stated:</td>
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My children…. Let me clarify, the children of my own, my two sons, are involved in after school sports at the high school. The high schoolers get out earlier than the time we dismiss our children so by the time they are finished with their extra curriculum activities, I need to leave immediately from school to pick them up. Because I have limited time to speak to parents after school, I do my best to communicate with them after school hours using the app or email. I find most parents to be very appreciative of the quick app reminders. I still have parents who prefer to speak on phone or in person, but that usually happens when there are problems that need to be dealt with. (Ms. Carolyne)

Ms. Sandra spoke about how times have changed and technology is no longer a thing that teachers use to fill their time.

Technology is no longer a thing that we use to fill our time in the classroom. It is used daily in the classrooms in order to enhance learning. I think it is important for the kids to see that the use of technology in academics can be continued at home. When we go to library, we teach children how to safely browse the web on their research project topics. I encourage parents to have their children continue their research on their topics at home so that parents can see what their child is doing at library, and it also helps the child understand that they can use technology at home that does not just include playing games on their IPads. (Ms. Sandra)

Ms. Selena has the texting application to communicate with parents, but she prefers to communicate via email.

I like the reminder app, but let’s face it, I don’t think I am as tech-savy as some of the other teachers here. I have been sending emails for years, and it still serves me well. I do
plan on using the “reminder” app more so this year. I have complained to teachers that some parents use emails as a way to create a conversation with me, which takes up a lot of my time…. For example, I once sent out an email reminding parents that field trip permission slips were due soon. One parent turned that email reminder into a way to voice out her concerns of another student who was not getting along with her son and how that may impact her son on the field trip. After I shared that with some of the teachers they all told me the same thing, “if you had sent that message through the “reminder” app, that would not have happened.” I know I need to really get on that. (Ms. Selena)

Another technological method that was used aside from texting, calling, and emailing was the use of a social media based application called “Seesaw.” As mentioned in chapter 4, Ms. Sandra prefers using the Seesaw application because it serves as a protected and private twitter account. Ms. Sandra stated:

I have noticed parents becoming more and more involved after seeing pictures or videos of their child on the Seesaw application. I think pictures and videos help motivate people to become more involved because they see their kid doing something at school that they may not have seen them do at home so they get very excited and encouraged to apply what was learned at school, at home so they can witness it themselves. It’s really intriguing to not only see the kids react when their pictures or videos are uploaded, but also seeing the families’ reactions. (Ms. Sandra)

Another application that teachers mentioned using is called “Dojo,” which allows teachers to give parents a daily update on how their child is doing in the classroom. Like the
“Remind” application allows both teachers and parents to send and receive texts to one another. 

Ms. Sylvie says:

I think the Class Dojo app is pretty neat. I consider it my online classroom in which I can decorate and set up the way I would like. I let students help me decorate their Dojo classroom, which sparks more of an interest when I pull it up on the Smart Board. I use it because it encourages students to be kind, work hard and help others. It also gives my students a voice by allowing them to showcase and share their learning with videos and pictures. Parents can easily access this app and see the videos and pictures shared by not only their child’s but also the entire class. The best part about the app is that teachers can message me privately, without exchanging my number! This app makes learning fun and it also builds a bridge between school and home. I’ve had kids tell me that they showed their cousins or friends who came over to their home a tour of their virtual classroom. It’s really cool to see them share what we made in the classroom outside with their friends and families. (Ms. Sylvie)

The use of technology can best be tied to Epstein’s second type of parental involvement, which is communication. Epstein (1985) focuses on overlapping spheres when schools and families communicate and engage between the home, school, and community that increases family involvement. The model emphasizes the cooperation Technology provides plenty of communication opportunities that are “not limited by school hours or location” (Brewer & Kallick, 1996, p. 181). As noted in this study’s literature review, Halsey (2005) suggested that technology can be used to address concerns for both individual and school interactions. This allows both parents and schools to communicate anytime and anywhere through web-based programs, such as emails and apps. The participants not only shared how they push the use of
technology in their classroom, but they also shared how they are constantly sharing and updating other teachers towards the use of technology.

