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**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A STUDY OF PARENTS' AND
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS IN AN
URBAN CHARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

by
Jacqueline Bingham Flemmings

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
April 5, 2013

Dissertation Chair: Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.

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Jacqueline Bingham Flemmings

Dedication

When I asked my ancestors for spiritual guidance through prayer, they gave me permission to go forth. This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors:

Mdalela – Born 1703 Eastern part of Africa (before it became South Africa)
Bingham (given name when captured and taken to America in 1719)
Sold into slavery and given the name John (Family Patriarch)

Steven Bingham-Born in Slavery in America - Great-Great-Great-Great Grand Father

Gabriel Bingham-Born in Slavery 1776 - Great-Great-Great-Great Grand Father

Samuel Joshua Bingham – Born in Slavery 1801- Great-Great-Great Grand Father

Dennis Bingham – Born in Slavery - Great-Great-Grand Father

Nicie Bingham –Born in Slavery - Great Grand Mother

Willie Bingham – Born Free - Grand Father

Charlie Bingham (my father) Born 1912 Joyce Barham (my mother) Born 1920

Jacqueline Bingham (me) Born 1952 Loreno Flemmings (my husband) Born 1954

Larena (daughter) Born 1980 Samuel (son) Born 1984 Charlotte (daughter) Born 1987

Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation is never without challenges, I owe many thanks to so many. Dr. Gini Doolittle, my dissertation committee Chairperson, you are truly a natural treasure and I am the blessed recipient of your teachings, expertise and continuous guidance. Thank you for believing in me and sharing your scholarly knowledge with the world, but especially with me. Without your constant encouragement this dissertation would not have happened.

I want to extend my gratitude to Dr. Wesley Pugh, Professor of Education at Cheyney University, 2011 Lindback Distinguish Teaching Award Recipient and committee member. I salute you and appreciate your scholarship, encouragement, and insightful questions. You are a gifted leader, but, more importantly, a wonderful human being. Many thanks go to Dr. Sheree N. Alexander, my committee member, who has inspired me and led by example. I am grateful for your invested time and expertise in this topic. Thank you for your willingness to be a part of my committee and your enthusiastic support.

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My lovely family continues to be a source of strength and inspiration. Special love and appreciation to my three beautiful children: Larena, Samuel, and Charlotte. Thanks for all your love, encouragement, prayers, and the joyous parenting journey. You all made it so easy for me to be your mother and I hope you are as proud of me as I am of you. Lastly, to my husband and pastor, Reverend Dr. Lorenzo R. Flemmings, thank you for your spiritual leadership, patience during this scholarly pursuit, and over thirty-five years of love, friendship and support for you; my love has no end.

I have reached this pinnacle in my life thanks to God. To God be the glory!

Abstract

Jacqueline Bingham Flemmings
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A STUDY OF PARENTS' AND
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS IN AN
URBAN CHARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
2012/2013

Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Parental involvement in children's education remains low, despite evidence that families have a huge influence on children's achievement. Major researchers in the field (Allen, 2009; Comer, 1988; Epstein, 1985; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Mapp, 1997) have identified many factors that may create barriers to family involvement. These factors include cultural, racial, and economic differences between the staff and families, parents' apprehension when confronting experts, work schedules, inadequate childcare, lack of transportation, and lastly, lack of effective communication.

Fullan (1993) claims teacher education is not only the problem but also the solution. Through interviews and conversations this study examines the experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers school-home relationship and explore how they could move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Implementation of these suggestions may improve the relationships between parents and teachers, while creating the capacity for parents to be deeply engaged in their children's learning and invested in the school.

Using Joyce Epstein's Conceptual framework for parent involvement as a conceptual framework for analysis, the experience and perspectives of parents and

teachers indicate communication and teacher training program are needed to move parents from parent involvement to parent engagement.

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Chapter I

Introduction

One of the most important areas of research and concern for educators and policy makers has been parental involvement. Henderson and Mapp (2002) highlight the importance of parental involvement and synthesize what the research concludes:

The evidence is consistent, positive and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 7)

Parental involvement in their children's education remains low, despite this evidence. Major researchers in the field (Allen, 2009; Comer, 1988; Epstein, 1985; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Mapp, 1997) have identified many factors that may create barriers to family involvement. These factors include cultural, racial, and economic differences between the staff and families, parents' apprehension when confronting experts, work schedules, inadequate childcare, lack of transportation, and lastly, lack of effective communication.

The importance of parental involvement in a child's education has been central in federal legislation. Parental involvement was a requirement of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 1965, however, with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, 2001 (the reauthorization of the ESEA), parental involvement has a statutory definition. NCLB defines parental involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2004a, p. 3). Cotton and Wikelund (1989) broadly define parental involvement as attending

school functions, responding to school obligations, providing encouragement, arranging study space and time, modeling desired behavior (reading, etc.), monitoring homework, actively tutoring their children, advocating for their school, volunteering in activities and the classroom, and taking an active role in the governance of the school. As described by Cotton and Wikelund (1989), the term “parent involvement” includes several different forms of participation in the school and in the home. Parents participate in attending school functions, parent teacher conferences, helping with homework, providing encouragement and modeling desired behavior.

Parental Engagement

Many educators and parents equate parental involvement with parental engagement. Often times the activities may seem similar. Parental involvement includes parent participation in school activities, student learning, and parent meetings. Parental engagement suggests partnership, collaboration, or a meaningful linking of shared purposes between parents and educators. Ferlazzo (2011) suggests:

To create the kinds of school-family partnerships that raise student achievement, improve local communities, and increase public support, we need to understand the difference between family involvement and family engagement. One of the dictionary definitions of involve is to “to enfold or envelope” whereas one of the meanings of engage is “to come together and interlock.” Thus, involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implies doing with. (p. 10)

Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis (2002)

describes engagement as parents working with schools to enhance and improve the development of their children. Engagement implies shared responsibility that links community agencies, organizations, and schools in a commitment to

reach out to include parents in meaningful ways to actively support their children's learning and development.

A lack of parental involvement and engagement, however, is among the problems facing public schools today (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) state, “educators and parents have many beliefs, attitudes, and fears about each other that hinder their coming together to promote children’s education” (p. 27). While teachers play a major role in the degree to which parents are involved in schools, research shows that teacher outreach and how they invite parents to the school make a difference in the parents’ engagement (Henderson et al., 2007). The growth of partnerships between parents and teachers depends on how well teachers understand the families with whom they work (Henderson et al., 2007).

Context of the Study

Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School (a pseudonym) is an urban school located in a major metropolitan city in the North East. The school draws on African pedagogical methodologies to assist students in developing and reaching their fullest potential. Shockley and Cleveland (2011) argue “the Afro centric approach in education involves working with Black students to master the academic disciplines from a perspective that grounds them in an African reality” (p. 55). The school uses the African Centered Values System to inspire scholars and staff emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually to be the best they can be and to make a contribution to their families, community, and to the world. Ladson-Billings (2001) claims “cultural relevant pedagogy” is developed with the intent to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically” (p. 4).

The school's "espoused theory" (Argyris & Schön, 1974) is to be a cooperative school family where intergenerational learning will take place in the school, home, and community. Scholars are encouraged to take leadership responsibility and parents are encouraged to be positive role models for their children. The "theory in use" (Argyris & Schön, 1974), however, is a lack of parent involvement and low attendance at parent and teacher meetings. The school is very much concerned with this phenomenon of low parental involvement, and this study seeks to identify barriers that prevent stronger parent teacher partnerships by engaging in a social process (Fullan, 2001) to learn how to support and promote parental engagement for student learning.

Setting

Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School is a year-round urban school in a large metropolitan city. Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School has aspirations of a strong commitment and partnership with parents and teachers, as outlined in the school statement regarding parental involvement. The faculty, staff, and parents of Louise Dos Santos Elementary School believe that it "takes a village" to prepare children to become lifelong learners and contributing members of a changing society. The school encourages education for the entire family and works to support the adults in continuing to provide what children and communities need to be successful. This is done by creating situations where families not only feel welcomed to participate, but are provided numerous opportunities for involvement in the educational, social action, and parent council of the school. Just as Louise Dos Santos values the expertise of its teachers as school based educators, parents, and other family members are valued as home based educators. The school is located in the heart of a thriving business and residential community. The

average school population is 600 students from Pre-K to grade 11, with a 12th grade being added this year. The student composition is 90% African American with the remaining 10% White and Hispanic. The majority of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and the free and reduced lunch percentage is 91.8% (National Center for Educational Statistics). Scholars are reared by grandparents, surrogate parents, foster parents, single and two parent families. The school is organized into two buildings, grades Pre-K to 1 and grades 6 to 11 are in one building, and grades 2 through 5 are in another building.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers' and parents' in an urban charter elementary school in order to align its espoused theory to its theory in use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The study was designed to examine the experiences and perceptions of teachers' and parents' school-home relationship and explore how they could move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Qualitative data were gathered in the research through semi-structured interviews, which included purposeful sampling of five teachers and five parents. Additional data include document review, observations, notes, and a personal leadership journal, which was analyzed in order to critique the researcher's growth and change as a leader.

The importance of parental involvement and engagement in supporting student learning is not only a concern of Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School it is a national concern. In an interview with Anna Hinton, the director of the Office of Parental Options and Information (POI), researcher Karen Mapp suggests that educators "explore

issues of both policy and practice – ones that inform and improve not only POI work, but also the broader policy framework of parental and family engagement as it applies to Title I and other nationwide federal school improvement efforts” (USDOE, 2011, p. 1). This study will inform educators, parents, and policymakers involved in the creation of policies, and address the need for practitioners to collectively develop, implement, and evaluate policies for student learning.

Research Questions

My research questions framed the study by focusing on the areas of context, change, and leadership. The questions that specifically guided this study were:

1. What are the parental involvement experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School (pseudonym)?
2. How do parents and teachers move from parent involvement to parent engagement?
3. How can my leadership support parental engagement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School?

Need for the Study

There is a significant body of research on parental involvement (USDOE, 2004b). Researchers (Epstein, 1985; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) have championed the importance of parental involvement and its impact on student successes; however, the lack of parental involvement has educators’ baffled (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). There is a scarcity of literature about the experiences and perceptions of parent and teacher engagement and the transition from parental involvement to parental engagement. Mapp states,

Family engagement has evolved from a limited focus on a parent's role as a supporter of their child's learning at home...to a broader definition that recognizes the multiple ways that parents are engaged – at home, at school and in the community-and not only in their own child's education, but in the efforts to improve the quality of education for all children. (USDOE, 2011, p. 1)

Information on how to implement a parental involvement program is largely missing from the literature, thus leaving teachers and parents ill equipped to move from parental involvement to parental engagement. More work is needed to bridge the gap between school and home to develop reciprocal partnerships, which support parents and teachers in collaboration, not in isolation. To help close the gap, more knowledge and understanding is needed.

This study examined the need for the district to create standards for parental engagement, and to implement the parental involvement as outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. NCLB mandates the development of parent involvement policies, specifically,

In support of strengthening student achievement, each district and school that receives Title I, Part A funding or services must develop jointly with, and distribute to, parents of participating children, written parental involvement policies that contain information required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). (NCLB, 2004, p. 2)

Despite federal mandate and Title I funding linked to compliance as regards parent involvement in schools, little research has examined how educators address the experiences and perceptions of parental engagement and its effect on student learning. Researchers call for family engagement that is systemic, that is, “when it is an integrated and sustained part of a strategy to improve student learning and school and district performance” (USDOE, 2011, p. 1). The outcome of this study will begin to fill gaps for scholars to investigate and address the issue of how to move from parental involvement to parental engagement.

Overview of Methodology

In this research study I investigated the experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School. The data sets included individual in-depth interviews, observation of parent/teacher meetings, document analysis of publicly available records, and personal reflections from my leadership journal.

I encouraged parents and teachers to participate in the qualitative phenomenological study. Using purposeful sampling, I identified and invited five parents who have children enrolled in the school, and five teachers who teach at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School. Purposefully selecting participants allows the researcher to understand the research problem and research questions (Creswell, 2009). All 10 participants were asked to complete an informed consent form, and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at anytime (Appendix A). All research instruments and procedures were included in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Rowan University, and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the administration of Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School.

I analyzed the data using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to identify key themes regarding participants' experiences and perceptions of parental involvement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School. I recorded and took notes of interviews, conversations, and discussions about parental involvement of the parents and teachers. I constantly compared data using the specific procedures in phenomenological research for emergent themes in the study related to the main research

questions regarding parental involvement (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological research study provides a resource for educators and policy makers to review and understand what process is needed to implement the move from parental involvement to parental engagement. This research provided a snapshot of a how to improve home and school communication for increased student learning. Several constituencies may benefit from this study, such as school administrators and staff, parents, charter, private, and public schools, and summer programs. Parents may benefit from this study by examining best practices in school and the relationship that exists in their current child's school. Parents may also be made aware of the important and essential role they play in the educational learning and their individual child's growth and development. Parents may acquire tools that help them navigate through the educational system by establishing a workable rapport and respect with teachers. School administrators and staff may benefit from developing an effective parent teacher board that works in collaboration with the entire school for improved student learning.

By exploring parents' and teachers' experiences and perceptions in an urban charter elementary school, this dissertation looks closely at the elements involved in developing an effective home-school partnership and contributes to the existing body of research that suggests the importance of fostering parents' skills and the capacity to connect to home and school. The outcome of my research adds to the body of research on parental involvement, begins to fill the gap for scholars in better understanding factors

that create barriers to parental engagement, and provides recommendations as to what might be done to ameliorate communication between home and school.

In addition, this study provides a resource for parental involvement programs at schools to develop and review parenting programs by disseminating and implementing effective strategies to move program focus from parental involvement to parental engagement that will positively impact student learning. Mapp suggests that “we now know from the research that engaging families and community partners is an essential ingredient to the improvement of schools” (USDOE, 2011, p. 1). The increased awareness regarding the importance of family engagement has an impact on school improvement, student improvement, and school reform.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Research indicates there is a growing demand for increased parental involvement and engagement in education. Parental involvement and engagement is an essential component to a child's academic growth and development. It continues to be an area where apathy prevails and improvement is needed regarding support and cooperation between schools and families working together in the best interest of the child. Over the past 30 years, research studies have concentrated on parental involvement in education. Henderson (1981, 1987), and Henderson and Berla (1994), analyzed a total of 125 research studies between 1966 and 1993 that explore data concerning the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement and the performance of schools. These studies suggest when parents are involved in their children's education; it makes a huge difference in the accomplishments of students.

Henderson and Berla (1997) also found that the greatest predictor of student success was not income or social status, but was dependent upon the family's ability to provide a home environment that encouraged learning, convey high and realistic expectations for their children, and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

The benefits of parent involvement reach far beyond the school walls. Henderson et al. (2007) found that involved parents were more active in their communities. Other benefits of parental involvement include improved school attendance. Epstein, Clark,

Salinas, and Sanders (1997) found “schools with stronger programs of partnerships have better school attendance, regardless of the area of the city or years in the program” (p. 1). The Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2012) found that students whose parents were involved were less likely to “experience emotional distress, practice unhealthy eating behaviors, consider or attempt suicide, disengage from school or learning initiate smoking and more like to increase positive health behaviors” (p. 7).

This phenomenological research study focuses on parents’ and teachers’ experiences and perceptions in an urban charter elementary school. I include major themes from the literature relative to this study in this chapter. The first section is a historical review of the contribution legislation has made on parental involvement and how it affects teachers and parents. The second section reviews the benefits to parental involvement and the reasons for lack of parental involvement. The third section focuses on the conceptual framework that supports this study, Joyce Epstein’s (2002) six types of parental involvement. Finally, in the last section I discuss the literature on leadership and change as it relates to this phenomenological study.

Importance of Parental Involvement

The relationship between parental involvement in schools and student success is not a new concept. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) found “documenting and analyzing the relationships between parents and teachers is critical to understanding the educational process that is experienced by children” (p. 83). The importance of parental involvement in schools is also accepted among the general population. In 1999, people in the United States “ranked the top three problems facing public schools as lack of parental involvement, drug use, and undisciplined students” (as cited in Epstein, 2004, p. 260).

Given the importance of parental involvement and the vital role it plays in the success of young people, there is a need for teachers and parents to work collectively toward this goal. Many scholars have pointed out the critical importance of developing meaningful partnerships with parents and the school (Ballen & Moles, 1994), but there is limited exploration of the need for training to prepare parents and teachers to work together. Henderson et al. (2007) state, “school leaders must provide the resources, energy, and leadership to implement and sustain partnership programs” (p. 42). As school leaders model the desired behaviors and partnership for parents and teachers, a collaborative relationship forms between the staff and families. This leads to more parents involved in their children’s education.

Henderson et al. (2007) suggest, “the more the relationship between families and the school is a real partnership, the more student achievement increases. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make greater gains” (p. 3). According to Moles (1987),

Parent organizations, school officials, educators and the U. S. Secretary of Education, William Bennett all endorse the concept [of parental involvement]. Each group is saying that schools cannot educate children alone and need the support if not the active collaboration of parents. (p. 137)

The collaboration, partnership, and sharing of ideas to help young people is a great benefit not only for teachers, but parents as well. This joint partnership enables parents and teachers to have positive conversations with the same goal in mind – helping students to be successful. Henderson et al. (2007) maintain partnerships help develop links to learning, build relationship, support advocacy, sustain relationships, and share power.

LaBahn (1995) asserts “the more the parent learns about the way the school functions, the more the parents will understand the educational process and educational decisions” (p. 3). Understanding how the school functions and the key players enables parents to navigate through the system and help their child in the academic hurdles that exist in the educational system. When parents understand and feel more comfortable with the school, the wall of uncertainty comes down and an open dialog can take place (Henderson et al., 2007).

Williams (2008) found parental involvement was apparent in the provision of structure and assistance with homework and extra-curricular activities. Williams suggests that parents strongly believe they are obligated to support their children because they value the principle that families have a great impact on a child’s academic achievement. Perhaps this belief is one of the reasons that students who are supported at home persevere and excel academically. In Williams’ study, when the parent and the school came together with the same goals and expectations, they worked harmoniously to support the male student, sustaining him emotionally, socially, economically, and most importantly, academically. Having the assurance of parental and teacher support, the student became decidedly determined and motivated to achieve.