Information

All five participants shared that any type of information from parents about the students can influence their teaching. Some participants shared that information on shits of behavior help them to further reach out to students while others shared that information on academics helps them to further reach out to teaching the children. Ms. Sandra, Ms. Selena, and Ms. Valentina all spoke how knowing information on students and their behavior can influence their teaching. Ms. Sandra shared that

More importantly, I believe when parents share information about what is going on at home that may revolve around behavior, it helps a lot with my teaching and how I handle certain situations. Most times parents are not open if something major or life altering is going on at home, which I understand, but they are not seeing the benefits of informing me. When parents share life altering situations that their children are going through, it changes how I interact with the student or what my expectations for that time period may be. It doesn’t mean that I will let the child do whatever he or she wants if things aren’t so great at home, but it helps me just understand a fraction of what they are going through so that I can be more understanding and patient.

Ms. Sylvie and Ms. Carolyne both touched upon the importance on knowing certain interests of the children and how that can influence their teaching. My Sylvie stated:

The more I know about a child’s interest, the more I can steer my lessons towards their interests. For example, Michael was struggling with his math word problems. He was
having a difficult time combining words and numbers. I would tutor him after school and always try to include race cars and dogs into the word problems to make learning more fun and practical for him. I’m not sure if it was the race cars or dogs that allowed him to finally understand word problems, but it definitely helped to keep him interested and sparked his attention.

Communication and sharing of information between parents and teachers are fundamental in creating strong partnerships. Participants expressed that when parents open up and share information about their children, they see that as an opportunity to strengthen their teaching. Expressed communication involves one-way or two-way exchanges (Berger, 1991). Typically when parents and teachers give and take information, it is a two-way communication. Two-way communication consists of an active dialogue between the teachers and parents. All participants have noted that for the most part two-way communication has been for influential towards their teaching. Ms. Sylvie noted that:

When parents open up to me, it helps me to better do my job and serve them. I make it a point to let parents know how appreciative I am of their openness and feedback because I know how hard or scary it can be, especially if it is something personal like if there is a divorce in the family. I once had a parent who was from India. I knew something was up because their child would come to school fine one day, and the next would get manfry over the smallest thing. I addressed the child’s behavior to the mom several times, but her excuses were not adding up. Eventually she told me that her and her husband were going through a divorce and it was not something that was socially accepted in the Indian culture. She kept quite for the longest time because she told me that it was something frowned upon in her culture and she was embarrassed to share that type of information
with me. Because she had the courage to share that information with me, I was able to understand and accommodate her son’s behavior. (Ms. Sylvie)

**Motivation**

All five participants emphasized that parental involvement helps their students academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. The majority of the participants did touch upon the word “motivation” in both a positive and negative light. Going back to previous research, student motivation has been studied using different models. Fran (2012) focused on two prominent views: perceived self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Self-efficacy refers to a student’s personal judgments of their ability to learn and perform. Fran associates self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation together. According to research, self-efficacy contributes to academic behaviors such as, persistence, effort, and academic achievement (Fran 2012). Children are always in constant contact with their parents, which is why parent involvement with their children is key to the children’s beliefs about themselves. Even if parents are not able to assist their children with a particular subject area or topic, they can still play a crucial role by encouraging feelings and positive attitudes towards academics. “[W]hen parents believe in children’s competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children’s initiations and problem-solving, children’s motivation is most likely to thrive,” (p. 295, Grolnick, 2009). Ms. Valentina supports Grolnick’s claim as she said:

I don’t care if the child’s parent isn’t educated or doesn’t have the resources to help their child academically. Children learn by example. I have two children of my own and I make it a point to just have a quiet 15 minute reading period where we just drop what we are doing and pick up anything to read for 15 minutes, whether it is a book, newspaper,
magazine, whatever! I know us reading together models that reading is important and encouraging. Just showing children that you are present and part of their education journey is enough to motivate and promote a positive image that education is important and necessary. I truly believe that. (Ms. Valentina)

Ms. Sylvie also supported Gronlick’s claim as well mentioning that parents who are involved in classroom activities motivate their child.