Changes in Society

The rapid changes in society dictate viewing parental involvement from a different set of lenses. With the evolution of education and all of the societal changes, parental involvement has also evolved. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003),

The major changes in family structure, the rise in the number of women employed outside the home, the rapid increase in the influx of immigrant groups into our cities and schools, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the shifts in the power and preoccupations of teachers’ unions, and the velocity of

technological changes and increased access to cyberspace, to name a few factors, have all had an influence on redefining the roles of and relationships between families and schools. (p. xxiv)

According to Henderson et al. (2007), the issue facing many communities is how to generate the genuine trust between both parties needed to build home-school partnerships. Added to this predicament for teachers, are families that do not share the same mores and traditions as the teacher. Learning to work with other people who do not look like you enriches mankind and helps people to understand they have more in common than they differ.

Historical Context

The historical context of parental involvement in schools can be viewed as essential for progress and growth in America. In order to help working parents, the need for parents and school to work together has not changed over the years. This partnership has mushroomed into a needed supportive relationship regarding families, schools, and communities. Parents continue to welcome the partnership as they did years ago due to more women having to work out of the home. For example, the “infant schools” of the 1820s and 1830s were “established to help working mothers and to teach morality to poor children, accepted toddlers as young as eighteen months old” (Epstein, 2004, p. 257).

Head Start has played a vital role in parental involvement since the first Head Start program began in 1967. The need for greater clarification of the roles and duties of parental involvement became evident and the first formal *Manual of Policies and Instructions* detailing the four areas of parent participation for Head Start was established. These areas are outlined as: parents as decision-makers; parents as paid staff, volunteers and observers; parents involved in activities which they have helped to

develop; and parents working at home with their own children in cooperation with Head Start staff (UMCHS, 2000). These goals continue to define parental involvement for Head Start today.

As early as the 1960s, federal legislation urged parental involvement in schools (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965) was one of the first legislative acts directly bridging parent involvement and schools together, acknowledging the significant contribution such partnerships represent in the lives of students. Despite legislation, however, “decades of efforts by educators, administrators, policymakers, researchers, and politicians to reform urban education have met with disappointing results” (Cucciara & Horvat, 2009, p. 998). Parents continue to need help in educating children, and changes in society call for the combined efforts of teachers, extended family members, and policymakers to assist in the process of educating children. The equitable education of all children continues to be an issue that plagues our nation, even though it has been a top priority for a several years regardless of whether a democrat or republican president was in office.

1983 A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s (1983) report, completed under direction of President Reagan and Secretary of Education, Bill Bennett contributed to the growing controversy that America’s schools were failing. The report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, ignited a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts throughout the country. The report raised concerns that elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education was failing to meet the demanding needs of the nation to

prepare a workforce capable of competing with the rest of the world. This publication is considered by some a historical breakthrough in American education reform.

This report has many serious criticisms, as outlined by Ansary (2007), who states, “The heart of the document is an indictment that lambastes America for letting schools slip into precipitous decline but praises the nation’s good heart, great potential, and mighty past” (p. 1). There appeared to be a war going on, with education in the United States of America under siege and losing. Educators, not politicians, were allowed to fall through the cracks and the future of the country was at risk, because of the dilapidated school system.

A comparison of American schools and universities to other schools was done to assess the quality of teaching and learning (The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s (1983). The report communicated information suggesting that the United States was a country at risk in the educational arena and if something was not done the future was very dim. In addition, society would be grossly affected and Americans would not be able to compete in the global workforce. There was an urgent call for parents to assume more responsibility, which included playing more active roles in their child’s education. However, Ansary (2007) states, “basically, it just called for More!—more science, more math, more art, more humanities, more social studies, more school days, more hours, more homework, more basics, more higher-order thinking, more lower-order thinking, more creativity, more everything” (p. 2).

As reported by Ansary (2007), James Harvey, a member of the commission that helped orchestrate *A Nation at Risk*, shared distress with regard to how the report was seen and the role it had played in school reform. Ansary (2007) states, “James Harvey

says educational decisions have been moved as far as possible from the classroom. Federal officials are now in a position to make decisions that would have been unimaginable even two years ago” (p. 4). Federal officials continue to make decisions that affect educators without inviting them to the table to discuss the issues. This seems to be a repeated pattern in educational reform, where people that work directly with educational issues are not consulted, and decisions are made without their voices being heard.

Standards Movement

1994 Goals 2000 Educate America Act. Heise (1994) shares that *Goals 2000* established a framework to identify academic standards, to measure students’ progress, and to provide the support that students might need to meet the standards. Set in motion by Congress under President Clinton, the goals of the Act were designed for standards-based educational reform. One of the key tenets of Goals 2000 was every school would promote partnerships that would increase parental involvement and promotion of the social, emotional, and academic growth of students. Epstein (1995) states, “the field has been strengthened by supporting federal, state, and local policies. The Goals 2000 legislation sets partnerships as a voluntary national goal for all schools” (p. 1). The voluntary provisions of the legislation was important in order to assure states and local education agencies, that the broad goals would not lead to federal government takeover of state and local boards of education.

The Goals 2000 were instrumental in keeping a focus on the educational dilemma in the United States. The momentum and the committed partnership were supported by congressional buy-in and with the intense interest of the President of the United States.

Ansary (2007) states “Bill Clinton had to promise to out tough Bush on education, as president, Clinton steered through Congress a bill called Goals 2000 that largely co-opted the policies that came out of the 1989 Bush summit” (p. 3).

As pointed out by Anfara and Mertens (2008), “some of objectives of this goal included the establishment of programs to increase parent involvement, engaging parents in the support of academic work of children at home, and shared decision making at school” (p. 58). There was a sincere effort on the part of policymakers and politicians to get parents more involved in their children’s education and to develop a partnership with families and schools with the goal of promoting academic growth for students.

2001 No Child Left Behind and Title I. One law that encourages parental involvement in schools is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. In various parts of the Act parents are mentioned more than 300 times, which could imply how important parents are to their child’s success in school. This law mandates that “each school that receives Title I funding must develop, jointly with parents, a parental involvement policy” (USDOE, 2004, p. 22). To ensure parental involvement in schools receiving Title I funding, “allocation of greater than \$500,000 must reserve not less than one percent of its Title I, Part A allocation to carry out the provisions of section 1118, including promoting family literacy and parenting skills” (USDOE, 2004, p. 16).

Anfara and Mertens (2008) state that Section 1118, Title I, “requires that school districts and schools receiving Title I dollars must have a written parent involvement policy and build school capacity to effectively implement the parent policy provisions” (p. 1). As pointed out in Epstein (2004), “the two largest Federally Funded Programs are Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is intended to

provide resources to disadvantaged students and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) designed to assist disabled students” (p. 44). Epstein (1995) mentions “many states and districts have developed and are preparing policies to guide schools in creating more systematic connections with families and communities” (p. 701-702).

The ESEA provides a definition of parent involvement:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school related activities including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child and that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parent Involvement). [Section 9101(32). EA]

There is a developing relationship between the federal and state government, however, the lines of authority are not always clear. This partnership is the result of the constant shifting of power. Non-delegation limits the degree to which states can give authorization for different aspects of implementation of the act. These factors create conflict in educational governance because the shifting of power and authority is unclear. Parents and teachers are often unclear about the authority each one has and the lines of power are sometimes confusing. Henderson et al. (2007) state one way to establish who is in charge is to “build a broad base of involvement by increasing families’ political knowledge and skills, and their connections to other parents and people in the community” (p. 187).

Section 1118, Title I, Part A of NCLB indicates that a “critical point in the process of improving teaching and learning where parents and the community can assist

is school improvement” (USDOE, 2004, p. 4). Each school funded under Title I must develop a written school parent involvement policy that describes how the school will carry out the parent involvement requirements, including the development of a school-parent compact. This Act bears witness to the role parents play in the education and possible result of their child’s future. Despite the benefits of strong parent involvement in schools, Fullan (2007) suggests “most parents do not want to run the school; they want their child to be better” (p. 195), and the reality is that the funds allocated to support parent involvement are often not monitored and there are no consequences if policy is not implemented.

The schools utilize the practice of mutual adaptation to implement the plan the way they desire. There are no checks and balances, leaving schools to operate on their own regarding parental involvement. The NCLB (2004) requires that each LEA “conduct an annual evaluation and review of its parent involvement programs that involves parents in an organized, ongoing and timely way” (p. 2) that will evaluate the effectiveness of parental involvement policies; assess the policies impact on academic achievement; identify barriers to the participation of identified subgroups; and determine more effective strategies bases on the evaluative process. The district and participating parents are charged with developing the evaluation instrument to assess compliance. Cavanagh (2012) posits that this focus on compliance does not encourage districts and schools to develop creative and sustained parent engagement (p. 1). Compliance suggests meeting the minimum requirements of the statute, not the development of comprehensive and coordinated programs.

There are legal boundaries of educational governance as mentioned in Epstein (2004), “local boards cannot delegate their decision-making authority to other agencies, associations or individuals, including local superintendents, principals, teachers, or teacher associations” (p. 58). As one can discern persons who have the most direct contact with students have the least legal power and accountability regarding the student’s education.

However, sweeping changes in how schools, including teachers and principals, are held accountable for student learning are being implemented across the U.S. as states implement actions tied to ESEA Flexibility, which requires “rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction” (USDOE, 2013, para. 1). Not only are superintendents, principals, and teachers held accountable for student achievement based on scores on standardized tests, Section 118, Part A of NCLB requires schools to build the capacity of parents to engage in the educational outcomes of their children. Additionally, professional associations have lobbied for a more a comprehensive system of accountability that includes more than scores on standardized tests. In states where the ESEA Flexibility Waiver has been approved, revised teacher evaluation systems that include multiple measures of student achievement are being developed (Higman, 2013).

Obama-Biden Zero to Five Plan (2008). One of the components of the Obama-Biden comprehensive plan for education is the Zero to Five Plan that would provide critical support to young children and their parents by having all children ready for kindergarten through universal access to preschool. The plan calls for increased funding

for Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and affordable child care for struggling families. A range of components that would support K-12 reform requires first and foremost, complete funding and reauthorization of NCLB (Office of the President-Elect, 2008). The Obama-Biden Plan is intended to structure the accountability and educational reform of America's schools by providing access to a quality education to all of America's youth and recognizing the importance of parental involvement in the process.

The idea of restoring public education rests on the need for more resources to carry out the mission of educating youth, and recruiting and retaining qualified teachers while rewarding them monetarily with increased salaries. The Obama-Biden Plan includes the belief that America's public educational institutions could prepare children to lead the world in scholarship and leadership while competing in a global society.

Full funding of NCLB, which includes monies allocated for parental involvement through decision-making, would give teachers and parents an opportunity to discuss issues important to the growth and welfare of the student. By establishing an accountability system and clarifying responsibilities, more people might feel comfortable participating in their child's education, while understanding that it takes collaboration to prepare students for the 21st century (Office of the President-Elect, 2008).

Obama Race to the Top (2009). Race to the Top (R2T, RTTT, or RTT), was created under the presidency of President Obama to encourage restructuring and to transform the educational system in states and local K-12 district education programs. This \$43 billion United States Department of Education endeavor is funded by the ED Recovery Act as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). Under this program, states are granted points based on

meeting the criteria for funding, such as performance-based standards for teachers and principals and promoting charter schools. The scoring is weighted depending on categories such as great teachers and leaders; state success factors; standards and assessments; general selection criteria; turning around the lowest-achieving schools; and data systems that support instruction. The prioritization of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education classes and programs earn more points (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). Locally, districts receive funds to improve student achievement, improve educator effectiveness, and prepare students for success in college and careers. It empowers districts to plan, pursue, and implement innovative initiatives at the classroom level for greater student impact.

Teachers and principals will be held accountable for the educational gains made by students in the class rooms and some historical actions will be taken when schools do not meet the criteria as outlined in Race to the Top standards. Diane Ravitch (2010) states,

Teachers will be evaluated in relation to their students' test scores. Schools that continue to get low test scores will be closed or turned into charter schools, handed over to private management, principals will be fired, and all or half of the staff will be fired. States are encouraged to create many more privately managed charter schools. (p. 1)

The mandate to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap under RTTT increases the need for parents and educators to work together to benefit student achievement.

Importance of Politics and Policy Makers

Ansary (2007) states, “what we now call school reform is not the product of a gradual consensus emerging among educators and how kids learn, it is a political

movement that grew out of one seed planted in 1983 [Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform]” (p. 1). Politicians have continued to embed education reform in their platforms while running for office, pointing to the fact that educating the children of America continues to be an important issue and discourse for millions of Americans. Policy makers, however, have not always understood the vital role and contribution educators make in helping mend the crippled educational landscape.

As pointed out by Ansary (2007) “in 1989 Bush convened his education summit at the University of Virginia. No teachers, professional educators, cognitive scientist or learning experts were invited. The group that met to shape the future of American education consisted entirely of state governors” (p. 2). It seems like this is pattern that has been often repeated in education. When decisions are made and plans created, the experts required to implement the plans are not invited to the table.

In the case of NCLB, many states were not able to implement NCLB to its fullest intent due to lack of funding and limited input from the practitioners in education. Some states shaped the policies to meet their school needs. Mutual adaption was allowed because no element was in place for ongoing observations, auditing, and evaluation. Schools focused on making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) instead of other issues such as monitoring the progress of NCLB. Lawmakers assumed once laws were written they would simply be implemented; however, this was not the case in many states. States found it difficult to fully implement NCLB because of insufficient local financial resources and difficulties understanding and implementing the specifics of the law (Center on Education Policy, 2007).

The Tenth Amendment. The Tenth Amendment states, “the constitution does not explicitly grant the federal government power to regulate education” (Epstein, 2004, p. 45). Historically, the federal government did not infringe in areas customarily controlled by state decision-making. Legislation such as NCLB expands the debate over accountability for educational reform to all levels of policy-makers.

As a response to one criticism of NCLB regarding lack of funding, President Obama issued “Race to the Top,” which came with revenue and resources to promote innovation, reform, and excellence in America’s public schools.

America will not succeed in the 21st century unless we do a far better job of educating our sons and daughters...And the race starts today. I am issuing a challenge to our nation’s governors and school boards, principals and teachers, businesses and non-profits, parents and students: if you set and enforce rigorous and challenging standards and assessments; if you put outstanding teachers at the front of the classroom, if you turn around failing schools – your state can win a Race to the Top grant that will not only help students outcompete workers around the world, but let them fulfill their God-given potential. (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009, para. 1)

Access to RTTT funding required states to adopt four core reforms:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (USDOE, 2009, p. 2)

Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) state, “policymakers interested in promoting school success must look beyond the school doors. Academic achievement is shaped more by children lives outside the school walls, particularly their parents” (p. 1).

Researchers claim that home contributes to a child’s development in many ways, particularly regarding the habits and initial skills students bring to school (Henderson et

al. 2007). Through the partnership and coordination of working together, all parties will be accountable for improvements in assessments and in the education of America's children.

Educators, policymakers, and stakeholders have an opportunity to coordinate, collaborate, and implement programs that will enrich the relationship of teachers and parents. There is room at the table for everyone to make a contribution and enough issues to address in educational reform in the United States. Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) state, "policymakers can also help families educate their children with childcare, summer school and out-of-school programs – all which have promising evidence on the benefits to student achievement" (p. 1). Policymakers are in a strategic position and have resources at their disposal to advocate for families and develop programs that will unite schools and parents in reaching the shared goal of helping students be successful.

Local Policies

The New Jersey Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide services to parents and students by requiring a written parental involvement policy that establishes the district's expectations for parental involvement. The policy must be developed jointly and agreed upon with the parents and children participating in Title I, Part A programs. There are three parts to the "School-Parent-Student" compacts that must be developed in collaboration with parents and the school while outlining the responsibilities of all parties involved in the educational process of the student. Communication must be deliberate and ongoing for the survival and effective planning, development, and implementation of the educational process (USDOE, 2004).

Capacity building is an important component in the development and implementation of parental involvement in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Capacity building is the planned development for parental involvement with a provision for technical assistance, often through grants, that result in systemic and sustained changes in local districts. The “Building Capacity for Parental Involvement Title I” training was developed by the Office of Title I program Planning and Accountability in collaboration with the regional and county education offices, the office of Abbot Implementation, the Office of Academic and Professional Standards (NJPEP), the Office of Program Support Services (Even Start Family Literacy), and the Office of Specialized Populations (bilingual and the Region III Comprehensive Center (R3CC) (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009).

These groups work together with parents to ensure information is clear, understandable, and meets the guidelines of NCLB regarding parental involvement. Pennsylvania has partnered with 29 Intermediate Units, three regionally-based Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Networks (PaTTAN), the Center for Data Driven Reform in Education, the Center for Schools and Communities, the Title I State Parent Advisory Committee, the Parent Information Resource Center and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center to provide technical assistance and build capacity for district support systems to include parental involvement.

The National Parent Teacher Association. The National Parent Teacher Association has been in existence for more than 100 years. The National PTA has advocated for all aspects of education, reduction of class size, funding for education, expansion of the curricula, health and nutrition, juvenile justice, and particularly parental

involvement (National Parent Teacher Association, 2013). The National PTA is now the recognized voice of parents, nationally. The PTA values are reflective of many school values such as collaboration with families and organizations, commitment to promoting the educational success of all students, accountability for leadership, respect for all colleagues, inclusivity which includes diversity and integrity with respect for all people.

The PTA provides valuable resources, programs to all families and will assist schools in implementation of school improvement programs. If the entire membership of the school joins this allows for more revenue to support school-wide programs. The collaboration with teachers and community members focusing on what students need to be successful are some of the advantages of participation in the PTA. Informed and engaged parents understand the demands facing the parent and the teacher and are able to help with solutions. The PTA understands the needs of the school and can help schools fulfill their responsibilities for parent involvement requirements under NCLB. (National Parent Teachers Association, 2013)

Parental Involvement

Benefits of parental involvement. Research has repeatedly identified the benefits of parental involvement on all levels of student education. There are various different kinds of parental involvement that can be linked to positive outcomes for parents, children, and the school. Educational leaders such as principals, school administrators, teachers and guidance counselors tend to conclude that parental involvement on any level, whether it is homework help, volunteering in the school, attendance at parent teacher conferences, school music performances, class trips monitors, or assisting in the classroom, has a positive impact on student achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989);

Henderson et al., 2007).

Henderson & Berla (1994) suggests educational institutions that collaborate with families display improved teacher morale and have a stronger positive presence in the community in which they reside. The relationship the child develops as a result of parental involvement cannot be understated. Maynard and Howley (1997) found “parents who help and encourage their children at home contribute to the growth and academic success of their children” (p.1).

Parental involvement not only affects the performance of the child but has a bearing on the rapport that is established with the school as well. The relationship that is developed with the school helps to improve community relationships. Henderson and Mapp (2002) found when parents take an active role in their children’s education; students project a more positive attitude in school, at home, and also in the community. Parents who are part of the school and community act as liaisons to the community, expressing a good word as well as sharing challenges they have had with the school or teachers. Schools have an opportunity to know the families in their school once parents are involved and develop a relationship with the school. Pena (2000) claims school administrators gain respect and appreciation for parents who are involved in the schooling of their children and as a result this fosters teacher support.

Eccles and Harold (1996) found parental involvement is beneficial for students, parents, and teachers from early childhood through high school. Research shows when all parties work together, the results are rewarding: students’ grades improve, attendance is better, graduation rates are higher, and discipline improves (Epstein, 1995; Henderson et al. 2007). Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on 25 empirical studies and

their findings indicated that parent involvement has a positive effect on student academic achievement and more students go on the post-secondary school.

Research has identified multiple factors that contribute to successful parental involvement. Williams and Chavkin (1989) describe seven essential elements of strong parent involvement programs: “written policies, administrative support, training, partnership approach, two-way communication, networking and evaluation” (p. 18). The written policies stress the importance of parent involvement and help to develop and sustain parent involvement between home and school. Funding, material, and product resources allocated to implement programs show the investment the school has in the child and community. Training is made available to staff and parents to develop skills essential for a partnership. Joint planning, program assessment, and setting school standards were done together. Frequent communication from school to home was done in various forms. Networking with shared ideas, resources, and evaluation of programs was completed in cycles and ongoing.

Henderson et al. (2007) mention children of diverse cultural backgrounds appear to do better when families and school work together to understand the different cultures and traditions. Children feel home and school are making a joint investment in their education by understanding their customs and holidays. Parents and schools are enriched by the diversity, helping students adjust to their new educational environment. Parents also become a powerful resource to the school by sharing their customs. This allows for “capacity building” (Fowler, 2009), which strengthens the school and home partnership. Fullan (2007) states “teachers cannot do it alone. Parents and other community members are crucial and largely untapped resources who have (or can be helped to have) assets and

expertise that are essential to the partnership” (p. 190). There exists a reservoir of parents with a multitude of skills and talents from accountants to salespersons, many of whom could be called upon to participate in a school’s educational program.

Types of parent involvement. A consistent body of research claims engaged parents make a difference in their child’s success in education and may help educational reform by working collaboratively with teachers and the community at large (Epstein, 2004; Henderson, 1987; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978; Mapp, 1997; Moles, 1987). The contributions to society are far reaching when everyone takes an interest in children, helping them reach their fullest potential. Short-term benefits include improved student attitude, achievement, and attendance; higher grades and test scores; more homework completed; fewer placements in special education programs; and higher graduation rates. Long-term benefits include increased enrollment in post secondary programs; schools with better reputations in their communities; improved teacher morale; increased support from families; and parents prompted to further their education (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Parents act as advocates for their children and role models by getting involved with school governance. Parents can participate in the development of goals, program selection, personnel selection, setting guidelines and rules, allocation of funds and evaluation. Parents can participate on parent advisory boards, school board members and be active in the PTA. Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) states,

The tremendous growth of Parent-Teacher Associations modestly began in 1897 to “one of the largest organizations of women in the United States” underscores the fact that schools have been one of the most acceptable forms of involvement for mothers outside the home. (p. 75)

Williams & Chavkin (1989) mentions although educators warrant and desire the support and cooperation of parental involvement there are no perfect parent involvement program. Participation on all levels helps contribute to the success of a parent involvement program. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) asserts, however, “it is important to recognize that the presence of parents in the school not only provides more adults to teach reading or offer help and support to children but also transforms the culture of the school” (p. 173). Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff & Ortiz (2008) shares that although educators have high desires for parent involvement, they are continually directed into the same roles of parenting such as chaperoning a class trip, providing snacks for the class, class room mother, fund raising and attending parent teacher conferences.

Barriers to parental involvement. Schaeff and Betz (1992) divide barriers into three categories: (1) human nature factors, which include the parent and teacher fear of failure, fear of criticism, or the fear of the differences between them; (2) communication factors such as the inability to communicate their needs; and (3) external factors, which include lack of time, personal problems and busy lifestyles. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) mentions “parents and teachers feel estranged from and suspicious of each other. Their relationship tends to be competitive and adversarial rather than collaborative and empathic. Their encounters feel embattled rather than peaceful and productive” (p. xxi). These experiences are what parents carry and harbor to the next situation with which they are confronted.

Henderson et al. (2007) state “well-executed partnership goes hand in hand with school improvement, whether prompted by their own desire to create a better school or in the process of effectively implementing state educational reform efforts and federal

programs, including No Child Left Behind” (p. 13-14). Some home and school partnership ingredients include offering each other something to work towards, cutting down barriers, and using resources. Both parties develop strategies that benefit the progress of the child, sharing power while addresses differences.

Cotton and Wilelund (1989) suggest administrators may feel parents are not capable of making decisions regarding budget and personnel. Administrators also feel that parents do not have the skills or knowledge about the workings of the educational arena. According to Cotton and Wilelund (1989), surveys show that most parents would like to play a more active role in the decision making process, however, school administrators and teachers exhibit great reluctance to push parents in this direction to become partners in governance. Perhaps, this is because they are threatened and feel they would lose control of the learning process. Administrators can seize this opportunity and exhibit leadership ability by building capacity through training parents in the importance of budget allocation and how it affects the entire school. These efforts also imply shared governance.

Olson (2009) states “shared governance has come to connote two complementary and sometimes overlapping concepts: giving various groups of people a share in key decision-making processes, often through elected representation; and allowing certain groups to exercise primary responsibility for specific areas of decision-making” (p. 2). Shared governance is two pronged. It gives parents a voice in the decision-making of the school, but also gives parents the responsibility to implement and carry out those decisions. Shared governance provides a climate for partnership and relationship building

to take place. In addition, decisions made through this process are usually fairer and well thought out because opinions are heard and both parties are willing to listen to each other.

There are other barriers that prevent parental involvement in the school. Schaeffer and Betz (1992) delineate external factors as those including lack of time, busy lifestyles, personal problems, administrative policies, unclear roles and responsibilities, and inadequate training or support as barriers for parental involvement. These factors are external to the personal characteristics of individuals, yet have a major influence on the level of parental involvement. For example, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) shares “whatever a woman’s task may be homemaker-mother, working mother, teacher; married, divorced, or single - she may enjoy her work and to the extent that she experiences maximum fulfillment and minimum strain, there will be positive outcomes” (p. 72). Consequently, women have to wear many hats and spread their time thinly, depending on what needs to be done to keep the home running smoothly; this does not negate, however, the essential role fathers play in the home-school relationship.

Becher (1984) found teachers’ attitudes towards parents’ commitment, education, and communication skills were barriers and challenges to parental involvement. Teachers felt that parents would not honor commitments to participate in schools functions; that parents lacked the education to understand curricular standards and that parent’ language skills, such as improper and accented English, served as negative examples for students. The parents’ lack of understanding could possibly challenge the authority of the teacher.

Researchers (Henderson et al. 2007) have indicated educators are hesitant to share their power with parents. Besides inviting parents to talk about test scores, feeding

students a good breakfast before a test, and ensuring proper rest before the test. There is little mention about the standards and curriculum development Encouraging healthy routines to support student learning is important and contributes to student success in school, however, a more engaging conversation needs to take place to make parents feel a part of their child's education.

Supporting parental involvement. Bogenscheider and Johnson (2004) state, “if this country is going to turn around poor school performance, one of the most significant problems that must be addressed is the high prevalence of disengaged parents” (p. 1). Parents and teachers in Taylor's (1992) research agree that in order for the home and school partnership to be successful, new attitudes must be developed and cultured between parents and teachers. In attending to the demands of the working family it is important to accommodate working parents and make after-school programs affordable to partner with parents. Programs could also be scheduled before school to accommodate parents with early shifts. Parents are more likely to enroll children in a school that meets their busy family schedule which could be an indicator they are attempting to partner with families to work things out (USDOE, n.d.).

The importance of trust and respect is repeated in the literature regarding developing a partnership and second order change (Fullan, 2001). Although parent involvement in instruction has been clearly linked to student success (Epstein, 1992), many teachers and parents are remiss at establishing meaningful relationships between home and school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). In order to improve parental involvement, school personnel need to be aware of the external factors limiting participation in their given context (Schaeff & Betz, 1992). Parents often feel defenseless when they

communicate with educators because they may not have obtained the same educational level. If teachers are more conscious of the ways they speak to parents, they might avoid talking above the intellectual level of parents, which could leave them feeling confused, uncomfortable, and ineffective (Gareau & Sawatsky, 1995).

Parents' and teachers' perceptions are developed from past experiences, trust, and respect. Nichols-Solomon (2001) mentions that people live in a culture of blame and operate out of fear. Teachers need to be sensitive to offending parents who feel teachers are the educated one and know best. Even so, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell & Perna (2008) points out parents of higher socio-economic status (SES) pay more attention to the progress of their students and have higher aspirations for college and future endeavors for their students than parents of lower SES. Teachers should not assume, however, that high SES parents desire more for their children than less educated, low SES parents.

Henderson et al. (2007) stress the importance of “creating a culture of partnership throughout the district by setting high standards for family-friendly schools and by expecting all district and school staff to meet those standards” (p. 225). Partnerships develop when parents and teachers trust and respect one another, develop standards jointly to meet goals, and create an atmosphere where the sharing of ideas takes place. When stakeholders work towards the same goals, embracing the same ideas, the possibility of implanting common goals and objectives improves.

Conceptual Framework – Joyce Epstein

When parents, teachers and students view one another as partners in education a caring community forms around students and begins at the work necessary to develop a

relationship between the school and home (Epstein, 1995). I will use Epstein's six levels of parental involvement to better address the research (Figure 1).

Number 1	Parenting - Help all families establish home environments to support children as students
Number 2	Communicating - Design effective forms of school-to-home communications about school programs and children's progress
Number 3	Volunteering - Recruit and organize parent help and support
Number 4	Learning at home – Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning.
Number 5	Decision Making- Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
Number 6	Collaborating with Community – Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development.

Figure 1. Epstein's Six Levels of Involvement

Parenting. Parents continue to be a rich untapped resource of which schools do not take advantage. It is vital the school tap into the resources of the parents. The research is very clear that parents are their child's first educator and they are the educator that is most constant. Fullan (2007 states,

[Parents] have knowledge of their children that is not available to anyone else. They have a vested and committed interest in their children's success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute that spring from their interest, hobbies, occupations and place in the community. (p. 190)

Although parents are their child's first teacher, many parents do not take parenting courses. In many cases, the school has the responsibility of training parents how to parent, which is not an easy process.

Parents raise their children just as their parents raised them with the same kinds of school communication and participation as they have observed through their youth.

Schools have an opportunity to make a difference and dismiss the negative experiences that may haunt parents when reflecting on their experiences as students themselves. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) states “respectful relationships also have a way of sustaining and replicating themselves” (p. 10). Respecting one another will tear down walls of misunderstanding and confusion while trying to find value in what is being said and understanding why things happen. If parents and schools are to work together, they must respect each other and work for the best interest of the student.

Huang and Mason (2008) share parents take pleasure in hearing about how their child is doing in school, the new educational objectives and standards in which students are engaged, and what is taking place in the whole school. Having this knowledge and better understanding of what is going on in the educational classroom for their child helps connect them and form a partnership with the school family and their child. Parents do not always know ways they can become engaged and get involved in their child’s education, but desire to know.

Communication. Families and schools working together to help students be successful cannot be underestimated. Henderson et al. (2007) share important ways for schools and parents to work together and increase communication, such as training teachers to partner with parents and to see them as collaborators in the education of their children. Research shows this partnership increases students’ desire to do well in school and to take a vested interest in their education. Parents communicate the importance of schooling to their child through their involvement in school.

Henderson et al (2007) posit that training in active listening may increase the confidence and capacity of teachers to have sensitive conversations with parents. The

ability to communicate effectively with parents is an indicator of teacher effectiveness (Danielson, 2007). Communication between school and home needs to be intentional and consistent with each family through face-to-face meetings, notes, emails, and phone calls and should be linked to student learning. Forms of communication that have been proven ineffective, such as large public meetings should be traded for smaller intimate settings, such as focus groups and community forums (Henderson et al 2007).

Reilly (2008) asserts when speaking with parents regarding their child, educators should be sensitive to using a tone and vocabulary that is understandable for parents who do not have the educational background. It is important that educators know the parents' level of understanding regarding programs and procedures, especially when speaking to English as a Second Language (ESOL) or Special Needs parent. It is important not to talk down to a parent and to offer explanations as clearly as possible. Reilly (2008) shares the most common occurrence of communication from school to home is when students do something wrong, have misbehaved, or have an incomplete assignment. These contacts are negative and do not build positive communication lines, creating instead a wall to developing a good parent teacher relationship.

Communication can take many forms and the most common is the face-to-face parent conference meeting. Henderson et al. (2007) suggest "it's not enough to have parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year, send occasional notes, and emails with each family – and not just when there are problems" (p. 166). Parents enjoy getting information from the school, especially when it concerns their child; however, it is how the school communicates to the home that makes the difference. Many teachers are proactive when deadlines are approaching for field trip and funds are needed to complete

the transaction for the class trip. School staff report school closings and adjusted days via phone, emails, and memos sent home. The reason for the communication is important and communicative news should be positive to encourage parents by establishing a rapport with the family and to continue on-going communication. Communication through email is very valuable to working parents and gives them an opportunity to communicate with the school and keep abreast of their child's progress.

The circle of communication needs to be enlarged to include good news and positive information about the success of not only individual students, but also the school at large. How and when parents and the community are invited to the school makes a difference and communicates an invisible message, which is heard by parents and the community for years. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) shares parent-teacher conferences are "crucial events" (p. xxii) because they give families and teachers an opportunity to voice and hear their differences. This sheer "passion and purpose" (p. xxii) is so important that more time is needed to broaden cultural understanding besides the twice-yearly scheduled meeting in the school year. In addition, to better help the community partner with the school, invitations should not only be given when the school is preparing Thanksgiving or holiday baskets for needy families.

Reilly (2008) shares school communication and parental involvement decreases and takes a different shift when children navigate from elementary school to middle school and on to high school. Some parents do not feel as comfortable in the new circles of communication and their knowledge base narrows, as the work gets more difficult. Parents may not understand the new curriculum their child is working on and have

limited knowledge of the subject, thus the situation changes their communication with the school.

Volunteering. One of the most common forms of parental involvement is volunteering in the classroom and at school. Henderson et al. (2007) mention “although this is a good way to see what the student is learning many parents do not feel confident taking on this task” (p. 90). Shellenbarger (2009) suggests “volunteer where your child can see you” (p. 1). Younger children enjoy seeing their parents and this gives them a vivid image that parents care. As students get older and move to middle and high school, they get sensitive to their parents being present in the classroom. Shaver and Walls (1998) found, however, that parents still want to be involved in the school lives of their adolescent children, but tend to be more cautious when their efforts are not successful. “The crux of family-school involvement at the middle school and high school level is determining the kinds of adult interactions that not only allow teenagers to have autonomy and respect but also meet the needs of families and schools” (Ferguson & Rodriguez, 2005, para. 3). At this point, many parents drop their involvement, and as Shellenger (2009) shares, “volunteer tasks become more remote from the learning process, often relegating parents to running fundraisers” (p. 2).

However, there are many other tasks parents can do such as sending notices home to parents as reminders, promoting parental involvement in the school, and working with the parent council. Parental involvement sends a strong message to young people when their parents volunteer at their schools. Hoover-Dempsey says “the parent is affirming that a) you’re really important to me; b) that what goes on in school is important; and c) I get to see things we can talk about later” (as cited in Shellenbarger, 2009, p. 2).

Shellenbarger (2009) states, “Most school volunteer projects have worthy goals. Helping out in the school office fills staffing gaps. Painting classrooms improves kids’ environment. Serving on the school board helps shape schools strategy and direction” (p. 1). Parents establish a rapport with teachers and other staff members by being in the school. Being present as a volunteer gives parents an opportunity to converse with teachers without scheduling a meeting. Volunteering at schools also gives parents an opportunity to network with other interested parents.

Some teachers may see parent volunteers as a source of scrutiny of their teaching skills or class management and may not welcome this kind of participation. In some schools teachers may feel that parents are not able to help their children, based on the parents’ education level. Research disputes this common belief, because many poor uneducated immigrants understand the power of education and will do what they can to educate their child (Henderson et al., 2007). They know and understand the power of an education and frequently talk to their children about the sacrifices they are making. They make sure the homework is done, and monitor activities and friends while stressing the importance of an education. Henderson and Mapp (2002) remind us that all parents and family members [including extended family and friends] can play a vital part in a child’s education.

Shellenbarger (2009) shares, “the most important parental role of all is to shape your child’s attitude toward learning and school, communicate high expectations, and help him or her set goals and solve learning problems” (p. 2). Volunteering is not just working in the school house, but it is the preparation that parents do outside of schools and educational institutions that prepares the student for learning. This sharing of

expectations resounds loudly to the student, “I care and am concerned about your education.”

Learning at home. There are many ways parents can help prepare students for learning and encourage their interest in being successful in school. It is important for schools to help parents with strategies that will reinforce learning at home. Henderson et al. (2007) suggest this could be accomplished through workshops and tips for parents in the school newsletter. Schools can take advantage of the opportunity to train some parents to be homework coaches or run a homework club jointly with teachers.