Just having the parents present during classroom volunteer activities really motivates the child. I have seen such shifts in behavior and attitude from the kids when their parents come in to read to the class or to help out. (Ms. Sylvie)

All participants hit upon the topic of student success and specifically in motivation. Ms. Valentina specifically focused on what particularly motivates children to progress quicker.

I know the majority of my parents apply what is taught in school at home. I love when my students come to me and tell me that their parents took them to the library after a non-fiction or history lesson. One student came up to me last week actually at summer school and said “mom took me to the library yesterday after school and I read so many books on alligators. I loved the ones with all the pictures!” By the end of the week, she was ready and excited to present her project on alligators. It was inspiring and also exciting to see that eagerness to not only learn but also that confidence to present her work in front of the class. I think when parents reinforce what their kids learn at school at home, it also reassures the children that they are taking a step in the right direction. Like what child doesn’t trust their parent? If their parent is encouraging them build off of what they learn at school, then the child is going to trust that what they are learning is good for them.

(Ms. Valentina)
Ms. Selena along with other participants shared how parental involvement can affect a child’s motivation in a negative way. She shared a story about a student who had a mother that was overly involved with her child’s education.

I had a student who had great potential, but he was just so lazy! He would do nothing in class and yet he would always come into school the next day with his homework completed…just not in his handwriting. His mom would constantly do his homework for him and he would come into class not knowing what was going on and fail all his tests. In situations like this, parents are destroying their children’s motivation levels causing them to be so lazy and ultimately causing them not to succeed. His laziness and dependency on his mom to do his work caused him to eventually stay back a year and last time I checked he is still struggling. (Ms. Selena)

Ms. Carolyne brought up a very interesting point on the consequences of overly involved parents.

I once had a parent that was so involved that her child did not take what I was teaching him seriously. When I would speak to her, I felt that she thought I wasn’t capable to be her son’s teacher and it was as almost as if she was teaching me how to teach. I am all for advice, but not the way she was approaching it. Throughout the year, I would have a parent come in every other week to do a short reading lesson with the children. The lesson consisted of the parent would come in and read a story to the student and then get into a circle facilitate a discussion based on the book with the children. For the most part I would like it when the parents came in. That parent that I mentioned earlier would overstay her welcome. Once the reading lesson was over, she would stick around and even find ways to correct me while I taught another lesson! It was unreal and eventually I
had to approach her about what she was doing. Her over-involvement was not only annoying and inappropriate, but it was also a distraction to the children. The children did not know who to listen to and it just felt like she was running the classroom. (Ms. Carolyne)

Teachers also touched upon how parental involvement affects students both intrinsically and extrinsically. They did not use the terms intrinsic and extrinsic directly, but the concept was implied. Participants stated that students who start out as extrinsically motivated may tend to shift and become intrinsically motivated due to expectations from both families and the school. Several participants mentioned that students may study because they want that good grade or they want that reward that will be given to them at home, but once they get into a routine and are provided with encouragement from both the school and families, they will want to do better from withing.

Research has shown a strong link between parent involvement and children’s motivation in education. (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994). All participants shared that even though parents may be unable to assist their children academically, whether it has to do with resources or language barriers, parents can still play a vital role by encouraging students and promoting a positive attitude towards education. Research also shows that there is a certain amount of involvement that can lead to a parent being overly-involved.

Teacher Education Programs

All participants were quick to agree that both educators and future educators must have some sort of training on the best way to communicate with parents as well as how to involve them. Some mentioned that undergraduate and graduate students should be required to complete
a parent involvement/communication course prior to graduating. Others shared that it would be very beneficial to have professional development workshops once or twice a year.

Ms. Selena had a lot to say about incorporating parent communication/involvement workshops during professional development days.

I sometimes question why our district has us attend some of the professional development sessions. A lot of them don’t have anything to do with the population or subjects we teach! I understand that they want some of the sessions to include all the grades together. Since they are going to group us together anyways, we should cover topics that pertain to all of us, like how to communicate with parents…and avoid unnecessary conflicts. (Ms. Selena)

Ms. Sandra emphasized the importance of educating future teachers on parental involvement and parent teacher communication. She believes that before students graduate from their undergraduate or graduate programs and become teachers, they should take a course on parental involvement. That is how strongly she believes in the importance of parental involvement.