The communication that takes place through homework could be a great way for home and school to merge efforts for the learning of all students. A key way is by helping students set goals for completing homework. Research shows homework can be either positive or negative for both parents and teachers. The U.S. Department of Education (2003) claims,

Homework has been a part of students’ lives since the beginning of formal schooling the United States. However, the practice has sometimes been accepted and other times rejected, both by educators and parents. This has happened because homework can have both positive and negative effects on children’s learning and attitudes toward school. (p. 1)

When parents are involved with their child’s homework assignment, they get a first hand view of what the child is learning at school and have an opportunity to reinforce the classroom lesson at home. It is also important that parents are aware of the school’s homework policies to prevent misunderstandings and help their child meet expectations.

Parents involved in their child’s homework can have conversations with other parents about what is going on educationally in their child’s class and also with the teacher. They can clarify misunderstandings before they evolve into something out of

control. Knowing what a child is doing for homework gives parents an idea of how the child is doing in school. Sometimes, however, parents can confuse students by using the techniques or methods they themselves used as students (Macario, 2012).

Iannelli (2003) points out “homework policies and practices should give teachers and parents the flexibility to take into account the unique needs and circumstances of their students” (p. 1). Some flexibility may be needed to help parents and students adjust to the rigor of certain homework assignments. Homework can improve students’ memory skills, help prepare them for exams, and give students bonding time with parents.

Educators and parents are concerned with the time that must be allotted to homework, being careful to make it age appropriate. However, homework is a learning experience and educators and parents desire these experiences to be rewarding. Students all work at a different pace and understanding level, homework should be fun and not seen as a punishment but rather a reinforcement of work learned. Strauss (2010) states:

The highest-level executive thinking, making of connections, and “aha” moments are more likely to occur in an atmosphere of “exuberant discovery,” where students of all ages retain that kindergarten enthusiasm of embracing each day with the joy of learning. Fun actually seems to promote learning. (p. 2)

Decision-making. More research is needed to explore this idea of pulling on the resources and expertise parents have to offer educational institutions. Parents could participate more in the decision-making process, especially through leadership roles in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), as School Board members, or principal executive team members. As mentioned by Fullan (2007), this could require training by teachers to demonstrate the factors that contribute to sound decision-making. Parents could be a part of the school budget committee and help with publicity at the school, which could strengthen individual skills for the job market and lead to a new career. Parents involved

in the decision-making processes in school could help strengthen the relationship between the school, family, and community.

Research shows that parents have been involved with some school decisions on the PTA Council, with decisions regarding trips, lunches, and fundraisers. Henderson et al. (2007) state “schools should provide workable mechanisms for teachers, parents, and students to voice their ideas and concerns, and to take part in decision making” (p. 187). This sharing of power strengthens the school and helps everyone understand ideas and the best way to solve an issue. Partnership requires sharing power to get the best results. It is important to network and allow all persons to the decision-making table regardless of socioeconomic status or racial background.

Collaborating with community. According to Epstein (1995), community partnerships “can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parent skills and leadership, and connect families with others in the school and in the community and help teachers with their work” (p. 1). Epstein (1995) points out “when parents, teachers and students and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (p. 1). Epstein (1995) states,

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children’s families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in the child’s education and development. (p. 1)

Henderson et al. (2007) share “schools are an important resource in any neighborhood” (p. 208). Both families and schools are located in a community surrounded by stores, bus or train stations, hospitals, churches and other places of

worship, parks, and other institutions of service and learning. Each one depends on the other for the various livelihoods that keep a community vital and productive. They cannot function in isolation and are dependent on one another for survival. Understanding their shared investment and responsibility for children, learning to partner with the various institutions, and cultivating resources can benefit everyone, but most importantly, can provide students opportunities for growth. Schools support local economies by patronizing stores and restaurants. Schools also provide students who may join the workforce as medical, public, and private institutional employees. Communities can benefit by using the schools, gym, library, or auditorium for large meetings. If schools, home, and community organizations work together, the possibilities are endless. Even so, community schools sometimes do not take advantage of the many resources located in the neighborhood.

Epstein (1995) mentions the three overlapping spheres that influence a child's growth and development: "the family, the school, and the community" (p. 2). This overlapping of all three factors places the child in the center, connecting all efforts at developing the child. This kind of overlapping and interaction shows the integral part each plays and how they depend on each other. Internal factors push and tug at parents, teachers, and students, who sometimes have no control over the societal issues that occur. Students are the main actors in their education and in many cases the least mentioned. Partnership allows the school, the parents, and the community to work with each other and learn from sharing ideas. By working together they can develop the parental involvement and engagement needed to assist in student learning.

Linking Epstein’s Framework to the Study

The various types of parental involvement detailed in this section provide the lens through which I analyze the data collected in this study to better understand parental involvement from both the school and parent perspectives. My methodology is consistent with the goals of this study, which are to examine the experiences and perceptions of teachers’ and parents’ school-home relationship and explore how they can move from parental involvement to parental engagement. By using Joyce Epstein’s (1985, 1992, 1995) pioneering work as the conceptual framework, I construct my study on a solid foundation and increase my understanding of the factors influencing parental involvement. To connect my study to the phenomenon of parental involvement in an urban charter elementary school, my research questions framed the study by focusing on the areas of context, change, and leadership.

The Role of Leadership in Educational Change

Ben Franklin is quoted as saying “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” (Brainy Quote, n.d.). In order to improve and implement educational changes in parental involvement one has to prepare a strategic plan. Planning and preparation are essential management tools that schools use in order to function and to bring about change, regardless of geographic location or the grade levels served.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) state “leadership is considered to be vital to the successful functioning of many aspects of a school” (p. 5). Fullan (2001) shares leaders should have good ideas and be able to express their ideas and vision with clarity and understanding. However, “authoritative leaders are not that good at listening and democratic leaders listen too much” (p. 42). Kotter (1996) mentions a powerful vision

can be beneficial to many even if it is understood by a few important people. But the real test of the magnitude of an idea is when most of the individuals participating have a clear grasp of the concept of the mission and objectives of the idea (p. 85).

The role of leadership is complex and challenging for many leaders and strategic planning could aid them in this quest. Helping individuals understand a vision or new ideas is never easy, especially in educational institutions. Good communication and listening skills can provide a bridge for understanding that could lead to change. Change does not come easy even if it is slow, and in some cases many factors contribute to the outcome of the change.

Change. Fullan (2007) states, “change may come about either because it is imposed on us (by natural events or deliberate reform) or because we voluntarily participate in or even initiate change when we find dissatisfaction, inconsistency, or intolerability in our current situation” (p .21). There is no specific time for change to take place, it is a combination of factors and situations that motivate people to change or make shifts in their way of performing. Henderson and Mapp (2002) point out when schools, families, and the community groups’ work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and graduate. Planning is necessary because it becomes a roadmap of what one hopes to accomplish in any organization. If one does not plan, then one plans to fail.

Fullan (2007) shares “it is essential for leaders to understand the change process” (p. 5). Leaders must lead and encourage the team to build relationships and explore the power of diversity. Creating an environment of listening and problem solving while staying focused on the moral purpose is challenging. Fullan (2001) asserts that change is

necessary for progress, and planning has many layers within the processes of an organization. By understanding the various layers, change can be developed and implemented. Evans (1996) shares “change means different things to different people; in fact, it usually means something different to each and every individual” (p. 21). Experiences enable people to view situations through different lenses with varied perceptions and outlooks.

Change can be implemented in types first and second order change. Marzano et al. share “first order change is incremental, it could be thought of as the next step or steps to take” (p. 66). Incremental change could be a slow, careful and steady process that is expected. Marzano et al. posits “second order change involves dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining a given problem and in finding a solution” (p. 66). It appears that first order change is not as dramatic as second order change and different situations would dictate what kind of change may be necessary.

There are different internal and external factors that affect the culture of change within an organization. Understanding the culture of an organization, the types of leadership styles in use, and how problems are solved are key factors in the change process. Knowledge of who the key players are in an organization can make a huge difference regarding governance, parental involvement, and accomplishing goals (Fullan, 2007).

De Geus (1988) states, the “real purpose of planning is to change the mental models that decision makers carry in their heads” (p. 1). There are different dimensions and degrees of change. “Real change, whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; and if

the change works out, it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and professional growth” (Fullan, 2007, p. 23). Changes in beliefs and understanding (first principles) are the foundation of achieving lasting reform. Change is multidimensional with a different set of goals established at every level.

Leadership. Individuals hold two kinds of theories of action. “The first is their espoused theory, which is composed of beliefs, values, and attitudes. The second is their theory-in-use, which is the one they actually use when they act” (Argyris, 1990 p. 23). My espoused leadership style is to treat people with respect and try to see situations through their eyes while listening to what is being said. Being open to other ideas, thinking outside the box, and asking questions for clarification on issues helps in the decision making process. My espoused leadership style also has an intense interest in helping parents be the voice for their children in schools and assisting parents in developing those skills. This may require incurring mistakes, which could lead to valuable lessons learned.

Empathy, organizational awareness and inspiration have a role in leadership in education (Goldman et al. p. 255). Leaders who possess empathy are able to connect to the emotions of individuals or organization better understanding their concerns and feeling on an issue. Organizational awareness assist the leader in being aware of the unspoken yet powerful relationship, culture and values that motivate the operation of an organization. Leaders who inspire motivate individuals to move by creating an environment that keeping ideas on the right track. They are able to express a shared vision that invites other to participate.

Conclusion

Research has shown when children know parents are involved in their education they desire to do better in school because they feel someone really cares about their future. This feeling transfers into positive grades, awards, and a sense of great accomplishment for the student. Williams and Chavkin (1989) mention “the possibilities seem endless when parents and educators join together to help children become more successful in school” (p. 20). Despite the many obstacles that face parents and educators as regards parental involvement, the quest to improve relationships on behalf of America’s youth must continue.

Research in the area of training activities indicates that parents generally want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness and pride. Parents and schools reiterate that they cannot develop and educate the child in isolation. Rather, a collective, collaborative, and deliberate approach to education must be taken to enhance parent school relationships (Moles, 1987). Orientation and training take many forms, from providing clearly written directions in step-by-step instructional packets, to providing creative hands on workshops where parents construct instructional games, to programs in which parents receive extensive training and ongoing supervision by school personnel (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

Parents become involved in their children’s education in many ways. One way is through homework, which is a great mechanism of communication between the school and home. Homework gives the parent a chance to see what the child is learning and to reinforce this at home. Even parents who do not understand what the child is learning can check to see that the child has completed the assignment. Parents can focus more

specifically on the child's efforts and completion or encourage desired behaviors through praise and extrinsic rewards. Providing home support for learning gives the school a chance to see that the parent is making an attempt to collaborate with the school for their child's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sanders (1997) suggest that some of the reasons parents participate in homework is because they think it is what they should be doing, it gives them a chance to see what the child is learning, and lets the child know the parent cares.

Schools are required to update policies periodically to meet the changing needs of parents and school. Schools should review the content and effectiveness of the school's parent involvement policies on an annual basis and notify parents of its written parent involvement policies. There is a gap in the implementation of the requirements because no one follows up or evaluation is lacking. Educational governance is bureaucratic in nature, allowing schools more self-management leads way to operation without many consequences. If policies were clear, indicating the responsibility of all players such as the state and school administrators, perhaps the goal of student achievement through parental involvement would be greater. If planning was established to implement ongoing evaluation of NCLB, monies allocated to conduct in-service for new teachers, training for principals on best practices, and clear lines of communication developed, positive change would take place between parents and the school.

Henderson et al. (2007) state, "parents want to protect, help, or get a better deal for their children. They are trying to be advocates, but they do not know how to act constructively" (p. 151). Even when parents know what to do, however, the challenge is how to engage them in their child's education to make them more effective partners in

education. Beyond volunteering at school or being involved in PTA organizations, there needs to be stronger working relationships developed between home and school to bridge the gap between parents and teachers helping students reach their fullest potential.

Educators have to attempt to bridge this gap in education to enable America's students to make a contribution to society and meet the challenges of the 21st century in order to compete in the global society.

Chapter III

Methodology

Patton (2002) states, “We cannot observe feeling, thoughts, and intentions” (p. 341). In this qualitative phenomenological research study, the researcher gives parents and teachers an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions of parental involvement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School. This was done through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and observations (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The informants became the experts and the researcher’s goal was to listen for the story, rather than listening to the story that gives meaning as it emerges from the data and the threads connect (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). When listening for a story, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) maintain “the researcher plays a more active listener role in the actor’s storytelling. Through the dialectic between interviewer and interviewee, voice as interpretation contributes to the determination of the direction and shape of actors’ responses” (p.120).

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011), “the researcher must understand essential issues of persuasiveness in qualitative research, including credibility, trustworthiness, and common validation strategies” (p. 14). The researcher was guided and mindful of the power of persuasion as the researcher and all participants completed a consent form and were assured responses are confidential and the researcher will be non-judgmental (Appendix A). The researcher shared her background and information about the study to establish trust and give the participants an opportunity to ask questions.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) outline the following steps for constructing emergent themes: (1) listen for repetitive refrains that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently, forming a collective expression of commonly held views; (2) listen for resonant metaphors, poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors illuminate and experience their realities; (3) listen for the themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals that seem to be important to organizational continuity and coherence; (4) use triangulation to weave together the threads of data converging from a variety of sources; and (5) construct themes and reveal patterns among perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors (p. 193).

To assist in answering the research questions, observation field notes were taken on the behavior of the parents and teachers, and the actions and activities at the research site. The research site became the observation laboratory to observe the relationship of the parents and teachers. Creswell (2009) states, “in field notes the researcher records in an unstructured or semi structured way activities at the research site” (p. 181). The researcher conducted several observations and used written notes to discover the themes that emerged from the data; these were used to assist in answering the research questions.

The research questions that frame this study are:

1. What are the parental involvement experience and perceptions of parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School (pseudonym)?
2. How do parents and teachers move from parent involvement to parent engagement?
3. How can my leadership support parental engagement at Louis Dos Santos Charter School?

The researcher focused on context, change, and leadership to address the research questions in this qualitative phenomenological research study. The researcher's personal journal was used as documentation to support the study through personal reflections of the entire study. The role of the researcher is critical, because the researcher "paints the contours and dimensions of the setting [putting her self in the context] and her presence must not be masked or silenced" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 50). The researcher "portraitist" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) is precise as regards the purpose for being at the research site, and notes her perspectives and views through an observer's lens, taking in the entire atmosphere including bulletin boards, paintings, posters, lighting, and colors in the room. This room then becomes the research laboratory where the observations and note taking will take form and unfold.

Research Site

Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School is a year-round urban school in a large metropolitan city. The average school population is 600 students from Pre-K to grade 11, with a 12th grade being added this year. The student composition is 90% African American with the remaining 10% White and Hispanic. The majority of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and the free and reduced lunch percentage is 91.8% (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). The school is organized into two buildings, grades Pre-K to 1 and grades 6 to 11 are in one building, and grades 2 through 5 are in another building.

Participants

The participants for this phenomenological study consisted of five teachers who are employed at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School and five parents of

children who are enrolled at the school. They represented a cross section of the school population. The teachers were of different cultural background, ages, and races with varied educational and employment backgrounds. Likewise, the parents had various occupational skills and educational levels. Renowned theorist, Kurt Lewin (1951), mentions the interview of certain persons is one of the most essential means of investigation (p. 165).

I used “purposeful sampling” (Maxwell, 1996) for this study to develop a reservoir of interviewees from the school community who represent diversity in age, educational background, race, gender, years taught, and years of experiences. Most parents and teachers were selected for this study based on their current parental involvement at the school, although the levels differed from parent to parent and teacher to teacher. Through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), I gained insight into the experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement. Patton (2002) states, “purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). Creswell (2007) states “participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher in the end can forge a common understanding” (p. 62).

Snowball sampling (Maxwell, 1996) took place once the interviewing process began to include additional vital data. Parents and teachers shared with other parents and teachers the importance and value of this study and recommended that they participate. Interviews were staggered between parents and teachers and were followed up by additional conversations after the initial interview. This approach was necessary in order

to follow-up and explores developing themes that emerged and to clarify ideas as the research unfolded. All interviews for parents and teachers lasted between one to two hours and were conducted in a familiar place of the participants' choice such as the school, home, or library. Interviews were open-ended and in-depth, focusing on the participants' perceptions and experiences of parental involvement.

The interview process gave parents and teachers an opportunity to express their experiences and perceptions concerning parental involvement at the school. Through their unfiltered discourse regarding experiences and perceptions, I heard authentic voices and listened to their stories. All participants who participated in the study were informed voluntary participants (Appendix A) and all information was kept confidential. There was no risk to participants and approval of the research methodology and interview protocols used were obtained through the Institutional Review Board of Rowan University prior to beginning the study. In addition, as the researcher, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training, which certifies my understanding of the rights of participants and ethical obligations of the researcher.

Data Collection

The data for this qualitative phenomenological study included written journal notes, observation notes, and audio taped interviews. The researcher invited participants to volunteer for an in-depth "face-to-face" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181) interview about their personal experiences and perceptions of Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School. The interview protocols (Appendices B and C) were "open ended," and "intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). In order to clarify ideas, probing was necessary to bring rich, thick ideas to the surface. Rubin and Rubin

(2005) state, “probes help you manage the conversation by regulating the length of answers and degree of details, clarifying unclear sentences or phrases, filling in missing steps and keeping the conversation on topic” (p. 164). The interviews were transcribed and were analyzed for common themes.

Data Analysis

The data from interviews, observations, and the researcher’s journal were analyzed, first by coding, and then by sorting the major themes and patterns that emerged. I used the “constant comparative method” as cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), “Glaser and Straus underscore the value of writing as a way to focus the analysis. The act of writing moves our thinking to a deeper level and connects field notes to conceptual ideas” (p. 189). The researcher’s laboratory for audiotape interviews was the school, the parents’ home, or library. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) mentions the importance of informants feeling comfortable and in familiar environments, adding, “He becomes the authority, more perceptive and expressive; he is free to be himself” (p. 42).

Observations were necessary in order to capture the full range of variations, meaning perspectives and connections that influenced this study (Erickson, 1990, p. 144). The researcher was deliberate in spending time in particular meetings and functions of the school, using observation to seek a better understanding of the participants’ perspectives and community context of the study. Erickson (1990) states “as the researcher focuses on a more restrictive range of events within the seeing, the researcher also begins to look for possible connection of influence between the setting and its surrounding environment” (p. 145).

Validity and Reliability

Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1972) define validity as “the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure” (p. 190). Ary et al. (1972) define reliability as “the extent to which a measuring device is consistent in measuring whatever it measures” (p.190). In order to guarantee the reliability of the findings, I used member checking, and triangulated the data gathered in interviews, observations, and researcher’s journal notes. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) state “member-checking is an approach in which the investigator takes summaries of the findings (e.g., case studies, major themes, theoretical model) back to key participants in the study and asks them whether the findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences” (p. 211). Triangulation between participant audiotape interviews, observations field notes, and my reflective journal supported the qualitative phenomenological research study to “reduce the treats to internal validity and external validity” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 211).

During the audio taped interviews, I used probing questions for clarification and to obtain a clearer understanding of what was indicated to confirm statements. I also took notes and listened for a story within the discourse of the interview. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) cautions it is very important to hear a story, but more important to listen for the story. When the researcher hears a story, she hears from her own perspective, but when the researcher listens for a story, she pictures the message in the raw voice in which it is intended, without interjecting any biased interpretation. Listening for themes “she [researcher] hears the harmony of their [informants’] voices” (p. 209).

In order to capture the true meaning of the phenomenon, only the perceptions of the parents and teachers, who lived through the experiences, were collected through the

data. Creswell (2007) points out “data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61). Creswell suggests “in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants [may be necessary]” in phenomenological studies.

Researcher’s Role

As the proud parent of three beautiful children, who has had experiences both positive and negative with several teachers and parents as we navigated our children through the educational system, I am very passionate about this topic. In addition, as an educator who has spent the majority of her adult life employed in educational institutions with parents, teachers, and administrator, my view of the phenomenon is from a wide and immense perspective. The lens I bring to this study is rich with appreciation, sympathy, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of both the parent and the teacher. By using qualitative research methods, according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), the researcher may “participate in the inquiry process as researcher, working from inside” (p. 41). Thus, the researcher is both a stakeholder and practitioner in the educational process.

As the researcher, however, I was cognizant of the role bias plays in this phenomenological study, and made every attempt not to embed personal data into the study. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) explain that to “embed qualitative data into an intervention experiment is the issue of introducing bias through the qualitative data collection that affects the experiment’s internal validity” (p. 193). As the interviewer, I encouraged informants to share their perceptions and experiences, limiting my input and understanding of the phenomenon, which allowed me to gather needed information (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) state before the researcher enters the study, she should complete “a self-reflective, self-critical exercise that increases her consciousness about the lens she brings to the field and allows her to open her eyes (as well as her mind and her heart) to record the reality she encounters” (p. 213). As the researcher, I was aware that “interpretive inquiry” and the “capacity for reflection” was critical (Piantanida & Garman, 2009, p. 60).

Taped interviews with parents and teachers were used as a method of inquiry to help support this phenomenological study in better understanding the complexity and dynamic life experiences of home and school relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The conceptual framework that undergirded this study was Joyce Epstein’s six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995). The framework for change through which this study examined ways to better support the future of parental involvement was derived from Fullan’s leadership model for change (Fullan, 2001).

Limitations

Erickson (1990) states “a major strength of participation observation is the opportunity to learn through active participation” (p.147). My role as a participant observer may have also created a limitation to the study as my ability to analyze data without bias, or reading into participants’ comments because of my familiarity with the research site, may have been influenced. Another limitation of this study was that only one school was used, and the parents and teachers were all from the same school. The findings do not represent all urban charter middle schools in the Northeast, therefore, cannot be generalizable to larger populations.

Chapter IV

Findings

Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out “when we are studying controversial issues, you want to obtain both sides” (p. 68). The perceptions and personal experiences of teachers and parents not only shape ideas, but provide a balanced view of parental involvement. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005) “interviewing both sides not only helps ensure balance but also ensures considerable depth, as people want to make sure you really understand their views” (p. 68). The key informants for this phenomenological study were parents, teachers, and the researcher who was an observer-as-participant. Shank (2002) implies the “key informant is a person who can give you an inside look into the culture you are studying” (p. 57). An observer-as-participant takes part in the study through observations, field notes, and feedback (Shank, 2002).

Field notes were central to the development of this study. Shank (2002) shares “field notes are just as much about your impressions and your observations as they are records of ‘who said what’” (p. 58). Documenting important events and dates were critical to the understanding and interpretation of data collected throughout the study. Nonverbal communication such as the tone of the informant’s voice, confidence displayed, uncertainty exhibited, passion for the phenomenon, and body language played a role in the impression and interpretation of field notes.

This chapter provides a contextual description, including stories of participants’ versions of personal experiences and/or perceptions of parents and teachers, regarding parental involvement and parental engagement. The verbatim interviews are personal

testimonies, which convey the participants' thoughts and opinions of what their perceptions and experiences were regarding parental involvement and parental engagement (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

This chapter “gives voice” in relation to the experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers in an urban elementary school regarding parental involvement and parental engagement. Giving voice allows the informants to speak in ways not heard previously, giving them an opportunity to share their expertise of the phenomenon. LeCompte (1993) shares “silenced individuals may in fact be quite vocal about their life situations among peers” (p. 10). The researcher has a huge responsibility as a participant observer. LeCompte (1993) shares “the initial job of the observer as participant is to define the powerlessness (within a specific context) of a group of individuals and then to identify members of that group whose story ‘begs to be told’” (p. 10).

The story is also told through the voice of the researcher, who acts as an interpreter in analyzing the data. Le Compete (1993) shares “the researcher’s task is to render the voices of the unheard in a language accessible both to them and to a wider and presumably more powerful audience” (p. 10). Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis (1997) share, “in the process of data collection, a story is reconstructed through interview-co-constructed by the interviewer’s listening and the interviewer’s telling” (p. 118). When listening for a story, the researcher questions framed the study by focusing on the areas of context, change, and leadership. The questions that specifically guided this study were:

1. What are the parental involvement experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School (pseudonym)?

2. How do parents and teachers move from parent involvement to parent engagement?
3. How can my leadership support parental engagement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School?

Key Themes

The interview questions generated a range of responses that provided thick and rich data. To code and analyze these data, I used the method of thematic analysis. Shank (2002) shares “...thematic analysis is about searching for patterns in data. When we find the data we have good reason to suppose that something systematic is creating that pattern” (p. 129). This is a process that requires incisive questioning, vigorous observations, piecing together data, and distinguishing the noteworthy data from the trivial data and verifying information.

Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method was used for feedback and refining the emergent themes. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) recognizes the method of emergent themes as “listening for repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors, exploring and discovering cultural and institutional rituals, triangulating data from a variety of sources and attending to dissonant threads” (p. 216). Through the thematic analysis I identified three key themes from the voices that emerged: communication - how parents and teachers communicate and the language that is used; respect/pride - levels of respect for one another; and collaboration/partnership - how work is accomplished together rather than in isolation.

Parent interview questions. Parents were asked the following six questions

during the individual interviews:

1. Do you perceive that there is a difference between parent involvement and parent engagement? Probing- Discuss your perceptions.
2. How are you involved? Describe your schools parental involvement? Probing- Are other parents engaged?
3. Discuss or describe how you are engaged in your child's learning? Probing- What are some of the benefits and difficulties related to parent involvement?
4. How do you send/receive information from teachers? Probing - Tell me how do you communicate with teachers?
5. Can you describe a particularly satisfactory exchange with a teacher about your child?
6. Can you tell me about a time that you were unhappy with a communication or how you received information from your child's school?

During the parent interviews, the emerging theme communication was mentioned 69 times. The emerging theme respect/pride was mentioned 21 times by parents, and the emerging theme collaboration/partnership was mentioned 60 times by parents responding to the interview questions. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of parental responses across the three key themes.

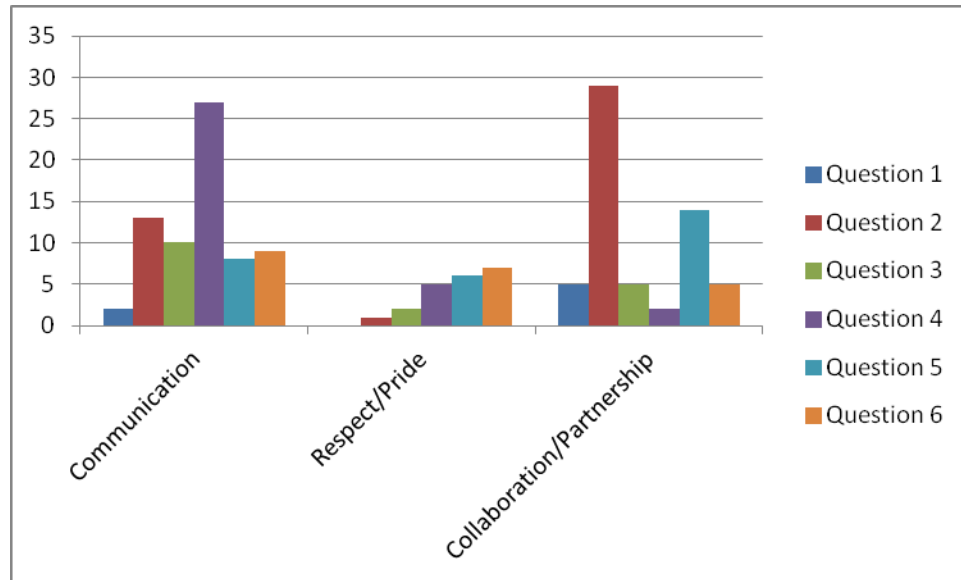


Figure 2. Graph Representing Parent Responses Organized by Theme

The parents were usually the recipients of multiple teacher communications, therefore, parents spoke about receiving information and responding to it. Respect/pride emerged as themes 21 times. Interesting to note, parents spoke about respect/pride more in response to the questions about a time that they were unhappy with a communication or how they received information from their child’s school. Collaboration/partnership emerged as a theme primarily when parents described their involvement with the school.

Teacher interview questions. Teachers were asked the following four questions during the individual interviews:

1. Can you tell me the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement?
2. Describe how you are involved with parents at your school? Probe- Give me some specific examples?
3. Tell me; are there challenges or difficulties in making a connection with parents at your school? Probe- Thinking of a specific situation, how did you resolve it?

4. Can you illustrate some suggestions of how the school can be more effective in bridging the gap between parents and the school?

During the teacher interviews, the emerging theme communication was mentioned 128 times. The emerging theme respect/pride was mentioned 12 times, and the emerging theme collaboration/partnership was mentioned 35 times by teachers responding to the interview questions. These responses are graphically represented in Figure 3.

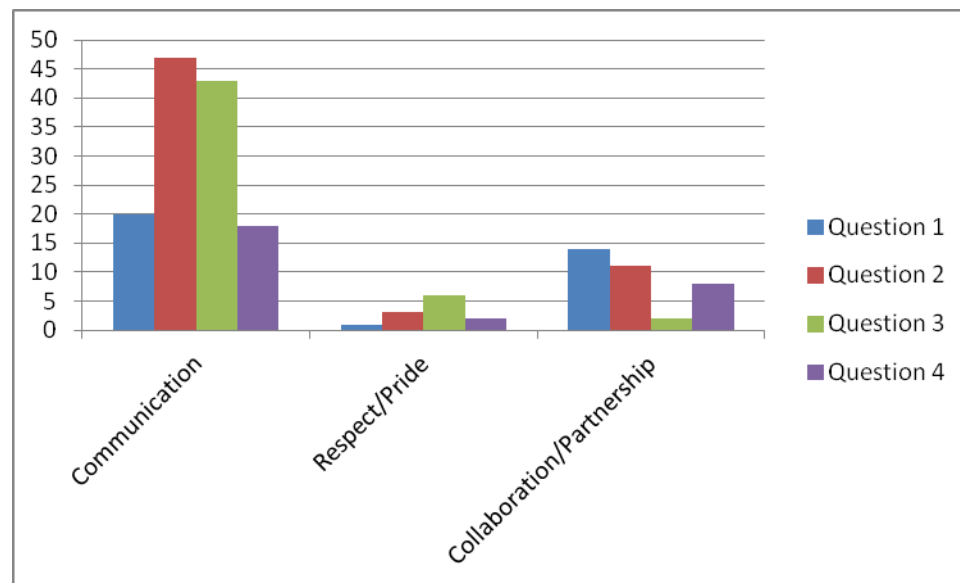


Figure 3. Graph Representing Teacher Responses Organized by Theme

The data suggest that the three themes of communication, respect/pride, and collaboration/partnership are important to both parents and teachers. A closer look at the data, however, offers some clarity regarding how these themes can be interpreted in different ways.

Teachers thought the role communication played in their relationship with parents was twice more important than did the parents. It was apparent that teachers' methods of communication were multiple and varied. Teachers described sending emails, texts,

notes, newsletters, and agenda books. Most of the communication was sent by the teacher to the parents. Teachers then assumed that by communicating with parents, a partnership was formed. However, the parents viewed these methods of communication as communication of information only, and generally in one direction. The teachers viewed parent participation in response to teacher communication as collaboration and partnership. The parents viewed partnership and collaboration as having a role in the decision-making for their children.

Parents thought respect weighed higher in their relationship than teachers thought. Teachers felt that their interactions with parents indicated a level of respect for the parents' diverse backgrounds, education, and culture. Whereas, the parents felt a certain disconnect with the teachers on this level.

Parents saw about twice the need to collaborate and partner with teachers than did teachers. The parents felt that, for the most part, they were not involved in decision-making or problem solving at the school level, although some parents felt they were involved with decision-making for their children.

Home school communication. This study gathered information and knowledge of parents' and teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding parental involvement. During the interviews the themes of communication emerged several times. Communication regarding how parents and teachers communicate and the language that is used was mentioned by various respondents. Epstein et al. (2002), Lawrence Lightfoot (2003) and Henderson et al. (2007), share communication is essential for parent involvement and parent engagement. Communication can take many forms whether by regular mail, email, agenda book, text, Skype, phone, or face-to-face.

Flora, a White, married mother in her early 30's is proud of her own educational accomplishments, having completed her associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. During the interviews she spoke of the positive experience she has had with communication at this new school. However, this has not always been the case. She expressed the following:

Teachers give lots of feedback through communication. There are times where I receive information in the mail. But the majority of the time it is verbal communication. We see each other [parent and teacher] when need be. If it is not something urgent that needs to be handled right at that moment. I will write a letter. I will send a note in with him [son]. If it is something that is urgent I will come to the school if need be and request to speak to the teacher right at that moment. If for whatever reason, the teacher, is not available, I will leave a message at the front office. The teacher has exchanged numbers with us, so I will call on her cell phone or text a message letting her know what is happening. Texting is a big thing and communication at the school is a big plus and I am happy about it.

When teachers and parents communicate regarding students they allows for the development of trust and a mutual understanding of each others' point of view (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Whoever makes the first phone call opens up lines of communication that could develop a partnership with better understanding and the ability to take a solution focused approach to situations. Parent teacher conferences can also create positive planning for specific strategies to assist student in being successful in the school. The availability of more advanced technologies, such as voice mail, school websites, and email, cuts down on the excuses that impede communication.

In some cases there are conflicts between parents and teachers in communication. While conflicts may not be desired they can be healthy if adults are able to dialogue and attack the issue and not the person through conflict resolution. Bunchie is a 2nd grade parent who has put another child on the waiting list to attend this school next year. She usually has glowing reports about the school, but had a situation that she explains:

This summer my money was tight. We purchased a bunch of things for school that we thought was really necessary to later find out she [my daughter] did not need the items. I waited two week before I contacted the teacher but also she should have reached out to the new class [since she had my email] and share her list of required material. Needless to say, when I did speak with the teacher I discovered I had the wrong list. I had used the list sent out the last day of school for the previous year and my daughter's teacher had changed. The new teacher mailed out the new list and we moved at the end of the year. My plan was to give the school my new address the first week of school.

One of the best ways to avoid misunderstandings with parents is to have ongoing, clear lines of communication from the beginning. If the parent had given the school her new address when she moved she would have gotten the new list. Similarly, if the school had double checked all addresses and requested that parents forward changes of addresses during the summer to assure the delivery of information for the upcoming school year, the parent would have gotten the new list. Keeping parents abreast of what is going on helps them feel like they are part of a team. This sense of teamwork mushrooms into support and understanding for both parties.

Clear communication will cut down on negative speculations and rumors that could be prevented. The ongoing dialogue can help both parent and teacher develop strategies together to benefit the student. Having clear times and a schedule could cut down on parents' and teachers' time conflicts because parents will not have to compete with other parents catching teachers in the parking lot or during their lunch hour (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Communication between home and school encourages the teacher to know the student better and the parent to know the teacher better, which in turn aids the family and the teacher being more effective with the students.

Teacher Kim, a fashionable Afro-American married female in her late 20's who has been affiliated with the school and its outreach community programs for four years,

is currently teaching 4th grade and is involved in the looping process at the school. She mentions the following:

The looping process allows my students and me to stay together for two consecutive years. The advantage is I get to know the strengths and weaknesses of my student and as a result of our two-year experience we understand how we both operate. I know which parents to make a personal call home to, which to text and which prefers hand written notes to get the message to them. As part of our duties and responsibilities at school, we are required to make phone calls home on a weekly basis with updates about positive and need improvement areas for the scholars. We have a wonderful communication system and parents are welcome to talk with us on many occasions before and after school. Many of my working parents prefer texting and email. So, I am able to email flyers and notices to them and reminders about trips and school closing.

Looping is a practice in which a teacher stays with a class for more than one year and it has some advantages on home school relationships (Nichols, 2002). One of the gains that are afforded both parents and teacher is the fact that they have established a working relationship and know the best ways to communicate, understand each others' style, and can provide a more comprehensive assessment of the student. Both parties are more comfortable as a result of this extended contact, building trust and respect for one another.

Importance of respect. When one thinks of respect one thinks of a homage owed to an older person as a result of an inherent position, age, gender, class, accomplishments, or professional status. Respect often implies or requires expressions of high esteem or in some cases submission. Such was the case of respect that the researcher observed at the parent meetings and parent gathering. The meetings usually started with permission by the nodding of the head or verbally asking the oldest person for permission to begin the meeting. This is a respected honor bestowed upon the oldest person, giving honor to their wisdom. I was delighted at one meeting when I was bestowed the honor based on my

wisdom. This is done at the end of the meetings as well.

However, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) states, “I focus on the way respect creates symmetry, empathy and connection in all kinds of relationships” (p. 9-10). In many situations respect is seen as unequal in the relationships of teachers and parents. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) makes one wonder what does respect look like? What does it feel like? Can it grow, be nurtured, or develop into a wonderful relationship? Can it even be sustained? Such was the case at Louise Dos Santos Elementary Charter School when older women were given honor and called Mama, and older man Brother, younger females were called Sister, and younger males Babu. The researcher could hear the respect in their voices by the tones, smiles, and humble positions taken when speaking with one another. Respect became the order of the day. This kind of respect honors one’s age, which represents wisdom, and then perhaps the person as a knowledge bearer.

In this study the researcher was able to observe how parents were able to be respected and respectful through parental involvement that could lead to parent engagement when the teachers respected the parents’ points of view and allowed them to partner in making some decisions. For example, at the parent meeting, where the workshop topic was strategies to help your child read more; parents and teachers got an opportunity to share their stories about the experiences they had with motivating their students to read. Both listened to each other and made recommendations about strategies that could be used to get students to read more. The consensus was to make reading fun and not a chore. When everyone reads together at the same time on a consistent basis, it then becomes a part of the nightly routine as opposed to unwanted chores. Each group respected the opinion of the other group by listening to the challenges and struggles they

were both experiencing. They guided each other by making useable strategies and suggestions that could be used at home and at school without injuring the personal integrity of the other person.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) shares there are “six windows on respect – empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect and attention – each one reveals a different angle of vision, each one illuminates different experiences” (p. 13). Janet, an African American 4th grade teacher in her late 30’s, who has taught at the school for 4 years, shares a situation in which she came to respect the parents’ needs. She was having a problem getting in contact with a parent. She shares the following:

Okay, so once I called the parent and I was calling- I call, like I said weekly, 15 parents. So in a month I touch both to the parent of my student two times in one month for everybody. So one parent I was calling, and when I got her she seemed a little agitated each time that we spoke. And then I had to ask her if it bothered her that I called. Because this was just something that I wanted to do in touching bases and let her know how her scholar was doing in school. She was able to tell me that she works at night and that during the day was really her sleep time. So, no, I was not really bothering her in touching base with her about her student but it did kind of interrupt her sleep time. I was able to make a different plan for her. So I would not call her after school. I may call her at night from home.

However, through communicating with the parent the teacher was better able to understand the situation, respect the parent’s needs and make the necessary adjustments to keep the parent abreast of the progress her child was making. This also is an example of a healing through dialogue; the teacher was feeling this parent was being difficult with her, not interested in her child's progress in school and basically not an involved parent. The parent was expressing anxiety because she needed her rest before going back to work and that was her sleep time. This became a healing process. A potentially fractured relationship was healed by both parent and teacher sharing information that could have led to a very strained relationship. Both parties began a healing process that enabled them

to understand and respect each other and work out a solution of mutual respect and benefit.

Starkey and Klein (2000) share parent teacher partnerships work well when they respect the needs of the families. By addressing some of the barriers to attending the parent meetings at Louise Dos Santos Elementary Charter School, the needs of the parents were met. The researcher observed at the Parent Meeting that childcare was provided and a dinner was served. This enabled the parents to attend the meeting and feed their children. While the parents were meeting with the staff, the younger children were working on their homework with high school students in another part of the building. The school respected the fact that parents needed childcare and partnered with them by providing this service. When the meeting was over the children and parents came together and shared the meal together.

Another way the school respected the needs of parents was to offer an after school program, which extends the day until 4:15 p.m. in order to assist working parents with positive constructive childcare. The after school programs were offered to all families and there was no cost for students to participate. Teachers and staff members supervised students while they worked on community learning projects, science projects, and homework. The researcher observed parents picking up their children and scholars saying “Mom, I finished my homework so all I have to do now is my reading.” This was a great help to a working parent who could go home and focus on dinner and preparing for the challenges of the next day.

As I listened to the voices, I heard curiosity and respect for another culture when Teacher Kim could not get through to the parent of one of her scholars. Her concern for a

student's academic progress prompts her to go beyond the call of duty to reach a parent.

Kim shares:

I had a hard time getting in contact with a parent. I went down the entire emergency list, asked other students and students if my student had any siblings or relatives who attended the school. The responds I got was no. So I went by the house one day after school and discovered the phone did not work and had been cut off and all the adults, (aunts and uncles) in the house spoke Spanish. I went back to the school and made arrangement through the Principal to take a Spanish speaking staff member to the house and we were able to communicate with the parent.

Respect though communication is critical for both parents and teachers to understand each other's viewpoints. Respecting each position as important and valued causes the parent and teacher to trust each other: knowing that ideas are listened to, shared, and considered.

Henderson et al. (2007) suggest invitations to come to school be made clear in several languages so all family members feel welcome. An important cultural difference is the way people perceive participating in events and meeting. "Welcome should be addressed to the whole family, including young children, aunts, nephews, grandparents, cousins, and close friends and neighbors who act like family members" (p. 117). Respect, like communication, goes both ways. Respecting parents' culture and communicating in their language is important to establish a relationship and build trust. By trusting one another ideas are shared and considered. This trust leads to a collaborative partnership with all stakeholders, bringing their problem-solving skills to the decision-making process (Epstein et al. 2002).

Collaboration/partnership. Henderson et al. (2007) argue "partnership requires sharing power" (p. 188). Sharing power does not mean that everyone works individually or in isolation, but rather works together by communicating, brainstorming ideas, and

listening to each other's voice, working in harmony for the same goal. Louise Dos Santos Elementary School's parent group is working toward a collaboration/partnership. The group is not affiliated with the National PTA and uses its resources and voice locally. Olson (2009) states, everyone does not participate on all levels. In some cases teachers may exercise primary responsibility over an area that they are experts in such as curriculum. However, parent and teacher may have a shared role in soliciting input, involving all stakeholders' ideas, making decisions, and evaluating the success of a project. When everyone takes a role, power is shared and all are empowered by the experience. Everyone gets to learn from each other, thus becoming a growing and developing experience for all parties. Such was the case as shared by Teacher Robert:

So we are talking about having Math Nights where instead of coming and getting information, parents would come and we would have some Math Centers or activities setup that the parents could do with their kids, handouts that they could take back with them and things like that. Just like doing math with their kids. And it just kind of all three of us the student the parents and the teachers we are just doing school together. There is no longer this arbitrary divide between home and school life. It was just like, well, the adults in my life read and I read too kind of a thing. Where it like expanded notation is not just something that my teacher talks about when I sit in a desk. I was doing it with my teacher and my Mom and my Dad was talking about how she stretches out numbers when she is balancing her checkbook and those kinds of things.

Parent and teacher work together, embrace the curriculum, and partner together to develop ways to include math and reinforce learning at home. Clearly the voices indicate that teachers should see families as partners, not as clients. All partners must have a voice and must be heard in order to elaborate on the issues of concerns.

Teacher Janet expressed the experience she had with collaborating and partnering with a parent on a field trip:

I had some parents go on the trip with us this year. I am a 4th grade teacher and in the 4th grade you study your state. So our state is Pennsylvania and in studying the

state, we study the history of Pennsylvania and we study the Underground Railroad. Our last trip of the end of the year, we take a trip to one of the Underground Railroad sites. We go to Bethel AME Church in Lancaster and we actually go through what is called the Living Experience. So we actually experience what the slaves experience as they came to freedom or as they were pushing their way. So what happens is one of the parents actually asked to play one of the slaves. She put on the costume and had a skit to play. You are in the church and you are listening to testimonies of other slaves and how they escaped and then you have to share yours. And before you know it this is a life changing experience you know it. This parent was from Jamaica so she not only tells her story but it is with a Jamaican accent. It become real, live and powerful. You feel so blessed to be in the moment. The parent on the way back begins to tell student more about her life in Jamaica thus another history lesson takes place by another educational resource - the parent.

This sharing of knowledge helps build partnership and strong educational bridges to educate the students and parents. Families feel good that they are sharing and making a contribution to the educational process. The sharing of knowledge also leads to parents' opinions being sought out and eventually becoming equal partners in the decision-making process for their child's education and school level decisions.

Personal Journal

As I reflected on my journal entries, I saw communication through the artifacts that surrounded the building. Shank (2002) shares that artifacts tell a story through unwritten words that are represented by the materials used and the cultural presentation that stirs up emotions and spiritual feelings (p. 140). Communication was also visible on the beautiful bulletin boards about upcoming events and student work, which gave their pride a boost to have their work displayed. Also, the hallways were like an art gallery in a museum, where students' drawings and artwork could be seen by passersby. There were also quilts hanging that told stories with various themes, creating a warm loving environment of communication, respect/pride and collaboration/partnership.

I saw and heard aspects of respect that emerged during parent teacher meetings, when songs such as “Respect” by Aretha Franklin were played while parents and teachers waited for the meeting to begin. Everyone was patting their feet or singing along with the music as if to agree all we need is a little respect. Also, when they played the song "We Are Family” and groups of parents and teachers were nodding their heads in time to the beat, seemed to say we are in this together.

Social and economic diversity brings great resources and opportunities to schools and can bring challenges, misunderstanding, and conflict especially in the area of communication. All involved have an opportunity to learn about other cultures and customs, however, it is important to communicate and be sensitive to the level of understanding of parents. This was shown several times by the staff and student body that was made up of several culture, age groups, and races. Efforts were made to include parents in class projects, harambee (a Swahili word meaning, “all pull together” that is the name for group assemblies), and intergenerational opportunities where students learn from their elders while also teaching them.

Voices Heard

In many cases the interviews continued after the tape recorder was turned off. Many conversations took place in the parking lot, after the interview, in the hallway, and over the phone. It seemed people felt a sense of obligation to tell me what was really on their hearts and in their soul.

Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter presents a more in-depth analysis and discussion of each research question. This phenomenological study was designed to examine the experiences and perceptions of parents' and teachers' school-home relationships and explore how they could move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Stories were told through face-to-face interviews of parents and teachers, observations, and journal entries. The common thread that blended these stories together gave voice to the following themes: communication, respect/pride, and collaboration/partnership. The essential data gathered in numerous interviews, observations, journal reflections, and conversations with parents and teachers provided insightful and meaningful information about the experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers in an urban elementary middle school.

The findings in this study suggest that communication is extremely important regardless of the form that is used in building relationships. The interviews with five teachers and five parents regarding parental involvement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School provided the data to answer my research questions. My research questions framed the study by focusing on the areas of context, change, and leadership.

Research Questions Answered

Question 1. What are the parental involvement experiences and perceptions of parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School (pseudonym)? The answer to the question established that although the parents and

teachers shared experiences, each came away with different perceptions of those experiences. Teachers referenced various methods of communication twice as often as parents. The perceptions appear to be that the teachers felt communication was very important and parents less so. Conversely, the other themes that emerged, respect/pride and collaboration/partnership, were referenced by parents twice as often as teachers. It appears that teachers viewed the home/school connection through communication, while parents wanted collaboration/partnership and respect/pride. Delpit (2006) shares, “one of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power” (p. 66).

Parents also saw their involvement through homework, chaperoning trips, class room helpers, afterschool helpers, volunteers in the school yard, donations to the school, volunteering in the office, attendance at parent meetings, and especially twice a year parent teacher conferences as involvement. These encounters between home and school do not engage the parent and teacher in meaningful dialogue regarding student achievement or give enough time for parental concerns. The value that parents place on the traditional twice-yearly parent-teacher conference may be ill advised. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) posits,

The traditional two parent-teacher conferences each year is nowhere near enough time for teachers and parents to stay in touch or communicate with one another productively. More time and more frequent contacts would, of course, require a major shift in the value that schools place on parental engagement (p. 237).

Some parents participated in classroom activities and shared with the students their expertise or knowledge on a particular subject. These activities presented parents in

positions that portrayed them as having an equality of knowledge on par with the teacher. Parents shared that going to school teaching a lesson bolstered their self-worth. Parents and teachers mentioned diverse levels of involvement, which help enhance a child's self-esteem and learning. Parents need options for participation due to work schedule, abilities [skill level], and hectic life styles. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) point out that research has shown the most rewarding types of parental involvement are those that offer an array of roles and responsibilities in the context of the organization. Giving parents a choice as to how they participate allows them to establish a level of comfort, develop a working rapport with the school, and build a long lasting relationship.

Parent Nicole shares her parental experience at Louise Dos Santos Charter

Elementary School:

Well, with my 12th grader, they have been on several trips, international trips. One she's been to Ecuador, and the second trip, which a group of them went to the Dominican Republic. Well, myself and the parents got together and we hosted a dinner for the kids. And it was really, really nice. And myself personally, I made T-shirts up for the children that were going and so that was a great experience. It was just all about the parents and the student and the teachers. But the parents really came together and it was really, really, nice. We had it at Harambee Hall. Myself and a few other parents decorated Harambee Hall in the colors of the Dominican Republic and we had balloons, the tablecloths. And we cooked the food. The Principal came and it was really, really, really nice. No parents went on the trip as chaperones. They had enough with the teachers.

When my youngest daughter was in kindergarten I kind of well, I did not kind of- I donated an aquarium to that classroom, just so they could have a class pet. And I came in and I took care of them, you know, with the fish food. I explained to the kids the different kinds off is hand helped the teacher, all that. Took care of the plants and things like that. With my middle daughter, I would sit after school. She had afterschool club. And so I would sit there and help with the teacher and help her with her homework, class work assignments and things. Doing the homework in the homework club with the teacher help me to ask questions if we did not understand something.

Lots of parents do not get involved at the school maybe because of their work. Maybe they just really do not have the time for their children. But I'm just going to say maybe there is a work conflict.

More pointedly, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler in their 1997 literature review theorized that one of the ways parents decide to become involved comes from “general invitations, demands and opportunities for family involvement.” They examined the question “do the parents perceive that the child and the school want and are interested in their involvement?” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 44). Teacher Judy shares how she invites parents to participate in school trips and other activities and encourages students to remind parents about helping at school:

I send home a list in the beginning of the year of suggested opportunities for parents to participate in which includes, fundraisers, classroom help, making phone call reminders for parents, chaperoning a trip and ask parents to pick three things they thing they can do. I also include help with homework, read with my child at home and attend parent meeting. Usually a blank line is left for parents to include ways they want to get involved. Students get extra points if their parent attends parent meeting. This helps with parent involvement and I have found students like seeing that their parents will be participating in their education.

Creating new spaces for conversation and communication can benefit parents and teachers while providing unique experiences and improving perceptions of the school. Regular communication between parents and teachers reinforces the importance of the school and family connection. Lawrence- Lightfoot (2003) posits, “meeting more often with parents allows more time to sway stories, share information, problem solve, and suggest remedies...teachers develop alternative ways of communicating with parents about the progress of their child and about the classroom curriculum” (p. 237).

Question 2. How do parents and teachers move from parent involvement to parent engagement? This study found 100% agreement among teachers that there is a difference between parental involvement and parental engagement. All of the teachers in the study had a clear understanding of what they wanted to experience with parents. However, only 20% of the parents recognized there is a difference between parental

involvement and parental engagement. While 80% of the parents indicated there was no difference. These findings suggest there is a huge amount of work that has to be done to put both parents and teachers on the same page. In order to bridge the gap of understanding of these phenomena, strategies must be developed and opportunities for understanding must be established.

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) argues a lack of planning and mutual understanding concerning parent involvement from both the parents' and teachers' perspectives are two of the barriers that affect the movement from parental involvement to parental engagement. Planning, designing, and working together on an issue enable parents and teachers to build a relationship in which teachers and parents can be open minded to listen and understand each other's ideas. As mentioned by Teacher Joy there are examples where this takes place.

At Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School parents, teachers, administrators, student representatives, and community representatives meet monthly as a School Council to plan, organize and discuss better ways of improving the school and developing stronger relationships with parents. Safety, curriculum, student retention, new programs, and general issues and concerns are also discussed. However there is lots of discussion on more parent involvement. At this school we try and encourage parents from the beginning how important it is to model reading behavior and to read with their children.

Moving parents and teachers along the continuum from involvement to engagement begins with communication. Epstein et al. (2002) posits, to have effective communication, clear, two-way channels of communication must be established between home to school and from school to home (p. 179). Other factors must also be considered. The quality of major communication must be analyzed and revised; report cards, newsletters, schedules, and conferences. Barriers to communication should be identified and considered. Language, disabilities, and educational level are all potential barriers to

communication. Frequency, readability, and clarity of all school communication are other factors to consider (p. 185).

Looping is a staffing strategy that removes barriers to communication (Nichols, 2002). Through looping, avenues of communication are established and nurtured for two years, enabling parents and teachers to understand and know each other for a longer period of time and allowing the shift from parental involvement to parental engagement to take place. Nichols (2002) implies as a result of looping, parents are more comfortable with the teacher and school. Consequently, they are more involved in the decision-making and in sharing ideas about the education of their child. Parents feel students are safe because they have known the teacher for more than one year and tend to allow students to take trips that may allow students to travel over night. This relationship and bond that teachers and families form can be rewarding for everyone, especially the child who forms a tighter bond with the teacher.

Simel (1998) implies there are some down sides to looping. While some students have the advantage of knowing the teacher and classmates for two years, new students do not have this opportunity. Many students have already formed their circle of friends and it may be difficult for a new comer to become part of a group. The new parent has to get acquainted quickly and play catch up to the norms of the class that have been established and in many cases perfected by teacher and parents, especially in the area of communication and respect.

Mutual respect is another key factor in moving teachers and parents along the continuum from involvement to engagement. Henderson and Mapp (2002) mention Delores Pena's 2000 study regarding parent involvement. Pena stresses the importance of

trust and getting information to the parents on a level they can understand. Additionally, parents offered suggestions for improving parent involvement and several of these suggestions centered on respect. Henderson and Mapp (2002), for example, posit, "make the parents feel more welcomed: change the attitudes of school staff; consider the educational level, language, culture and home situations of parents; and take parents' interests and needs into considerations when planning activities" (p. 45-46).

Capacity/community building. The data from the study did not glean much information regarding the area of community building/capacity building [utilizing all the resources of the community; banks, hospitals, churches, community centers; and parents skills, knowledge, and contacts to network with one another], which is the foundation of parental engagement. The literature review strongly suggested and the data hinted to a connection between parental engagement and capacity/community building. Henderson et al. (2007) share,

Schools are important in a community and if schools and community work together they could address some of the issues in the community and needs of the school. Reading Programs, tutoring and use of facilities could be made available for both community and school. (pp. 208-209)

While the study designed questions to illicit data regarding this important concept of parental engagement, community building/capacity building did not emerge as a theme. This seems to indicate that one of the barriers of movement from parental involvement to parental engagement is the force that drives parental engagement, which is community capacity building.

The school has great potential and has all the components to move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Community capacity building was only mentioned

once by a parent and four times by teachers. They have the ability to build community capacity as illustrated by Teacher Janet in the school garden project. She explains:

The garden project was started as a class project and we got parents involved. At my school I am one of the teachers who put together a community garden. We surveyed the community for fresh vegetables and as a result the garden idea was born. One of the parents who come did lessons on gardening and talked about the different kinds of vegetables explaining roots and making connections to plants. She took them outside and instructed them on how to working the soil. She even identified the insects one would find in the dirt. She talked about the watering process and how to care for the garden. She also taught them how to pull the vegetables off the stem without damaging the plants. She is our expert. She was a jewel. A community organization donated the fruit trees and helped with the harvesting of the produce.

This project could have been an opportunity to develop a stronger partnership with the community, parents, and school. A science unit on plant life could be developed through a collaboration/partnership with parent and teacher; a nutrition unit could be developed with parent and nurse; and partnerships could be forged with community businesses to donate equipment and supplies.

In addition, Louise Dos Santos Elementary school has wonderful global initiatives with service projects in various countries, including a school that has been adopted in an African country. Parents and teachers might be encouraged to nurture and develop this kind of relationship with the community to help build a stronger partnership between the school and the community. Flemmings (2011) states a community assessment is essential to analyze the needs, resources and potential for capacity building with a given community. This would allow for the possibility of establishing sustainable and effective collaborations with churches and other civic and community organizations (p. 76).

Building capacity is essential to move from parental involvement to parental engagement. Community capacity building is the foundation of parental engagement

because it encompasses communication, respect, collaboration, and partnership; partnership not only with parents and teacher, but with the community. Capacity building refers to investment in people, institutions that will work together in order to achieve a goal. McGinty (2002) shares, “capacity development is the process by which individuals, organizations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives” (p. 2).

In order to build capacity, all the resources of the community such as banks, hospitals, churches, community centers, parents’ skills, knowledge, and contacts must network with one another. Shockley and Cleveland (2011) share, institution building involves creating the necessary community environment that allows for the development of the attitudes necessary to make progress and change in the community for growth. Community capacity building is the foundation of parental engagement because it encompasses communication, respect, collaboration, and partnership. Partnership is not only between parents and teacher, but also embraces the community.

Role of the guidance counselor. The role of the school guidance counselor was missing in this study. Not once did the parents or teachers mention how the counselor plays an instrumental role in bringing parents, students, teachers, and community together. Counselors are certified, specially trained in several areas, and focus on prevention and wellness through guidance programs meeting the needs of the school, home, and community. In addition to their many counseling duties and responsibilities, counselors also advocate, coordinate, consult, lead meetings, and collaborate with staff and community on all levels to help students in reaching success. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) posits, “most advocates for school-family-community (SFC) partnerships believe

that school counselors, if involved in SFC partnerships, may better meet the personal, social, academic, and career needs of larger numbers of students” (p. 66).

The school counselor makes referrals to community agencies, hospitals, and local organizations to help students and families in crisis as a routine part of the job. Melton (2007) explains,

Parents contact school counselor to help their child with a variety of issues, such as academics, new school registration, orientations and transition, test interpretation and special needs. Parents often have obstacles to overcome such as culture, languages, and their own bad experiences in school a lack of understanding or feeling intimidated. (p. 2)

The school counselor is an important resource that goes untapped in many schools, often underutilized, especially in leadership roles such as connecting schools, families, and communities (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). At Louise Dos Santos Elementary Charter School there is no official guidance counselor. However, the students are not neglected for the services that are rendered by guidance counselors in public schools. The administration has made sure that the duties of a counselor are divided among the staff. Deans, lead teachers, teachers, nurse, and administrators all work in coordination to make sure the needs of the students are met and they are not neglected.

Question 3. How can my leadership support parental engagement at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School? As an observer-participant, parent, and life-long educator, my interactions, conversations, and interviews proved to be a powerful educational experience. Listening to the stories of the teachers and parents in this study enhanced my leadership capacity. Goldman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) refer to two types of leadership: resonance and dissonance (p. 19). Resonant leadership “reinforces synchrony just as much as enthusiasm does, because it leaves people feeling understood

and cared for” (p. 20). While listening to the stories of the parents and teachers at Louise Dos Santos Charter School, I could relate to them and understood how they felt. I got the sense that they understood I cared about what they were saying. Northouse (2009) posits “listening is both a simple and complex process that demands concentration, open mindedness, and tolerance” (p. 129). As I heard the stories I remained focused on their ideas, attitudes, and feelings showing no bias to allow the parents and teachers to express their viewpoints.

Caring. Caring is crucial to developing trusting and respectful relationships. Caring how other people feel and being empathic with a situation is important for building lasting relationships. Goldman (1997) posits “the key to intuiting another’s feelings is in the ability to read nonverbal channels: tone of voice, gesture, facial expressions, and the like” (p. 96). As a leader I am watchful of the expressions and gestures made by people and have the ability to read nonverbal channels. This skill has been useful in understanding parents and teachers concerns about an issue. Individuals need to feel someone cares and is compassionate about their situation. In order to enable people to feel comfortable in building successful relationships, a tone must be set. Northouse (2009) posits “setting the tone demands that a leader provide structure, clarify norms, build cohesiveness, and promote standards of excellence” (p.105).

Fluker (2009) suggests “compassion at the level of character demands careful attention to and practice of integrity, empathy, and hope as defining virtues” (p. 149). As a leader I display the character of caring in many ways, especially through my compassion for parents and teachers. I am able to look through my lens and try to understand how others are feeling, realizing there is a bond connecting their stories with

my own. Whatever happens in their life could have an impact on my life. Fluker (2009) shares “demonstrating compassion for the self begins with an understanding that my character is interrelated both in my own personal stories and to the stories of others” (p. 147).

Relationship building. Henderson and Mapp (2002) share, “genuine collaborations among school staff, parents, and community members must start with building relationships of respect. The building of relationships must be intentional and consistent” (p. 27). Henderson and Mapp (2002) indicate that in study after study the recurring theme of relationships are key (p. 66). One of the ways that I have developed relationships with individuals is by exercising emotional intelligence. Goldman et al. (2002) posit, “emotional intelligence is how leaders handle themselves and their relationships” (p. 6). I think about the strengths and weaknesses of a situation before making a decision. I understand the power of emotions, thus I am careful of the tone and emotion used when expressing ideas. I am aware that as a leader I am a role model and people look to me for direction. Northouse (2009) posits “a leader with emotional intelligence listens to his or her own feelings and the feelings of others, and is adept at regulating these emotions in service of the common good” (p. 71).

Democratic leader. A democratic leader seeks the opinions of others in the organization and delegates authority. Northouse (2009) posits “democratic leaders treat subordinates as fully capable of doing work on their own. Democratic leaders work with subordinates, trying hard to treat everyone fairly, without putting themselves above subordinates” (p. 41). As a democratic leader, I no longer feel I am the only person that can complete every task. I have learned to allow others to display their talents while

giving them guidance and direction. I must be conscious of my role at all times and know that credibility, trust, and respect are characteristics that must be exercised at all times.

Visionary leader. As a visionary leader (Goldman et al., 2002) I have learned it is important to mentor and coach others. Goldman et al. share “visionary leaders help people to see how their work fits into the big picture, lending people a clear sense not just that what they do matters, but also why” (p. 56). I have conversations with parents and teachers sharing strategies that could benefit the partnership between parents and teachers. I communicate the vital role they play in their child’s education and the positive outcomes of parental participation. Northouse (2009) posits “a leader must communicate the vision by adapting the vision to his or her audience. A leader also needs to *highlight the values* of the vision by emphasizing how the vision presents ideals worth pursuing” (p. 91). When parents and teachers have buy-in and grasp the importance of this relationship they begin to collaborate, plan, and implement strategies that benefit students.

Listening to the stories. Schawbel (2012) shares, storytelling is a powerful leadership tool and has been used by several CEOs; having this skill made them effective leaders. He indicates story telling is powerful because it is “inspiring the organization, setting a vision, teaching important lessons, defining culture and values, and explaining who you are and what you believe” (p. 2). Through this study I learned that I had a leadership skill that I have used for years as a result of my educational training as a guidance counselor. The training that I have had in listening skills has made me a better leader. Listening to their stories I can assist parents and teachers identify common goals and develop listening skills that foster two-way positive communication.

In addition, as pointed out by Holcomb-McCoy (2007), “it is believed that school counselors have the necessary skills (e.g., consultation, collaboration) to carry out the tasks related to promoting, developing, and implementing SFC partnerships” (p. 66-67). As a leader, I understand leadership must be shared with schools, families and the community to encourage a working relationship.

Servant leader. I am a servant leader with skills in listening, awareness, persuasion, and building community. As a servant leader, I put the needs of others first, trying to bring out the very best in people (Greenleaf, 1995). My reward is helping others be successful and helping people reach their fullest potential. It is important to meet the needs of the parents and teachers first and help them to understand they are a priority.

An aspect of being a servant leader is bringing hope to an organization. Fluker (2009) defines “hope as genuine anticipation of the future” (p. 77). As a leader my role is to nurture parents and teachers bringing out the best in them and enabling them to see hope for the future in a successful partnership that leads to student academic improvement. I encourage people to use reflective practice to journal their experiences; this allows for learning through thinking and rethinking what has been done. I believe in divine guidance and social justice. Northouse (2009) posits “justice is concerned with the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated. If you expect fair treatment from others, then you should treat others fairly” (p. 162).

Transformational/transactional leader. I am both a transformational leader and a transactional leader (Burns, 2003). As a leader it is important to be a good follower, listening more and talking less. Burns states “transforming change transforms people *and* their situations” (p. 151). Leadership and fellowship complement each other because

good leaders must be good followers as well. Burns (2003) shares “new leadership may emerge, perhaps from among the followers, better suited to the demands of the changing situation and the developing expectations of followers” (p. 172). Followers are leaders also, and as a leader I practice taking the lead from followers who might have a better understanding of an issue, especially if they are empowered to lead. Burns (2003) shares “leadership empowers followers by intensifying these motivations: nurturing self-efficacy and collective efficacy, fusing “self” and substantive motivations, framing needs, grievances, aspirations, conflicts, and goals in terms of values” (p. 183-184).

Situational leader. I am also a situational leader and depending on the situation I will use the leadership style that is appropriate and allows me to be flexible in handling the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995). The relationship that develops between the leader and the follower depends on the issue and what is happening in the organization. Hersey and Blanchard (1995) share “effective leaders need to be able to adapt their chosen style to fit the requirements of the situation” (p. 210). As change takes place and new problems arise, I must be sensitive and my behavior may have to be adjusted to handle the situation. I am innovative and bring creative insights to issues while empowering people to develop their leadership skills. Northouse (2009) posits “empowering people is one of the oppositions facing leaders that can produce great results” (p. 133).

Core values and ethical leadership. My core values are: children come first, parents are partners in educating children, and I lead by example. I have been an active parent for over 20 years, participating in school activities, modeling partnerships with the schools our children attended, and building bridges of communication between the school

and the community. I believe there is power in diversity and have worked in several schools while enjoying the diversity of teachers, parents, and the community. I realize change takes time and the challenge of time management is a result of strategic planning and strategic thinking.

I am an ethical leader and the role the community plays is a big part in decision-making. Fluker (2009) posits, “the task of the ethical leader is to inspire and guide others in the process of transformation through courageous acts of defiance and resistance against systems of injustice” (p. 32). This process requires a living experience that gives meaning to life and aims at serving the collective good. The ethical leader is shaped by wisdom, habits, and traditions, while focusing on three dimensions of human existence: spirit, self, and social (Fluker, 2009, p. 33-34). Caring, trusting, integrity, and hope are the capacities I try to use with teachers and parents on a regular basis. Northhouse (2009) posits caring is the hallmark of ethical leadership and it is vital to be concerned about the interest of others.

Change leader. Fluker (2009) shares “leadership is not about winning and losing: rather, it is about growing and stretching, becoming better and better, more balanced and harmonious as we seek wholeness within ourselves and with others” (p. 149). My educational leadership has evolved through the many experiences I have encountered. I remain committed to parenting and educational leadership, but now have a clear understanding of the issues and challenges facing parental engagement. I now see through a wider lens with a broader understanding of the complex relationship between the school and the community. I have a responsibility to make a meaningful contribution

to education, especially in parental engagement, encouraging more fathers to be engaged in their children's education and taking leadership positions as engaged parents.

As an educational leader and parent I will continue to be an advocate for parents' rights and champion the cause of training teachers regarding parental engagement in college and university preparation programs. I feel in order to equip teachers to better collaborate with parents they must receive educational training on how to develop sustainable partnerships for student success. I will also continue to stress the role parent engagement plays in the lives of students and that parental engagement is a two-way relationship between schools and parents. I will continue to encourage parents to become problem solvers and decision makers and to be more accessible at school. I will continue to be a role model for parents and educators, lead by example, and let my voice be heard by decision makers on the issues that plague families and schools.

Using Epstein's Conceptual Framework as Lens

Joyce Epstein's (1995) Conceptual Framework is used as a lens to understand parental involvement. The six areas of Joyce Epstein's types of parental involvement that will be discussed are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Parenting. The parenting framework was manifested in helping families establish home environments to support school. In one of the parent workshops parents had a discussion on how to make the home environment conducive to learning. Parents had an opportunity to discuss how to create a mini library in their homes for their children. They also talked about creating working space for projects and having school supplies in an area that child knows is the educational wing of the apartment or home.

Communication. The communication framework was manifested in a two-way communication procedure that was established on a regular basis with parents and teachers, weekly connecting to at least 10 parents a week with news about their child's progress and academic levels. There were wide assortments of communication that was used including, email, parent teacher conferences, and hand written notes. The information shared was not always negative. Teachers had an opportunity to express good news and the progress students were making in their class and on test scores.

Volunteering. Parents took pride in sharing their various volunteer experiences at the school. There was something for everyone to do regardless of their work schedule or family responsibilities. Parents could be found volunteering for fundraisers, as playground monitors, as chaperones on trips or for school functions as well as classroom duties. If parents were not able to participate in volunteering they solicited grandparents. Parents also enjoyed volunteering their expertise in an area whether it was cooking or carpentry. Although the number of parents participating at parent meeting may have been low, the parents that were present benefited from the experience.

Learning at home. Learning at home was manifested in activities in the school that supported parents engaging students in learning activities at home. The role that homework played in the school varied from class to class. At the parent meeting teachers stressed students must read to their parents, a relative or sibling at least 20-30 minutes daily. A program that was held in the evening was "Reading under the Stars." Students and families had an opportunity to use flashlights and read. This was something that was mentioned that could be done at home. Teachers offered support and strategies for

parents about getting students to do their homework. Parents were encouraged to monitor students completing homework and set time limits on watching television.

Decision-making. Decision-making and partnership with parents and teachers were evidenced in the collaborative efforts made by parents and teachers exploring and working on projects together such as the school garden, various history projects, and service action projects undertaken with the assistance of parents sharing their knowledge and cultural backgrounds. Parents are active members of the Board of Director and help make decisions regarding governance of the school, parents are also active in issues regarding busing, safety, field trips, book fairs, parent night, reading under the stars, black history program, and fundraisers. This is the first graduating class and parents, teachers, and the entire staff are partnering to make this a celebration to remember. These momentous partnerships not only help students succeed in school but provide a strong foundation for them to navigate through life. Parents get an opportunity to develop leadership skills and may discover hidden talents they have which may lead into a career.

Collaborating. Collaborating with community was an area that continues to be a work in progress. Collaboration requires a commitment of time and money. Time is needed for both parents and school staff to visit community businesses and agencies to establish a relationship. An authentic, open communication is necessary for the relationships to develop. An initial expenditure from business and agencies will be needed to support the school's programs. However, the resulting positive relationships and increase patronage will hopefully make the initial expenditures worthwhile.

There is a partnership with the local library where one of the parents works and continues to support the school with educational materials. There is some community

involvement with a local community center, but the participation is not as high as desired. More collaboration is needed in the community to integrate resources, build capacity, and encourage families to take pride in their environment.

Chapter VI

Implications and Recommendations

The phenomenon of parental involvement is critical to the future of American education and the development of our children as change agents for this nation. When we help a family, we help a child, and when we help a child, we help a nation. Fullan (1993) posits, “teacher education programs must help teaching candidates to link the moral purpose that influences them with the tools that will prepare them to engage in productive change” (p. 12). In order for teachers to prepare youth for the 21st century challenges and become change agents, teachers and parents must collaborate and utilize all resources. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) shares, “parents and teachers are most comfortable with one another when they recognize the validity and necessity of both parenting and teaching for the effective socialization of young children in this society” (p. 39).

The interviews for this phenomenology indicated that parents were delighted to have an opportunity to voice their opinions. The parents were eager to tell their story and voice their opinions. The power of storytelling is unlimited and can be used by stakeholders and leaders alike (Schawbel, 2012). These stories are more than the recounting of experiences. These stories tell us what has been done, what has not been done, and what should be done. In this chapter, these stories provide a roadmap that can direct implications and make recommendations for moving from parent involvement to parent engagement.

Implications

These findings suggest that despite themes that emerged: communication, respect, and collaboration/partnership, there is a missing theme – capacity/community building. The result of not recognizing the significance of capacity/community building may point to the lack of understanding of what it takes to move parents and teachers from parental involvement to parental engagement. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) found,

Creative educators are reconnecting their institutions with their local community, building new alliances which recognize that healthy schools and healthy communities reinforce each other...They share important values and interest...Healthy communities produce and support educational excellence and good schools are the best guarantee of a community's future. (p. 209)

Capacity/community building is an important component needed in order to move from parental involvement to parental engagement.

Charter schools. Parents send their students to a charter school thinking more parent participation would take place (Golding & Shapira, 1993). As a result, in the greater autonomy afforded to charter schools, research has found charter schools design and adopt more parent involvement requirements (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). Charter schools are known for establishing parental involvement as a requirement for admission. Similarly, charter schools assume that if parents sought out charter schools and committed to the criteria of parental involvement, engagement would look decidedly different than in many urban public schools. Buckley and Schneider (2006) posit, “parents who are satisfied with their children's schools represent a potential pool of supporters for further expansion of charter schools and choice in general” (p. 57). Urban charter school parents include a significant percentage of parents that have been moved to school choice because of dissatisfaction with public schools.

While this may be the case, charter schools are also challenged to involve and engage parents. Fuller's (2002) case study points out charter schools do not escape the parent involvement issues that plague public schools. Cooper (1991) argues parents who choose charter schools may believe the choice to enroll their child in a charter school will ensure a good education and there is no further need to get involved. In addition, parents see charter schools as an option of educational choice for their children. While supporting school choice, these urban charter school parents may bring the apprehension of former unpleasant experiences with school staff.

Staffing. Parents and charter school staff have brought the habits and strategies of the public school system with them to the charter school. They have just shifted buildings. Parents have been accustomed to not being involved, through not feeling welcomed, not willing to participate or unable to participate, and they bring those habits with them. In general, charter schools are often staffed by former public school staff. Charter school staff often uses the same ineffective methods and strategies used by public schools to engage parents; they bring with them old habits. Parent and staff training and different approaches are needed to affect change.

The National Charter School Policy Forum Report (2008) share there is a need to gain more support and improve efforts to educate parents regarding parental involvement in charter schools. Parents whose experiences have not always been pleasant must have trust restored to the relationship between home and school. Parents historically viewed certain school staff, nurses, and counselors as trusted confidantes and resources. Counselors, specifically, have provided social, academic, and emotional support for families.

Title I. Title I Schools and local education agencies are encouraged, but not required, to assure that parents are involved in the development of training for other parents to enhance the involvement of other parents (NCLB, 2004, p. 4). In addition, “schools qualify to receive Title 1 funding when they implement the parent involvement requirements found in Section 1118, but very few schools lose their funding if found to be in non-compliance with Section 1118 provisions” (NCLB, 2004, p. 1).

PTA/PTO. Although the National PTA is a great resource for schools and parent, the growth of this organization comes with a cost. Local PTAs, including charter schools, begin to struggle with the rising cost of belonging to the national body (National PTA, 2013). Concomitant with the cost are the strict adherence to the national policies and advocacy positions. Local PTAs are not allowed to publicly advocate against a PTA approved policy position; local political views that may be in opposition to the national view are silenced. Henderson et al. (2007) share “despite the PTA’s historic role in state and national policy, local parent groups often shy away from decision making and advocacy” (p. 194).

Charter schools recognize the National PTA’s efforts are laudable, nonaffiliated parent groups are commonly known as Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO). Many parent groups do not need to use their meager funds to send to the national body while ignoring pressing local needs or relinquishing their ability to publicly advocate for local positions that may be in opposition to nation positions. Henderson et al. (2007) share there is no doubt when PTAs, PTOs, and other parent groups combine the resources of parents, school, and the community; they can support each other and provide training to help build support for the schools.

School counselors. The counselor's role cannot be underestimated. The resources and skills that counselors bring to an organization are monumental. In many cases, counselors are the first persons contacted by parents and teachers when there are conflicts or challenges at home, in school, and the community. Counselors refer and coordinate services to social, health, and mental health agencies. They are called upon in emergencies and disasters to work with families and community leaders to solve neighbor and family challenges.

Counselors listen. They listen to the stories of the parents, families, and community. Their active listening skills help gain insight into the realities of life for families and communities. Additionally, storytelling provides potential avenues for organizational change that can positively impact the relationships between home, school, and the community. Storytelling can help leaders be more effective in any organization by inspiring and motivating change in human behavior (Schawbel, 2012). Thus storytelling becomes a leadership tool for leaders to effectively utilize when leading change. According to an interview with Paul Smith (2012), storytelling is useful in “inspiring the organization, setting a vision, teaching important lessons, defining culture and values, and explaining who you are and what you believe” (p. 2).

This study suggests that the deliberate commitment of both parents and teachers to develop relationships and strive to move the relationships beyond mere involvement is necessary to establish a sense of belonging for all stakeholders. Stronger partnerships will help move involvement beyond the peripheral surface and help promote parental engagement and participation in developing stronger policies and advocacy for students. When all stakeholders learn from each other, students will profit and reach their fullest

potential. Hughes and Kwok (2007) conducted a study that found when schools make efforts to engage with parents there are positive results for students.

Lawrence Lightfoot (2003) posits, “across the country, and in a wide variety of educational settings, teachers receive almost no training or support in developing relationships with the families of their students” (p. 229). This absence of educational training for teachers at the undergraduate and graduate levels is echoed by Doolittle and Browne (2011), teacher training preparation is essential for second order changes to allow teachers to continue producing students who will be equipped for the challenges of the 21st century. Fullan (1993) shares, “teacher education has the honor of being the worse problem and the best solution in education” (p. 3).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) points out the following:

Firstly, teachers need to learn to value the authority and wisdom of parents and recognize the contributions that they can make to the child’s success in school. Secondly, they need to develop a wide-angle view of the broad ecology of education, be able to envision a map of the several institutions where children are socialized, and develop an appreciation of how students individually and collectively navigate the terrain between home and school. Third, teachers in training need to develop strategies, tools, and skills for supporting productive dialogues with parents. They need to learn to listen – patiently, intently, and respectfully – to parental perspectives on their children. They need to develop their powers of observation so that they will be able to see, and then document, the important evidence, illustration, or anecdote that will help them offer a vivid portrayal of the child’s life in school and help them convey to parents that they know their child and care for him or her. (p. 229-230)

Recommendations

Based on the key themes of communication, respect, collaboration and partnership, as well as the implied theme of capacity/community building that emerged through the voices of the participants in this study, I offer the following recommendations for improving home school partnerships. Implementation of these suggestions may

improve the relationships between parents and teachers, while creating the capacity for parents to be deeply engaged in their children’s learning and invested in the school.

1. Improved communication through technology. Schools and parents should take advantage of the new technologies (email, grade book, Skype, School Net, etc.) and use the best ways to communicate and listen to each other to stay current with families and school information. A technology workshop would make a wonderful workshop for parents, and would enable them to keep up with the latest technology. Greenleaf (1996) shares “the first step in good communication, anywhere, is listening” (p. 211).

2. Diversity training. Differences exist in schools regarding race, religious backgrounds, languages spoken, income, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disabilities, and culture. While diversity can be an asset in a school, it can also be challenging when a lack of awareness translates to a lack of understanding in how best to meet the needs of the families. Henderson et al. (2007) share “many teachers lack the training to address differences or to examine their assumptions about the implications of these differences” (p. 114). Schools may want to address how they address diversity issues, and raise awareness to improve home school relationships in an ever-changing, culturally diverse society. By embracing and respecting diversity, teachers may grow to appreciate the power of diversity to develop respectful partnerships with parents.

3. Teacher education programs in parents as partners. Colleges and universities should consider upgrading and changing their curricula to meet the needs of 21st century educational challenges by requiring a class for all educators on Parents as Partners and Capacity Building for Educators. The classes would emphasize the vital role parents play in the educational arenas of their children. In addition, districts should

provide classes, workshops, in-services, and training to assist parents and teachers in the communication processes, capacity building, and building teacher/parent alliances that will lead to academic achievement and school retention.

4. Expand the term “parental” to include “family.” The term parental involvement has changed through the years. Often the person responsible for the care of the child is not the parent but an aunt, uncle, grandparents, or other extended family member. New terms need to be established to identify this group of caregivers that includes rather than isolates. The term family involvement is more inclusive, and would honor a more diverse range of caregivers.

5. Looping. More schools may consider the concept of looping to develop and nurture the parent teacher relationship. Looping may not be best for all grades, but it helps to fulfill the mandate to get more parents involved. When teachers have an opportunity to work with the same student over two years, they are able to make more comprehensive assessments of the student’s strengths and weaknesses.

6. Actively promote the school. Schools should always keep in the forefront that parents are the customers, therefore, market your school and make it attractive by welcoming parents and the community to partner with you in activities. Market the school activities by preparing a quarterly parent newsletter, highlighting classes and other opportunities for parents to become engaged. Newsletters should have parents as authors giving advice and talking about parent engagement experiences at the school. These strategies empower parents and enhance their leadership skills. Invitations to Open House events should be extended more than twice a year. The community at large should be invited to concerts, plays, and special events. Market the contributions of community

businesses to the events; the neighborhood florist donated the flowers for the event or a local restaurant picked up the tab for the luncheon. If parents feel like they are part of the school, they will also share the many resources they have to offer.

Reflection

A great and wise parent once told me, “The best investment you can make is in a child” (voice of Joyce Barham Bingham). This has been proven to be true time and time again, as heard by the many stories of parents and teachers through conversations whether in the parking lot, on the phone, or face-to-face interviews. There seems to be no substitute for good parenting and one only gets a single chance to raise a child, and the future to live with the memories.

Through listening to the voices of parents and teachers, I found my true passion, parenting, and discovered I had a voice that needed to be heard. This experience has transformed me personally and has had a major impact on my educational professional platform. I learned that I was a natural storyteller and understood concepts through story telling. Perhaps it comes from my Jamaican African heritage and from the stories that were told to me as a child by my southern Mississippi father, Charlie Bingham. My father dropped out of school in the 4th grade to help take care of his siblings, was reared by his grandparents, who had been in slavery, and told me and my other three siblings the slave stories of our ancestors.

A telephone interview in 2011 with my cousin, Dr. Haskell Bingham, Retired Vice-President for Academic Affairs from Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia, and Family Historian and Genealogist, revealed I was from the Zulu Tribe and the eighth generation born in America. The name Bingham was given to us on the slave ship, “The

Greyhound,” in 1719 on the unsolicited voyage to America by the captain of the ship. He said the slave reminded him of a free black man in England named Bingham.

I crossed paths with my heritage again, and was greatly delighted, when during a doctoral class – Diversity in Educational Leadership (EDSU 28706) with Dr. James Coaxum, III, Chairperson of the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University – we were introduced to a book entitled, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* by Ronald Takaki (2008) that mentioned my great, great, great, great, great grandfather Gabriel Bingham “Prosser Slave” (p.71). Grandfather Gabriel, a slave blacksmith never took the masters name that is why it was so easy when the family historian Cousin Haskell conducted the research on the Bingham Family. The ancestors whispered remember you are a Bingham (Kollatz, 2012).

I must mention, on my mother’s side, I am the first generation born in America. My mother came to America in 1932 via Ellis Island from Jamaica, West Indies, as an immigrant with the hope of becoming educated and having a better life in the Promised Land. Through my grandmother, Louise Dos Santos, and my mother, Joyce Barham Bingham, I am appreciative for the many stories and answers to my many probing questions about family. I am extremely indebted to the many sacrifices they made and I constantly hear their voices.

Powerful first hand experience has given me more compassion for parents and teacher relationships, balanced my perceptive, and given me a different lens to support the home school issues. More attention should be given to enhancing existing programs and making them more effective and workable for parents and schools. By pulling

resources together and working strategically towards the same goal, one can reach intended accomplishments.

I have always felt it was a privilege to become an educator and having an enormous influence on the youth of our nation through the lives one could touch, but it is a blessing to become a parent. With this privilege and blessing I am convinced the two can work together in harmony, deliberately addressing some of the most difficult dilemmas facing this country to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. This study will keep the interest in parental engagement in the forefront for educational scholars to continue dialogue and discover viable solutions to the many educational issues.

While educators cannot choose the educational challenges for the 21st century, surely parenting will be in the forefront. There are countless children waiting and observing our behavior and shouting [Do the right thing] for educators to make the necessary changes that will allow an equal opportunity for all students. Educators must no longer put their voices on mute, but must speak out through legislation, new educational policies, and deliberately participate in shared governance to eradicate the issues facing parent and school engagement.

As a participant observer, I brought a caring, understanding, and passionate voice to mix together with the harmony of the interests of teachers' and parents' experiences and perceptions on this topic. I wanted to explore this rich phenomenon of parental involvement with the hope that through respecting and being respected, parents and teachers could move from parental involvement to parental engagement in order to form symmetry with the student in the middle. At times I felt like a human archaeologist,

peeling back layers of information to be untangled to find meaning and patterns, and at times I felt like a counselor offering some sort of catharsis, as the poignant stories were told by teachers and parents.

I learned the importance of giving parents and teachers the opportunity to voice their experiences and perceptions about parental involvement and engagement. The stories were amazing and inspiring; parents are the real experts and educators are their students. The energy that is spent on the differences is tremendous, but more synergy is needed to bridge the gap between home and school. Both teachers and parents want the same outcomes for their students and children: for them to be able to compete and solve issues in the global society and take their rightful place in decision-making for our country.

Limitations

This research study was limited to a small group of five parents and five teachers, although a representative sample, it did not account for the majority of teachers and parents at Louise Dos Santos Charter Elementary School and teachers and parents in other parts of the United States. In addition time was a factor; this study was conducted during the school year to capture the essence of the current parent population and teachers with the same interaction for the year. This study represented only one urban elementary charter school and did not account for middle or high school parent and teacher's perspectives and experiences of parental involvement in other charter schools.

This study was conducted with only one researcher, which allowed no engagement from other researchers. If another researcher had been part of this study, the phenomenon would have been viewed through a broader lens to provide more insight and

a more in depth understanding. As a result of being an observer participant and educator, parents and teachers may not have been sure of how I would use the data for this study and may have been reluctant to express their true feelings. This may explain why there were several rich lengthy stories and conversations after the taping sessions.

Conclusion

The voices heard in this study from the participants contributed to my better understanding of the urgency for parental engagement in all schools. This study enriched my leadership platform by confirming my leadership style of a servant leader. The moral compass that directs my life is rooted in the fibers of my spirit as a servant leader. When I asked the ancestors what I should do, they gave me permission to go forth. I will respect my ancestors. As mentioned by Greenleaf (1995), a “servant leader is a servant first” and leads through serving the needs of others. It is through this servitude the inspiration to lead is born (p. 22).

Through the constant inquiry and mirroring, I discovered that community capacity building does exist at Louise Dos Santos Elementary School, but is not recognized as the powerful tool that it is in linking parents and teachers together to embrace parental engagement. This school has representatives from the community; a parent and a student on the school board. The power that this kind of representation portrayed is outstanding and should be commented upon. The garden experience with teacher Janet and parents ought to be emulated and encouraged to usher in additional partnerships and collaborations for community capacity building. Greenleaf (1996) shares “the raw data – verbatim notes taken by good listeners-make powerful communicating material. There are few things more convincing that a simple quote from someone who spoke honestly,

courageously, and insightfully under the influence of good listening” (p. 212). This is the message that must be translated to every parent and teacher on a steady and consistent basis to encourage parental engagement.

The themes, communication, respect, and collaboration/partnership often overlapped and flowed as a continuous pattern of experiences. The data in this study point to capacity/community building as a good beginning point to move in the direction for parental engagement. The voices of Louise Dos Santos must ring out and signal to the community by continuing to build on the rich relationship that exists with the community and enhancing what has and might be a barrier to parental engagement. Greenleaf (1996) posits, “everything that is going on communicates. Actions communicate. Failures to act communicate. Attitudes communicate” (p. 211).

The ability to engage parents and teachers effectively in the existence of the school is challenging and multifaceted, yet critical for the achievements of students in the educational system. The complexity of this issue calls for an urgency for educators to implement ways to develop, implement, and evaluate ways of engaging parents and teachers aligned with the goals of the school. Implementing communication, respect, collaboration/partnership, and developing capacity/community building could help lead to movement from parent involvement to parental engagement (Fullan, 2007).

This study allowed for a better understanding of one of the challenges facing parents and teachers regarding engagement in the 21st century and adds to the body of knowledge regarding parental engagement. This study gives light to the need for additional research and action regarding linking teacher training to parent engagement and capacity/community building. I will continue to focus on my transactional and

transformational leadership skills while strengthening emotional intelligence, resiliency, and social justice skills. My passion in parenting and the use of my educational leadership skills to make decisions and lead in this challenging, bureaucratic, educational, and political society will benefit ALL children regardless of race, religious affiliation, or nationality.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Participants over the age of 18

I agree to participate in a study entitled "*Parental Involvement: A Study of Parents' and Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions in an Urban Charter Elementary School,*" which is being conducted by Jacqueline Flemmings, a graduate Ed.D. student of the Educational Leadership Department, Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the methods used by parents and teachers to arrive at current engagement within the context of school parental engagement. The data collected in this phenomenological study will be compiled and analyzed in order to better inform educational leaders and the literature about future research on Parental Involvement.

I understand that my interview may be recorded, but that my responses will be anonymous, and all the data collected will be kept confidential.

I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Jacqueline Flemmings at (267) 872-3290, or her advisor Dr. Gini Doolittle, and she may be contacted at (856) 256 - 4500.

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

(Signature of Investigator) (Date)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Associate Provost for Research at:

Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the Protective of Human Subjects Office of Research, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701 ☎ Tel: 856-256-5150

Appendix B

Parent Interview Questions

Parental Involvement: A Study of Parents' and Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions in an Urban Charter Elementary School

Protocol Interview Questions for Parents

- (1). Do you perceive that there is a difference between parent involvement and parent engagement? Probing- Discuss your perceptions.
- (2). How are you involved? Describe your schools parental involvement? Probing- Are other parents engaged?
- (3). Discuss or describe how you are engaged in your child's learning? Probing- What are some of the benefits and difficulties related to parent involvement?
- (4). How do you send/receive information from teachers? Probing – Tell me how do you communicate with teachers?
- (5). Can you describe a particularly satisfactory exchange with a teacher about your child?
- (6). Can you tell me about a time that you were unhappy with a communication or how you received information from your child's school?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Questions

Parental Involvement: A Study of Parents' and Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions in an Urban Charter Elementary School

Protocol Interview Questions for Teachers

- (1). Can you tell me the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement?

- (2). Describe how you are involved with parents at your school? Probe- Give me some specific examples?

- (3). Tell me, are there challenges or difficulties in making a connection with parents at your school? Probe- Thinking of a specific situation, how did you resolve it?

- (4). Can you illustrate some suggestions of how the school can be more effective in bridging the gap between parents and the school?