I absolutely think there should be some sort of course geared for either undergraduates or graduates on how to deal with parents. I wish I had that sort of training before becoming a teacher. It wasn’t until I became a mom myself that I really understood what it means to be a parent. Let’s face it, most beginner teachers are not parents since they are so young. It would be nice to not only train future teachers on how to communicate with parents, but also help them to understand how parents think and why they think the way they do so that when they become teachers they won’t take what is said offensively. I know that happened a lot to me in the beginning. I don’t think teacher educator programs should
just be geared for undergraduates or graduates. I think there should be some sort of training and an orientation aimed specifically for new teachers at this school. I believe that once a teacher is hired, before stepping foot into their classroom, they should go through that orientation. I think learning how to communicate, interact, and understand the parents will take them very far in their teaching career. It’s really important to understand where parents are coming from and to try to place yourself in their shoes. Young teachers beginning their careers may not be able to do so, even if they are totally convinced that they have the ability to do so. My biggest advice for new teachers, especially young ones would be to really humble themselves and be open to the idea that they may need more training on how to interact and involve parents. (Ms. Sandra)

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandlers (1995, 1997) teachers who have not be educated or prepared to interact with parents or implement parental involvement, may not know how to invite or maintain involvement efforts. When parents feel like their involvement is not encouraged, or perceive this as intentional exclusion, it may lower the likelihood of effective parental involvement. Most participants did express that they wished they would have had some sort of training or course prior to becoming a teacher, which would have avoided some negative experiences at the beginning of their career.

Limitations

This study is limited because it was conducted at one elementary school in the same school district. All participants were white females so attempts to maximize diversity did not transpire. Studies conducted in larger districts in other geographic areas may not yield the same results. The study was limited to only five participants from diverse positions within one elementary school. A broader range of participants may have yielded in different results.
**Recommendation for Further Research**

This research study builds upon existing literature on parental involvement and strategies used to implement parental involvement. It fills a gap in literature as it focuses on the use of technology to build bridges and connections with parents. Still, further research needs to be conducted.

In this study, all participants were females from the same school district. Further research could expand this study across a larger group and explore the experiences of both male and female teachers who don’t come from just one school district. Including men in future research on the topic of parental involvement, may contribute to a broader perspective and would be interesting to compare and contrast men’s experiences and women’s experiences. It would also be valuable to explore parental involvement in different socioeconomic settings. It would be beneficial to see the difference socioeconomic status makes when it comes to teachers and their experiences with parental involvement. Participants in this study were white middle class women. Future research can focus on the experiences of educators who are racial or ethnic minorities. Including educators from different ethnic backgrounds, may bring distinction and shed light on different variations of parental involvement.

Aside from what teachers to interview, whether female or male, or from different school districts, this research provides the foundation for a further study examining how different parent involvement practices actually impact student achievement. Such a study would explore the effects of parent involvement on not only behavior, but also on student grades and test scores. This would further help teachers to identify and encourage practices of involvement that lead to specific needed results for each of their students.
It would also be interesting to conduct further research outside of a public school setting, such as at a private school or charter school and compare parental involvement between the schools and share ideas between each other in a collaborative effort to improve parental involvement.

This study has opened the door for future research to take place on the topic of parent involvement and provide new insight and understanding into the experiences of teachers and parental involvement. This study adds to the existing literature by restating that relationships between parents and teachers, and the knowledge gained from these interactions, can be significantly effective to teachers, parents and students. Therefore, conducting research that includes men, including various socioeconomic status and races, may provide different outcomes and new understandings.

Implications for Personal Practice and Across the Field

This section will identify those who would be affected and can use the information gained by this research study to enhance their teaching and communicative skills with students’ parents. Children, parents, teachers, districts and teacher education programs can directly or indirectly use this research to further understand and encourage parental involvement in public elementary schools.

Students:

According to existing research (Flynn, 2007), parental involvement is significantly imperative to the educational achievement of children. Children who have parents who are involved tend to have more positive attitudes toward school, higher achievement, specifically in reading; higher quality, more level-appropriate work; efficiency in completion of homework; and
even a closer relationship between family and school in general (Epstein, 1991). According to the participants of this study, having parents who are involved will help students progress both academically and behaviorally.

**Parents**

After examining the teacher’s experiences, parents may come to realize the important roles they play in their children’s education. Parents can learn different strategies on how to get involved and bring these ideas that were mentioned in this study into their children’s schools. Hopefully the results of this study will also become a source of encouragement for parents to build stronger relationships with their children’s teachers and vice versa.

**Teachers and School Districts**

Teachers may also be able to grow from learning and applying the experiences of the other teachers onto their own practice. Wherry (2009) touches on the benefits of parental involvement both in the school and in the community. Some of these benefits include improved teacher morale, higher ratings or teachers by parents, more school support from families, and better reputations for the school in the community. Both participants in this study and research have reported that involved parents show improvement in school attendance, higher educational aspirations, and reductions in retention, suspension, and behavior problems (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; U.S Department of Education, 1997).

Not only will the results of this study be beneficial for parents and teachers, but perhaps for the school districts. Within school districts, stronger understanding of parental involvement may be of great value. If administrators are more aware of the importance of the involvement of parents, they may be more willing to help teachers and schools bridge that gap. As Hatch and
Honig (2003) advocate, schools wishing to be progressive on matters of pedagogy must establish and revisit their mission statements and create structures that support professional development.

**Teacher Education Programs**

Although the No Child Left Behind Act has encouraged parents to be involved in their children’s education, it is ultimately the school’s responsibility to provide and support parents with meaningful chances to become further involved (Smith et al., 2011). The topic of this study could also interest those at the university level who are teaching or studying in the field of education. It would certainly be of relevance to those who are training future educators, specifically primary educators, to ensure that these future teachers receive comprehensive pre-service training on the parental involvement concept.

**Connecting the Research to practice**

Sharing the findings of this study could be accomplished through several ways which include:

- Designing a course for students in the field of education on the importance of parental involvement in education. This can be designed for both undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation program.

- Holding parental involvement workshops at professional development sessions throughout the year and throughout the school district, which can meet the diverse needs of all elementary educators.

- Presenting at teacher or university conferences in order to bring awareness to parental involvement to teacher and education undergraduates or graduates.
• Holding a seminar or meeting for both parents and teachers before the school year starts so that teachers and parents know what to expect going into the school year.

**Personal Reflection**

My interest on parental involvement in education has grown to be such a monumental component of my practice. Parent involvement has always had a strong presence while being both a teacher and a director. No matter what subject was taught, parental involvement seemed to be one of the core factors that lead to student success. The more I taught, the more I observed that students who had parents who cared about their education, were more likely to progress than students who did not. This research has a significant impact on my life. As director of an elementary program, music teacher, and language teacher, I hope to use curriculum that encourages parents to be involved in their children’s education and to encourage my teachers and staff to continue to involve parents in their classrooms.

The themes that surfaced from the interviews demonstrated that there is a still a lot more research that needs to be done in order to further understand parental involvement. Lack of support from parents can lead to students falling behind and not progressing as much as their peers. Participants explained that if students do not feel supported and encouraged by their parents, they will be more likely to not be as motivated to progress both academically or behaviorally. After the analysis of the data and review of the literature, I truly believe that courses and workshops should be provided on how to further implement parental involvement and strategies on how to communicate with parents. Parental involvement in education can be a prominent tool in achieving student success. This study could have profound influences on the lives of teachers, parents, and students. I would like to further continue asking the questions that lead to my findings after hearing the experiences of the educators in this study. Moving forward,
I will keep these educators experiences in mind and continue to ask other educators about the impact of parental involvement in their field.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to investigate and explore experiences that public elementary teachers have had with parental involvement. The four themes that surfaced from the interviews, demonstrated that there is still a gap in parental involvement and education. Further research needs to be done so that findings can help fill that gap. This study provides another lens into parental involvement and fills several gaps in existing literature. While there are limitations to this study that must be addressed through additional research, this study does build upon existing literature on parental involvement. Further research will need to be done in order to more deeply explore teacher experiences in parental involvement.
References


National Center for Education Statistics: Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities


