1-9-2008

Head Start Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement During their children's transition to Kindergarten : a Phenomenological Study

Dawn Angela Barberis
Portland State University

HEAD START PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT DURING THEIR CHILDREN'S TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

DAWN ANGELA BARBERIS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Portland State University

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The abstract and dissertation of Dawn Angela Barberis for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction were presented January 9, 2008, and accepted by the dissertation committee and the doctoral program.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

[redacted]
Christine Chaille, Chair

[redacted]
Susan Halverson-Westerberg

[redacted]
Samuel Henry

[redacted]
Leslie Munson

[redacted]
Martha Balshem
Representative of the Office of Graduate Studies

DOCTORAL PROGRAM APPROVAL:

[redacted]
Randy Hitz, Dean
Graduate School of Education

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of Dawn Angela Barberis for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction presented January 9, 2008.

Title: Head Start Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement During Their Children's Transition to Kindergarten: A Phenomenological Study.

Schools are recognizing the importance of parent involvement in children's education, but they often struggle to work with families living in poverty whose definition of parent partnership may differ from that of school staff (Lareau, 1987). Parents who live in poverty may feel inferior to school staff due to their lack of economic and educational resources. They may lack the expertise to be able to effectively communicate and work with school staff in making decisions that affect their children. With the increased expectations that schools place on families in supporting their children's education, this mismatch between the resources and experiences of the home and those of the school places children from these families at an educational disadvantage.

This qualitative research study, based on a phenomenological research approach, followed five Head Start parents during the months leading up to and

shortly after their children's transition to kindergarten. A phenomenological approach focuses on the individual lived experience of the study participants and how their understanding of those experiences shapes their view of the concept or phenomenon. A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with parents, which focused on the parents' descriptions of parent involvement and their early involvement in their children's education. This study sought to better understand Head Start parents' perceptions of parental involvement, by describing how Head Start parents come to understand the phenomena of parent involvement and how the role(s) they believe they play in their children's education might be influenced not only by their previous life experiences, but by their experience in Head Start and their early encounters with the school. It is hoped that this study might lead to the development of strategies to better prepare Head Start parents to be involved in their children's education as they transition from Head Start programs into kindergarten.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother who told me to "get a job or go to school" and to my grandmother who always wished she'd had the choice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors, Sara Davis and Christine Chaille for working with me throughout the doctoral program. Thank you, Christine, for giving me hope that I could finish this work when I'd almost given up, and for appreciating my passion for and commitment to this topic and the parents in this study. I would like to acknowledge the support of my committee members in the various phases of this work, Emily de la Cruz, Cathleen Smith, Leslie Munson, Samuel Henry, Susan Halverson-Westerberg, and Martha Balshem for your participation and support during the dissertation process. I would like to thank my professors in the doctoral program, but especially Bill Greenfield and Karen Noordhoff, whose ideas and perspectives especially inspired and challenged me. Thank you to my colleagues who gave feedback on my writing and especially to Mary Blackburn for assisting me with the bracketing process. I would like to thank the parent participants, Sandy, Joy, Mandy, Anne and Claudia, who allowed me to meet with and interview them for this study – your stories have reinforced my commitment to speak up against the stereotypes of children and families who are living in poverty, which often keep them from achieving their highest potential. And finally, thank you to my husband, Joe, and to our children, Anthony, Sarah, Adrienne and Patricia, for allowing me to spend so much time on this work, which means so much to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE PAGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical Ground

I have worked with Head Start children and their parents for more than two decades. I have lived in the same community with these families for most of my life, and my own family's working class roots connect me to these people and this place. As someone whose worldview has been influenced by the periods of poverty I experienced in my childhood and early adulthood, I have struggled to understand why so many of my neighbors live their lives in poverty and what conditions keep many of them bound to such a life. In my role as a Head Start teacher and administrator, I have participated on transition to kindergarten teams and work groups for more than 15 years, working with school staff, and sometimes parents, to create and implement plans that we thought would ease the transition for children and families as they moved from Head Start to school. With the exception of a very short-lived parent volunteer mentor program started in one school in one district, parents were, and generally still are, afterthoughts in these transition planning efforts. As a parent of four children who attended public schools, I have experienced the opportunities for and barriers to school-based parent involvement, and often questioned the level of my own involvement at school and at home. My involvement as a parent representative on school site council and as a school board

member of a high-poverty district has allowed me to witness the low expectations that many school staff have for meaningful involvement of families who live in poverty. As a doctoral student, I considered and reflected on the many forces that act upon children and families living in poverty. Through my various roles, I have witnessed the miscommunication and antagonism that can occur between Head Start parents (and staff) and schools, and the differing expectations each has for the other in supporting children's education. As a person who straddles the worlds of Head Start and school, I see value and validity in each viewpoint and want to find ways to bridge the divide, because I believe these misunderstandings are at the root of school failure for many children living in poverty.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand how five Head Start parents described the phenomenon of parent involvement, and how their perspectives might be influenced by their own life histories, as well as their experiences in Head Start and their early encounters with the school as their children transitioned into kindergarten. The analyses considered how these descriptions align with the definitions and assumptions about parent involvement that are found in existing research. Assuming that the perspectives of these research participants might be similar to those of other parents who are low-income, especially those who have participated in Head Start, how could Head Start programs and schools work with parents to ease the transition into kindergarten and

improve school success for children living in poverty? The research question posed in this study was:

- How do Head Start parents perceive and describe the phenomenon of parent involvement as their children transition into kindergarten?

Other questions that guided the study included:

- How might the previous life experiences of Head Start parents have contributed to their understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement?
- How might parents' experiences in Head Start have shaped their understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement?
- How might parents' first experiences with the school have influenced their understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement?

Statement of the Problem

Children living in poverty do not fare as well in school as their more economically advantaged peers. These children experience more problems transitioning into the earliest school grades, maintain lower levels of academic achievement, and have disproportionately higher high school drop out rates. They exhibit more behavior problems, are absent from school more often, and have a higher incidence of disability. Many studies have documented this association between living in poverty and poor educational outcomes for children (Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Kagendo-Mutua, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levy &

Duncan, 2000). Numerous reasons have been cited for these relationships, including: fewer material resources, such as books, in the home; higher rates of mobility, due to lack of affordable housing and homelessness; lower levels of parental education, especially the mother's education; inadequate access to high quality early childhood education and child care experiences; limited English proficiency; living in a single parent family; and lower rates and quality of parent involvement. Some research points to the negative effects on children living in areas of concentrated poverty, where the adults in their lives exhibit high levels of dysfunction, such as criminal activity, drug addiction, child abuse, and chronic unemployment (Balshem, Chaille, Banach, & Ramsperger, 1994; Hudley, 1997; Kagan, 1997). In addition, there is evidence that schools in high-poverty neighborhoods tend to be staffed by less qualified teachers, and frequently have lower levels of funding and fewer resources than schools in more affluent areas (Hudley, 1997).

Much attention has been given to the various factors or variables associating school failure and living in poverty. Current theories about why some young children are failing in school center primarily around two conceptualizations: (a) the child is not ready for school due to personal or familial characteristics, and (b) schools are not adequately providing the necessary supports to accommodate all children who enter the school setting. Children of particular concern include those from racial/ethnic minority groups, English language learners, those with

disabilities, and those living in poverty. Interestingly, children living in poverty often fall into one or more of the other categories deemed at risk, as well (Resnick, 2002).

Historically, families have been responsible for the socialization and early education of their children (Braun & Edwards, 1972). When children did not do well in school, many educators and social workers blamed the family (Cutler, 2000). In the United States during the nineteenth century, early education programs were established to compensate for lack of "personal and familial supports [and] to provide nutrition, cleanliness, good health and work habits [to] children of the needy" (Kagan & Cohen, 1996, pp. 4-5). Churches and other philanthropic organizations supported these earliest "preschools" (i.e., kindergartens) as attempts to mitigate the social ills that they believed were associated with the influx of immigrants (Braun & Edwards, 1972). These programs more resembled social service agencies than schools, often adopting the Froebelian philosophy of "the all around care of the child – in the home as well as the school" (Braun & Edwards, 1972, p. 74).

Many of the current solutions for overcoming school failure continue to be designed to compensate for the lack of resources available to children and families who live in poverty, including food and shelter; opportunities for early childhood education and child care; medical care; and improved access to books, tutoring, and extracurricular opportunities. While resource differences may account for about

half of one standard deviation in the link between socioeconomic resources and racial and ethnic achievement gaps, there are no clear implications for policies to address the problem (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). Furthermore, studies have suggested that neighborhood characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, can explain no more than "5 % to upwards of 10 % in the variation of child and adolescent outcomes" (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, p. 315).

Is school failure primarily the result of lack of familial resources? Current policies and practices designed to increase children's success in school have failed to result in significant improvement in educational outcomes for children living in poverty. Perhaps schools are contributing to children's failure by not being willing or able to accommodate children who might be deemed "unready" to enter the school setting. Perry and Weinstein (1998) suggested that, "what is described as maladjustment within the child may be attributed to the schooling environment in which the child is embedded" (p. 180). Likewise, while parent involvement has a positive influence on children's interest and achievement in school, schools promote different levels of parent involvement in working class versus wealthy neighborhoods (Feuerstein, 2000). Schools may need to explore the underlying reasons for the mismatch between the home and school that places children who are poor at risk for school failure. Finding ways for schools to develop partnerships with families who live in poverty may hold promise in preparing their children for successful transition into and participation in school.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review describes the theoretical framework of the ecology of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and demonstrates the impact of these contextual factors and proximal processes on young children's success in school through examples drawn from educational research. The literature review examines current practices related to the transition to kindergarten, including research pertaining to young children's differential access to early education and the resultant discrepancies in school success, as well as the ways that schools influence the involvement of parents who are low income at home and school, particularly regarding expectations of school success for children living in poverty.

A number of research approaches have been used to study why these children do less well in school than their more affluent peers. Much of the current research has been descriptive or correlational in nature, based on surveys of children and families (Diamond et al., 2000; Lee & Burkam, 2002: Levy & Duncan, 2000) or of teacher perceptions and practices (Foster, 1997; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003). Occasionally, studies have attempted to extend understanding of these relationships

by examining data collected through longitudinal studies (Masse & Barnett, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002; Schweinhart, 2005; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). Some research has attempted to bring in the voices of the poor through ethnographic and narrative research, including case studies of children and their families (Balshem et al., 1994; Kagendo-Mutua, 2001) and ethnographic studies of school and school culture (Lareau, 2003; O'Connor, 2001).

Less frequently, research in this area has been of an experimental nature. For example, in the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention study (Ramey & Campbell, 1984), 112 children, between the ages of 6 and 12 weeks of age, and deemed at risk for retarded cognitive development due to a variety of factors such as household income and maternal education, were randomly assigned to either a preschool program (experimental group) or a control group. In conducting the longitudinal study of the effects of the intervention program on young children, children in the control group received the same nutritional and medical services as those in the intervention group "in order to avoid the confounding effects of these factors on intellectual development" (Masse & Barnett, 2002, p. 4). Children in the experimental group of this intensive preschool program experienced lasting gains in IQ, and increased achievement in reading and mathematics through their elementary school years.

Children living in poverty face significant challenges in their education because of lack of opportunities and negative expectations placed on them based on issues of social class. "We live in an era of deep and enduring tensions, with a widening ideological divide between haves and have-nots, urban and suburban, rich and poor" (Kagan, 1997, p. 287). Many elements of the educational system, including its linguistic structures, authority patterns, and curriculum, are misaligned with the social and cultural resources that many low-income families bring to the school setting (Lareau, 1987). While families living in poverty may face multiple challenges in their daily lives, including poor nutrition, low literacy, poor job skills and chemical abuse (Swick & Graves, 1993), a critical factor in the different expectations between the home and school is the lack of understanding about the hidden rules of social class that govern expectations and interactions between the two (Payne, 2001). With the increased expectations schools place on families in supporting their children's education, this mismatch between the resources and expectations of the home and those of the school places children from low-income families at an educational disadvantage. Educational programming assumes that students (and their families) come with the requisite skills and resources needed to take advantage of all of the benefits of the programming, and assumes that education provides these students access to academic success and subsequent life opportunities.

Stipek (2004) found that teaching approaches vary based on the social class of the children. Teachers in low-income schools were more apt to use didactic, teacher-directed instruction if they perceived the families' ability to support their children's education was impeded by poverty-related factors. Children in higher income, predominately Caucasian schools were more likely to be taught with student-directed, constructivist approaches (Solomon & Battistich, 1996; Stipek, 2004). Developmentally appropriate early childhood education experiences are critical to children's future success in school (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Unfortunately, education, in its current form, has benefited some students more than others due to its differential treatment of children and families based on socioeconomic background. Such an education has perpetuated, rather than overcome, the inequities present in our society. In order to support the early development of children who are poor and their successful transition into school, one must seek to understand and address the multiple challenges they and their families face (Swick & Graves, 1993).

Developmental Contexts

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a schema for examining human development, which he termed the ecology of human development.

> Understanding of human development demands more than the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (p. 21)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified four contextual systems that influence the individual: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. He also described how the interactions between individuals and their environment vary as a result of characteristics of the individual, the environmental contexts and the time periods in which they occur (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The following section looks at how these contextual systems and proximal processes play a role in the lives of low-income children and their families as children transition into kindergarten.

Microsystem

The microsystem can be defined as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Settings include those places where the individual has face-to-face interactions, such as the home, the school, and the work place. Bronfenbrenner emphasized the element of experience in the definition, stating that the person's perception of a setting or event that they experience, rather than the "objective reality" must be examined if one wants to understand the forces that direct a person's behavior and development.

An example of such a microsystem influence is the parent-child relationship. Lareau (2003) identified "the largely invisible but powerful ways that parents' social class impacts children's life experiences" (p. 3) by documenting the divergent ways that parents who are low-income and middle-income raise their

children, and the influence these practices have on their and their children's successful participation in the education system. Parents who are middle-income employ a process of "concerted cultivation" which involves an active involvement and explicit coaching in the skills that are valued in education and other formal institutions, such as verbal reasoning and negotiation. These forms of communication are encouraged between children and adults, leading children of the middle-class to feel a sense of entitlement to adult attention and voice in decisions involving them. Parents who are low-income, on the other hand, engage in child rearing practices which Lareau called the "accomplishment of natural growth." This style of parenting emphasizes clear boundaries between children and adults, more interaction with extended family, and extended periods of leisure time for children. While many of the skills that children from families of the poor and working class gain from this type of parenting, such as learning to manage their own time, and learning to play and work independently, are valuable competencies, "they are not equally valued in the institutional worlds with which *all* children must come in contact (e.g. schools…)" (p. 67). The day to day interactions that children experience are vastly different based on their social class, and these differences set the stage for their different readiness for and participation in school.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem describes "the interrelationships among two or more settings [or microsystems] in which the developing person actively participates"

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). A mesosystem is created when a person moves from one setting to another. Such a system is created when a child transitions into school, since two settings that the child participates in, the home and the school, must now communicate and interact with each other on behalf of the child. "The ecology of the kindergarten classroom is different from that of the preschool or home environment" (Pianta & Cox, 1999, p. 8). Both the quality and quantity of the links between microsystems influence the impact they have on the developing child. For example, the more closely aligned the communication styles and behavioral expectations of the home and school are with each other, the more likely that children will successfully navigate between the different settings (Birch & Ladd, 1996). Studies indicate that children living in poverty have much higher rates of adjustment difficulties in school than children who are more affluent (Perry & Weinstein, 1998). Teachers rear their own children in ways that mirror the methods employed by parents of the middle class (Lareau, 2003). Children from low-income families, who have been taught a different communication "code," may experience conflict in their teacher-child relationships, which can "limit the extent to which they can rely on that relationship as a source of support" (Birch & Ladd, 1996, p. 199).

Exosystem

The exosystem "refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or

are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). Some examples of exosystem influences include teacher education programs (how teachers are trained to work with children and families who are poor), and funding and resource allocation to schools. While neither institutions for teacher education nor school boards and legislatures are generally settings experienced directly by children and families living in poverty, they nonetheless influence families' lives through the actions they take. For example, in making decisions regarding school attendance area boundaries, school boards determine the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic make-up of the schools within the district. Legislatures, by establishing policies and funding levels for schools and prekindergarten programs, influence the quantity and quality of services children receive. Institutions of higher education, through their recruitment and enrollment policies and practices, control who has the opportunity to be trained to become a teacher.

Graue (2005), in her study of preservice teachers, most of whom are white, middle class and female, found that their personal "biography shape[d] their dispositions toward families" (p. 157). Smith (2005) found that despite changes to the school culture and the development of a broader definition of parent involvement at one low-income school, teachers persisted in defining parent involvement from a narrow, school-based perspective. "Parents were viewed as

tools in teachers' work and they were questionable tools at that" (Graue, 2005, p. 178).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem can be defined as the "consistencies… that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). In other words, within a given society, specific institutions, such as schools, are similar to one another as a result of influences from the other, lower-order systems (microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem).

Macrosystem influences, including the effects of socioeconomic status on childrearing and schooling, affect children before they are born and throughout their childhood. "All societies have their own ways of ranking people" and in the United States, "it is the family, and not merely the individual, that is ranked in society's class structure" (Berns, 2004, p. 102). While families in the United States may generally be similar to one another when compared to families from some other region of the world, as noted previously, the family lives of children from the low-income and middle class are qualitatively different from each other, and these differences set the stage for children's future success in school. Opportunities and experiences for young children vary based on their social class (Lee & Burkam, 2002; McGill-Franzen, 1993). One must consider each of these embedded contexts

of children's lives in order to fully understand the complex challenge of preparing those living in poverty for success in school.

Proximal Processes

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) expanded the ecological model of human development by emphasizing that the development of an individual is influenced not only by the contextual environments in which he or she interacts, but also by the characteristics of the persons involved in the interaction and the time period in which development takes place. These interactions are referred to as proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) identified three personal characteristics that influence these developmental processes: dispositions, resources, and demand. Dispositions "set proximal processes in motion...and continue to sustain their operation" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 995). Resources include a person's ability, experience, knowledge, and skill to interact with elements in their environment. Demand refers to the extent that the individual "invites or discourages reactions with the social environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 995). This expanded model also emphasizes the contribution of interactions with not only other people, but also objects and symbols (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Each person in an interaction brings these characteristics to the interaction. Children and families living in poverty often bring dispositions and resources to the educational setting which differ from those expected by schools and school staff (Graue, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Perry &

Weinstein, 1998). The different resources of the home and school, coupled with a lack of understanding of the hidden rules of class, inhibit successful interaction between these environments (Payne, 2001).

Change Over Time

Another important context that affects human development is the influence of episodic and historical time on each of the other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For example, it is during this particular "historical moment [that] middle class parents tend to adopt a cultural logic of child rearing that stresses the concerted cultivation of children" (Lareau, 2003, p. 3). Factors influencing the other systems, such as more mothers in the work force and shifts in parenting roles, rapid increases in the knowledge and use of science and technology, changing career opportunities, and shifting political values all have an effect on child rearing practices. One might find different child rearing practices valued in different historical times. Lareau (2003) argued that in this particular moment in time, the child rearing practices of the middle class are in better alignment with school practices than those of the poor and working class. This better alignment in practices presumably leads to better educational outcomes for children of the middle class.

Current Practices in Kindergarten Transition

While transition to kindergarten practices have received considerable attention in the past two decades, Ramey and Ramey (1999) suggested that much of

the research on children's early adjustment and success in school has not adequately accounted for the influence of family and school environments on children as they transition into school. Government agencies, non-profit organizations and for-profit companies have all offered strategies for enhancing children and families' transition into kindergarten (e.g., Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., 1996, 2000; Epps, 1996; SERVE, 2005; Highreach Learning, Inc., 2003; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1992; National Head Start Association [NHSA], n.d.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986). However, very little research has assessed the effectiveness of the strategies used to facilitate the transition to kindergarten (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [SEDL], 2004). Ramey and Ramey (1999) indicated that only two transition support projects "have used randomized research designs to test the efficacy of specific transition practices to affect the developmental outcomes of children and families during the early elementary school years" (p. 224): the Abecedarian Preschool Program and the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Program.

In the Abecedarian project, children and families participated in one of four treatment groups: (a) no treatment, (b) home-school transition support for children and families only, (c) preschool only, and (d) preschool, plus home-school transition support. Home-school transition support included the provision of Home-School Resource Teachers who "coordinated home and school academic activities

and served as educational resources to both parents and teachers" from school entry to second grade (Ramey & Ramey, 1999, p. 227). The children in the group receiving the combined treatment of preschool plus home-school transition support demonstrated the greatest gains in academic achievement and had the lowest retention rates. Children in the preschool only group demonstrated the next best outcomes, followed by those in the transition support only group.

Ramey and Ramey (1999) described the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Program which looked at both the process and the outcomes of transition strategies which included: providing developmentally appropriate curricula, health services, social services and supports for parent involvement. The study examined the effects of these strategies on children from families of different typologies. The typologies were created based on family characteristics, such as maternal education, number of adults in home, household income and mother's primary language. Not surprisingly, child outcomes in social and language skills varied by family typology, with poorer outcomes associated with such risk factors as maternal unemployment or health issues, fewer adults in the home, homelessness, and not having English as a primary language (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). McIntyre, Echert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) found that families receiving government financial assistance were less likely to participate in transition activities than those not receiving aid, which "further exacerbate[d] risk for school problems" (p. 87).

Pianta and Cox (1999) developed an ecological model of kindergarten transition which takes into account the influences of the school, the family and the community that affect children's later success in school. The model suggests several actions that could be taken by schools to improve transition to kindergarten: (a) make links with children and families; b) establish links before school begins; and c) make contacts of appropriate intensity, such as personal contacts and home visits (Pianta & Cox, 1999, p. 6). Despite the lack of research on the effects of transition strategies and children's later success in school, SEDL (2004) suggested that "transition activities make sense [because they get] families and school staffs off to a good start together, providing the basis for productive relationships throughout the child's school career" (p. 54).

> Good policy and practice have to build on a solid conceptual foundation that recognizes that young children's success in school is intertwined with their experiences in multiple settings...and that this transition period is a critical time for building partnerships between schools and families that can support children's progress. (Pianta & Cox, 2002, p. 3)

The following section looks at two influences on children's transition into and successful participation in school: access to early education and parent involvement.

Access to Early Education

The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act, requires that schools demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" for all students. As a response to the No

Child Left Behind mandate, schools have raised standards for student achievement. Unfortunately, as schools are pressured to get all students to meet these higher standards, they may be setting inappropriate kindergarten readiness standards. In the field of early childhood education, kindergarten has historically been more aligned, or grouped with prekindergarten programs, such as nursery schools (NAEYC, 2001). The focus of these early educational experiences was the development of the "whole" child, including emphasis on physical, social and emotional development. Kindergarten was often viewed as a child's first exposure to group learning. However, as kindergartens have become a regular part of the education system, their role has shifted to a more academic one, in closer alignment with the curriculum of the elementary school. While, "it seems that society has come to terms with the idea that kindergarten is no longer a place of pure play and social development, [it] still struggles with the tension that changing curricular focus has on children" (Graue, 1999, p. 119). With the challenges schools face trying to meet the needs of increasing numbers of children living in poverty (Greene & Forster, 2004), one can understand why schools may be reticent to have some young children enter into the kindergarten program, especially those who have not had the benefit of a high quality prekindergarten experience.

The achievement differences begin before these children even enter their formal schooling, usually in kindergarten (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Once in school, children living in poverty continue to lag behind children from higher income

families. Lee and Burkam (2002) reported that, "social inequalities exist among young children as they begin their formal schooling in kindergarten" (p. 79). Large variations in children's cognitive and social skills are associated with differences in their social class. A study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2002) found that high quality child care and center-based preschool experiences predicted better preacademic skills and language performance in 4 ½ year olds independent of family characteristics, including parenting and poverty. Children who received intensive preschool interventions through their participation in the Abecedarian project (Masse & Barnett, 2002) experienced lasting gains in IQ, and increased achievement in reading and mathematics. The Head Start Family and Child Experience Survey (FACES) project, which began in 1997, has surveyed nationally stratified cohort samples of Head Start children and families about their experiences in the program, and used standardized assessments to document children's cognitive and social-emotional development through first grade. While Head Start children may still enter kindergarten below national averages on these assessments, the study found that participation in Head Start significantly narrowed the developmental gap between Head Start children and the general preschool population that existed before participation in the program (Zill et al., 2003).

Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), Graves (2006) found that, "children's previous achievement

levels were the strongest predictor of the achievement at the end of kindergarten" (p. 78). Despite much evidence to suggest that quality early childhood experiences can improve early achievement of young children (Masse & Barnett, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2002; Schweinhart, 2005; Schweinhart et al., 1993), fewer than half of the young children living in poverty attended center-based preschools (about 20%) or Head Start (about 27%) prior to beginning kindergarten; by contrast, approximately 65% of high-income children participated in center-based preschools prior to kindergarten (Lee & Burkam, 2002).

Unfortunately, simply adding a year of prekindergarten "may not be enough to create the magnitude of effect that is needed [for poor children to excel in school]" (Karweit, 1994, p. 75). Campbell and Ramey (1994) noted that children living in poverty who participate in quality preschool programs may not experience lasting gains in cognitive skills, but suggest that because these children learn to behave differently in school, teachers tend to view them more positively, thus reducing children's retention and placement in special classes. While research on many of these preschool efforts has shown that children's initial cognitive gains may fade during the elementary school years, Alexander and Entwisle (1996) suggested that the early improvement in cognitive ability demonstrated by these children is effective in that it gives them time to avoid common problems associated with living in poverty, including retention and labeling as special education (p. 79). Clearly, early childhood education can benefit children living in

poverty by improving their behavioral and academic skills at kindergarten entry. Despite indications that this uneven distribution of early educational opportunities likely contributes to the later school difficulties experienced by low-income children, current government policies and funding allocations have been slow to increase high quality preschool opportunities for children living in poverty and access remains uneven.

Because parents who live in poverty often do not understand issues of readiness or believe they are part of the decision-making process in schools, they may delay sending their child to school or may feel ill-equipped to help their child who is deemed "unready" for school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al., 2000; Pianta & Cox, 2002; Pianta et al., 1999). The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECSSDE, 2000) is concerned that delaying children's entry into the regular kindergarten, "labels [them] as failures at the outset of their school experience" (p. 2). These specialists go on to say that this practice is, in fact, a form of retention, which places the child at greater risk for later school failure. "Children subjected to delayed entry disproportionately represent racial and linguistic minorities, low-income children and males (NAECSSDE, p. 4). In addition, children who are members of minority groups or poor are more frequently placed in transitional classes or retained in kindergarten than their more affluent peers (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). They are more likely to be labeled as disabled (Kagendo-Mutua, 2001). Regardless of

whether delayed entry results from parent decision or school policy, the consequences are the same. These children do not demonstrate greater gains as a result of their extra year of preparation for school, and most are relegated to the slow track for their school careers (Gay, 2002; NAECSSDE, 2000).

Parent Involvement

Although there is little agreement in the research literature on exactly what constitutes family or parent involvement (SEDL, 2004), parent involvement is often cited as critical component for improving student performance. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included several provisions requiring schools to involve parents. A number of studies have examined the capacity of families living in poverty to support their children's education (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Kaiser & Delaney, 1996; McWayne & Owsianik, 2005; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, & Younoszai, 1998). Schools are recognizing the importance of parental involvement in children's education, but they often struggle to work with families living in poverty whose definition of parent partnership differs from that of the school staff (Lareau, 1987; O'Connor, 2001).

Zigler and Styfco (2000) noted that, "Head Start planners...knew that children came to Head Start from impoverished environments and would return there at the end of the day. This is one reason why we emphasized parent involvement" (p. 68). While families who live in poverty are willing and able to learn strategies for helping their children succeed in school (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996; Lopez & Cole,

1999), teachers often assume either that these parents already have the necessary information and capabilities to assist their children in the ways the school expects (Lareau, 1987; Moles, 1993) or tend to question the ability of parents who live in poverty to be able to assist their children in their schooling (Fine, 1995; O'Connor, 2001).

Mantzicoupoulos (2003) studied the circumstances Head Start children encountered in their first years in public school, and found that their early school success was related to the frequency of their parents' involvement in school activities, which he speculated might be due to the parents' increased knowledge of school programs and expectations. Smith's (2005) study of parent involvement at one low-income school suggested that parents' mere presence in the school may positively influence teachers' opinions about parents' interest and ability in being involved in their children's education. Unfortunately, parents living in poverty often relinquish the role of educating their children to teachers. These families tend to lack the skills and knowledge to work interdependently with the school in supporting their children's education (Lareau, 2003). "Human resources that usually accompany material resources may hold the key" (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996, p.77). Schools have sometimes undervalued the patterns of family life found in families of the poor and working class, which often include more informal recreational activities and socializing with relatives, as compared to middle class

families, who engage in more formal after-school activities and spend more time with other parents from the school (Lareau, 1987).

Feuerstein's (2000) study of the relationship between school-level characteristics and parental involvement in children's education found that, while there is evidence that certain kinds of home-level involvement, such as parent-child discussions about school, may be among the strongest predictors of student achievement, home environment is not easily influenced by school-level variables. McWayne and Owsianik (2005) reported that demographic factors were related to parents' school-based involvement and home-school conferencing, but did not seem to influence home-based involvement, such as spending time at home on reading or creative activities. Likewise, Seefeldt et al. (1998) found, in their study of former Head Start parents' involvement during their children's kindergarten year, that parental beliefs about school climate and their ability to influence their children's education predicted school-related involvement, but not home-related involvement. Graves (2006) found that, while school involvement varied based on socioeconomic status and parent education level, at-school involvement was not a significant predictor of children's reading and math achievement or general knowledge at the end of kindergarten. These findings may be significant because, despite ample evidence that parent involvement increases children's school success (Epstein, 1985), Marzano (2003) suggested that the critical factor in the association between low-socioeconomic status and children's school success may be the home

environment. Home environment is defined as the combination of communication about school, supervision and parenting style, and expectations. The association is strongest for parents who speak positively about school, provide appropriate supervision of their children, and exhibit an authoritative parenting style (Marzano, 2003). A powerful predictor of student achievement is parent-student discussions in the home (Feuerstein, 2000). Christenson (1999) noted that, "family process variables (what parents do to support learning) predict scholastic ability better than family status variables (who families are)" (p. 153). Jeynes (2005) found that a "general atmosphere of involvement" (p. 262) that resulted from parents' expectations and style, rather than specific actions, was strongly correlated with scholastic outcomes for children. Marzano (2003) suggested that the most important factor may be parental expectations for their children's school success. What is not clear is the degree to which children's school success influences parental expectations and parental expectations influence children's school success.

Parents' own experiences in school, and their sense of feeling welcome in school and competent in assisting with schoolwork, all influence their expectations for their children's successful education (Fine & Weis, 1998; Goldenberg et al., 2001). Galper, Wigfield, and Seefeldt (1997) found that, while 90% of Head Start parents wanted their children to receive education beyond high school and 55.8% wanted their children to obtain a college degree, only 21.7% actually expected their children to receive a college degree. Goldenberg et al. (2001) explored the

connection between Latino parents' aspirations (ideal or potential level of educational attainment) and their expectations (realistic or probable level of educational attainment) for children's school performance during elementary school, and their children's actual school achievement. They found that while parental aspirations or hopes remained high throughout their children's elementary school years, their expectations became increasingly linked to how their children were performing academically. Alexander and Entwisle (1996) suggested that parents with high incomes better understand and process the information provided to them by the school regarding their children's academic performance, and thus have expectations that are stronger predictors of their children's actual performance.

There is evidence that schools have different expectations for parent involvement based on the social class they serve (Feuerstein, 2000). For example, schools in wealthy neighborhoods tend to engage with parents in more participatory governance of the schools while schools in working class neighborhoods tend to be controlled by administrators (Feuerstein, 2000). Smith (2005) found in her study of one low-income school that despite changes to school culture and the school's broad definition of parent involvement, school staff persisted in defining parent involvement much more narrowly (e.g., volunteering at school). Smith (2005) noted that "the mere presence of parents in the Family Resource Center constituted involvement" (p. 148). Finley (2001) found that low-income and minority families

were well aware of the school's attempts to involve them. "Certain school-level factors can influence the amount and character of parent involvement" (Feuerstein, 2000, p. 31). For example, parent contacts with the school and their volunteerism both increased as schools' contact with parents increased. Parents believe that positive relationships with school staff and a strong sense of community are necessary in order to become involved at school (Finley, 2001). Finley noted that parents described the school's attention to relationships and a strong sense of community as necessary factors in their decision to become involved at school.

Lareau (1987) found that teachers rated students higher when their parents were involved. Jeynes (2005) noted that grades and other teacher ratings of students increased when parents were involved. However, parents living in poverty often lack the expertise to be able to effectively communicate and work with school staff in making decisions which affect their children. They may feel inferior to school staff due to lack of economic and educational resources (Lareau, 2003; Moles, 1993; O'Connor, 2001). "Educators and disadvantaged parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting effectively" (Moles, 1993, p. 31). Fantuzzo, Lamb-Parker, Watson, and Christenson (1999) noted that schools must go "beyond policy councils, classroom volunteers [and treating parents like] unpaid housekeepers...and make them feel they are an intricate part of their child's educational development" (p. 17). O'Connor (2001) suggested that the power differential between parents who live in poverty and school staff, resulting from

social class differences and professional expertise, is at the root of the problem. Without addressing some of these underlying assumptions about power that keep schools and low-income parents from working together to meet the needs of the children, there appears to be little hope for meaningful partnerships to support the education of children living in poverty.

Summary of Literature Review

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) discovered that, "one person's expectation for another person's behavior can quite unwittingly become a more accurate prediction simply for its having been made" (p. vii). In a study of child care providers who provided care for young children with disabilities, one of the critical factors that determined if the provider successfully provided care for the child was her belief and personal interest in providing such care (Devore & Hanley-Maxwell, 2000). One could interpret this to mean that believing that one should or could provide such an experience would help that person expect to be successful in providing it. "Beliefs may guide people's sensitivity to factual matters and their selection of information" (Moen, Elder & Lüscher, 1995, p. 577). Perhaps belief in and expectation for academic success of young children living in poverty is necessary for teachers of these children. Perhaps, too, part of this belief and expectation must also be extended to their families, so that mutually supportive relationships between teachers and parents can develop, allowing each to provide the assistance necessary for children to succeed.

As a result of unequal opportunities for early childhood education, children living in poverty exhibit achievement differences before they even enter kindergarten (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Zill et al., 2003). These differences are exacerbated when they enter school and find the rules of communication and conduct differ qualitatively from those of the home (Lareau, 2003; Payne, 2001). While there is and will continue to be a need for material resources to support the comprehensive needs of students living in poverty, perhaps the real answer lies in the development of trusting, supportive relationships between parents and school staff, in which parents are given the tools they need to support their children's education, and school staff believe that these parents can make vital contributions to this endeavor (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Moles, 1993). "Social contexts in which children's development occurs intersect, and that intersection [can] no longer be ignored" (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996, p. 67).

Alexander and Entwisle (1996) questioned what role schools and teachers play in the tie between socioeconomic status and low achievement. Graue (2005) noted that existing antagonism between home and school influences prospective teachers' beliefs about the value of parent involvement. "Teachers will need to confront their different philosophies of education, plumb their personal and cultural perspectives, and probe how their prejudices consciously and unconsciously affect their beliefs about the inability of poor children to learn" (Foster, 1997, p. 182).

Finley (2001) noted that most studies of parent involvement focus on parental deficits rather than strengths and perceptions. Rather than looking for the deficits that children and families bring to the educational setting, and predicting (and expecting) dire outcomes as a result of these deficits, schools could focus on the hopes and dreams that families living in poverty have for their children, examine the resources and competencies that these parents bring in supporting their children's education, and develop strategies that can offer appropriate support and guidance to children in their education. Bowman (1999) suggested that new strategies can only be developed if school staff move beyond their "naïve and culture-bound conceptions [and learn to] appreciate real similarities and differences between their understanding of the world and that of children and families who come from different backgrounds" (p. 293). By coming to understand these different perspectives, schools and families can each find their niche in helping children in poverty succeed in school.

To address these gaps in the research, a phenomenological study was undertaken to capture parents' perceptions of their experience of parent involvement as their children transitioned into kindergarten. It is hoped that understandings gleaned from this study might lead to the development of strategies that can be used by Head Start programs and schools to ease Head Start parents' and children's transition into kindergarten and improve the school success of children living in poverty.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework of Model

Much of the current research on parent involvement has linked aspects of poverty to quantity or quality of parental involvement and children's (low) educational achievement, through research using correlational or survey designs (Christenson, 1999; Feuerstein, 2000; Galper et al., 1997; Mantzicoupoulos, 2003; McWayne & Owsianik, 2005; SEDL, 2005). "Although the database is replete with correlational studies...the definitive family process variables for student achievement gains are unknown" (Christenson, 1999, p. 154).

> [We do not] know which aspect or aspects of socioeconomic conditions are contributing to the improvement in children's preparation for school. Because researchers do not as yet have definitive answers to these questions, knowing that socioeconomic status matters is not the same as knowing why it matters and hence how this knowledge can be used to close the gap. (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005, p. 9)

The existing research has not adequately captured *why* these links exist. The literature does, however, suggest that the quality and quantity of parent involvement varies between parents of different social class status. But *how* do parents who are low-income define parent involvement and how do they come to understand their role(s) of involvement in their children's education? In an attempt to better understand these links, the present study explored more deeply five Head

Start parents' perceptions about parent involvement and how these perceptions may be influenced by their own school experiences as well as their experiences in Head Start and their early encounters with the school.

The present study was conducted using qualitative research methods, based on a phenomenological research approach. Such an approach focuses on the individual lived experiences of the study participants and how their understandings of those experiences shape their view of the concept or phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The researcher attempts to identify, "the 'essence' of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study" (Cresswell, 2003, p. 15). Using a phenomenological approach, this study examined the perceptions of parent involvement of five Head Start parents as their children transitioned into kindergarten, and considered how these perspectives might have been influenced by their own life histories, their experiences in Head Start and their early interactions with the school. Throughout the analyses, these findings are juxtaposed with current research and other literature that describes and encourages parent involvement in children's education to consider how the findings might be used to improve educational outcomes for children living in poverty.

There is a natural tendency to assume that others see the world as we do; phenomenological researchers must bracket their subjective experiences with the phenomenon so as to understand and separate their emotional responses to the data from their interpretations of it (Drew, 2004). This is not to say that the purpose of

bracketing is to remove the researcher's emotional responses to the phenomenon under study. To the contrary, "emotions show what is important to pay attention to. Emotions lead to the origins of interpretation" (Drew, 2004, p. 219).

Positivist research paradigms continue to influence qualitative research designs. Shank and Villella (2004) identified four assumptions that unnecessarily constrain qualitative research studies: (a) the consistency assumption, which suggests that qualitative research must adhere to the format and structure of quantitative research; (b) the rigor assumption, which encourages a level of pre-design and preplanning that can interfere with the researcher's ability to be flexible and responsive to "unusual or intriguing points" (p. 52) that might emerge during data collection; (c) the coding assumption, which presumes that all elements of meaning found in the data must be coded and accounted for within larger thematic structures; and (d) the thematic assumption, which, by "creating reductive and scientific coding [early in the data analysis process, can] obscure the very facts that one needs to find" (p. 53).

These assumptions limit the open-ended exploration of data that is critical in qualitative research. By trying to apply the "logic" of quantitative research to qualitative designs, "[qualitative] studies [frequently] suffer from too much design and too much unnecessary preplanning" (Shank & Villella, 2004, p. 52). Qualitative research is emergent, and its design must allow for flexibility and reflexivity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The researcher is an integral part of the

research. Phenomenological research incorporates not only "the meaning of the phenomenon for the participants but [the researcher's] own responses" (Donalek, 2004, p. 517).

This study explored the experiences of five Head Start families as their children transitioned from Head Start to kindergarten. The study began in the spring of the children's Head Start year and continued through their first few months of kindergarten. Using a phenomenological interview strategy, a minimum of three in-depth interviews were conducted with each parent who completed the study.

Much of the current research examines parent involvement from the school perspective. When parents have been included in studies, "there are significant discrepancies between school people and parents about school efforts and family involvement in education" (Graue, 2005, p. 158). The primary goals of this study were to gain a better awareness and appreciation of (a) the ways that Head Start parents describe their experiences of parental involvement as they leave Head Start and have their first encounters with school staff and systems, and (b) how their life histories and these early educational experiences might shape their understanding of the role they play in supporting their children's future education. It is hoped that this study might lead to the development of strategies to better prepare Head Start parents to be involved in their children's education as they transition from Head Start programs into kindergarten.

Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological researchers must begin by fully examining their own experiences with the phenomenon under study so that they can "bracket their own experiences from those of the interviewees" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). This first step in the research process, referred to as the "epoche," helps the researcher understand any preconceptions. The researcher continues this process of self-reflection throughout the study in order to understand the influence values and experiences have on the interviews, observations, and data analysis. Prior to beginning the parent interviews, I prepared a description of my own experiences in order to bracket these experiences from those of the parent participants. I recognize that my early life experiences, which included periods of time living in poverty, my work in Head Start and school settings, as well as my experiences being a parent of four children contribute to my understandings and interpretations of the data collected in this study.

Through this study, I have attempted to describe Head Start parents' perceptions of the phenomena of parental involvement as their children transition into kindergarten so that their views might be considered as schools consider how best to work with parents in educating children. Stringer (1996) described how "individuals...in positions of authority control what they consider to be valid knowledge...hav[ing] the power to dominate the ways in which things happen" (p. 153). The challenge for me throughout this study was to bracket my own values

and experiences of parent involvement, and my understandings of these Head Start, school and neighborhood settings, so that they did not exert undue influence on the study participants or my interpretation of the data.

Methods and Procedures

Preparing to Conduct the Study

I discussed the study proposal with the Head Start program's Executive Director in the early fall of 2005. She indicated initial approval to involve Head Start parents in the study. Later, I presented the study proposal to the Head Start program's Policy Council at its November 2005 meeting. Policy Council is the Head Start governing body made up of parents and community representatives. This group must work with key program staff to develop, review, and approve or disapprove major program policies and procedures in the Head Start program, including personnel actions, program planning procedures and grant proposals (Administration of Children, Youth and Families [ACYF], 2001, p. 164). I shared with the group that much of the existing educational research ties living in poverty to poor educational outcomes for children, and has shown that parents who are low-income are not involved in their children's education in the same ways as more affluent parents. I told them that this study would follow several parents as they and their children transitioned into kindergarten, interviewing them and seeing how their own histories and experiences shaped their beliefs about parent involvement. The Policy Council was very interested in this study and moved approval to go

forward with a study. Several of the parents expressed interest in participating in pilot interviews or the study itself. I conducted pilot interviews with two parents in March 2006, which resulted in the addition of a seemingly obvious additional question to each of the three interview protocols. The question was "How would you describe parent involvement?"

Initially, the study intended to choose parent participants from "target schools." These target schools were identified as:

- Being a public school offering a kindergarten program;
- Having a high percentage (more than 50%) of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch;
- Having at least 10 Head Start families transitioning into the school during the 2006-2007 school year;
- Being located within the service area of the Head Start program.

The original goal was to choose parents from two or three of these target schools. The purpose of choosing participants from these target schools was twofold. First, it was thought that parents' descriptions of their understandings of the phenomena of parental involvement could be compared and contrasted within the contexts of their experiences in same and different Head Start and school settings. Second, the research suggests that schools may hold different expectations for parental involvement based on the socioeconomic status of the neighborhoods

they serve (Feuerstein, 2001; Stipek, 2004). The study had intended to focus only on families transitioning to high-poverty schools.

The Head Start program in this study shares attendance boundaries with 42 regular and 3 charter elementary schools. In addition, several private schools in the area offer scholarships to families living in poverty. A search of the Head Start program's database revealed that for the upcoming study period, the program was going to transition 10 or more children to only a handful of the regular public schools, and those schools tended to serve a large percentage of families who spoke Spanish in the home. It was becoming apparent that the original selection criterion might be difficult to meet.

A review of the Oregon Department of Education's (2005) on-line database indicated that schools in the area had large discrepancies in the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch at each school. Fewer than half of the elementary schools in the area had free and reduced-priced lunch percentages greater than 50%, although most of the high-poverty schools had percentages well in excess of 50% (65-90%). Not surprisingly, many of these schools also served a student body with at least 25% identified as English language learners.

In addition, it was anticipated that families might move during the study and I was prepared to follow them to their new schools to the extent possible. Schools in the area served by this Head Start program frequently experience 40-50% mobility (defined in the broadest terms as any child who moves in or out of a given

school during the school year), although many of the families continue to live within the broader boundaries outlined by the study. The Community Assessment report conducted for the Head Start program by Portland State University's Population Research Center in 2002 indicated that over half of the population ages five and older moved during the past 5 years, but 61% of those who moved stayed within the county. It was hoped that at least three of the parent participants would continue to live within close enough proximity to remain in the study through its duration.

I revisited my original reasons for proposing these target school criteria, and determined that I could still find opportunities to compare and contrast participant experiences and perspectives during the data analysis, and that, since the initial school affiliations of study participants could change during the study, that it was unnecessary to include this limit in the selection criteria. Demographic information about the school where the child attended kindergarten could be considered, when available, during the data analysis phase of the study (see Appendix H).

Participants

Participants were drawn from families who had a four-year-old enrolled during the 2005-2006 school year at a Head Start program in the Portland metropolitan area. Families were selected for the study based on the following criteria:

- Had a 4-year-old child who had attended Head Start for at least one program year prior to beginning kindergarten and who was eligible for kindergarten during the 2006-2007 school year;
- Had never had a child in public school before;
- Planned to enroll their child in the local public school kindergarten;
- Had at least one primary caretaker who was willing to be interviewed at least three times: once during the spring prior to the child entering kindergarten, once approximately one month after the start of school, and once after the child had been in school three to four months;
- Were not planning to move within the school year (although it was recognized that this population tends to be highly mobile); and
- Were fluent in spoken English;

Families living in poverty frequently include a "range of significant others" who assist the parent in child rearing (SEDL, 2004). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 noted the definition of parent as adults who have an important role in the child's family life – and could be a grandparent, stepparent, uncle, aunt, guardian, or other adult. Section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 defined a parent as the natural, adoptive or foster parent, or the guardian or other adult, such as a grandparent or stepparent, who lives with and is responsible for the child. Ramey and Ramey (1999) noted that more than one third of the mothers participating in the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition

Demonstration Program reported that someone other than the mother or father regularly helps with the care of the children. For the purposes of this study, the person the family considered to be the primary caretaker of the child was expected to participate in the study. It was anticipated that this would most likely be the mother, but could have included the father, a foster parent or other guardian. Other significant adults in the child's life, such as stepparents or parental partners, and extended family members could also be included, if they were interested.

Potential participant families were initially recruited through an e-mail request sent to the Head Start program's teachers and family service staff in early May 2006. In the e-mail, I asked these staff to identify English-speaking parents on their caseload who were sending their first child to kindergarten in the upcoming school year, and who might be interested in participating in a study about parent involvement as their children transitioned to kindergarten. Three teachers and one family worker responded to this request, identifying eight potential participants. I reviewed the program's database to confirm that these potential participants met the study criteria.

I contacted the Head Start staff by telephone and asked them to share a letter from me with each potential participant (see Appendix B), asking the participants if they were comfortable with me contacting them by telephone to set up an interview. Only after the staff member confirmed that they had made contact with the family and that the family was awaiting my contact did I call the family.

From this pool of potential participants, five families were included in the study. Of the eight families initially identified by staff, I was able to reach five in one or two attempts, setting up appointments for face-to-face interviews between May 30 and June 9, 2006. One family decided they did not want to participate in the study after our phone conversation; the father had recently moved out of the home, leaving the grandmother to care for the child. She was not sure that she would remain in the parent role for the duration of the study. Another family never returned my telephone calls. A third family had a disconnected number. I worked with the teacher to find an alternate contact number, which turned out to be an out-of-state relative. This relative gave me a cell phone number for the parent. I left two voice mail messages over a 3-day period and never heard back from this parent.

The Head Start staff had initially identified a pool of potential participants which included one- and two-parent households, mother- and father-headed households, and one grandmother caring for her grandchild. The group selected for the study included family members who were African-American, Latino and Caucasian. One parent from each family participated in the study. All were women; four were single mothers and one was a stepmother. Their family situations varied greatly, as described later in this section.

Adults living in poverty sometimes exhibit high levels of dysfunction, such as criminal activity, drug addiction, child abuse, and chronic unemployment (Balshem et al., 1994; Hudley, 1997; Kagan, 1997). I recognized that factors such

as drug abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence could affect a family's ability or willingness to continue through the course of the study. By recruiting families through teacher and family worker referral, I was reasonably assured that these families had regularly participated in home visits and other program activities, and were less likely to be experiencing severe personal or family conditions that might keep them from completing the study. In addition, families who did not return my calls after several attempts were likewise excluded, because I reasoned that if they had difficulty making the initial contact, it was likely that they would have difficulty remaining in contact for the duration of the study. I felt that my training and experience working with Head Start families in home-based settings had prepared me to deal with some of these situations should they arise. Despite this planning, one study participant, a stepmother, withdrew from the study prior to the second interview because the child had been removed from her husband's custody and was now living with the child's mother out of the area. Because the stepmother was no longer in a parental role, she could no longer participate in the study. None of the remaining four participants experienced personal or family situations that jeopardized their ability to complete the study.

I asked each of the participants to give themselves and their children pseudonyms for use in the study. A synopsis of each study participant follows (see Table 1).

Table 1

Parent Participants

Name	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Child	Head Start Experience	Kindergarten
Anne	African/ American	26	Alex	1 year in part-day	part-day, public
Mandy	Caucasian	23	Tony	1 year in full, then part-day	unknown
Joy	Caucasian	28	Mimi	2 years in part-day	part-day, public
Sandy	Caucasian	30	Henry	1 year in full-day	part-day, public
Claudia	Caucasian	36	Julie	2 years in full-day	full-day, private

Anne. Anne is a 26-year-old single mother who is African American. She lives with her son, Alex, in an apartment complex that houses about 100 other families who are low-income. Anne lived in foster care and group homes during much of her childhood. She reports that she moved a lot as a child, but has always lived within about 20 miles of the Portland area. She has begun having some contact with her mother, a recovering addict. Anne has also recently begun to have more contact with Alex's father, who lives out of state. Anne has her GED, which she completed after Alex was born. Much of her time is taken up with counseling for herself and other appointments. She has recently been working with a temp agency and hopes to find regular work. Alex was diagnosed with a speech disability when he was 2 years old and received early childhood special education services while he was in Head Start. For one year, he attended a part-day Head Start classroom, which is located in the same school as his part-day kindergarten

class. Alex has a late August birthday, so he is one of the youngest in his class. He continues to qualify for speech services in kindergarten.

Mandy. Mandy is a 23-year-old stepmother who is Caucasian. She has been married for about 3 years to Tony's father, Anthony, who is biracial. The family lives in a small apartment complex. Mandy and Anthony attend school at the local community college and work part-time jobs. Tony is their only child. Tony started Head Start in the full-day child care center on the community college campus, but later moved to a part-day classroom located nearby because the family did not like the full-day program. Mandy's younger sister spends time with the family. Mandy withdrew from the study prior to the second interviews, because Anthony lost custody of Tony to Tony's mother who lives out of the area.

Joy. Joy is a 28-year-old single mother, who is Caucasian. She lives in a house in a suburban neighborhood with her daughter, Mimi; her infant son; and several members of her extended family. Extended family members living in the house included her mother, stepfather; adult sister and her 2-year-old son; and a niece and nephew who have been adopted by Joy's parents. Her son's father is also involved with the family. It was unclear if he lived in the home. The family actively participates in church and Sunday school. Mimi participated in a part-day Head Start classroom for 2 years. Joy has completed her General Education Diploma (GED) and provides child care in the home for her young nephew and occasionally for other children. Mimi is enrolled in the neighborhood school, which operates a

part-day kindergarten program. Joy did not enroll Mimi until late in the summer, because she said she was hoping to move out of her parents' home prior to the start of school. The school where she registered Mimi contacted her right before the school year was going to begin to tell her that the family lived just a few houses out of the school's attendance area boundary, so Joy needed to re-register at another school. The school assisted her in transitioning the registration information to the new school. Although Joy reports that she moved many times throughout her childhood, she lived in this same community much of the time, and has resided in her current home for a number of years. She knows some of the teachers at the elementary school either from her childhood or because they are currently her neighbors.

Sandy. Sandy is a 30-year-old single mother who is Caucasian. She lives with her son, Henry, and another son, Mark, who is one year younger than Henry. Sandy is a college student at the local community college and is pursuing a degree in business. She considers herself religious and she participates regularly in her church. Henry attended Head Start for one year in a full-day child care program on the college campus with Mark, who continued to attend Head Start there when Henry transitioned to kindergarten. The family lives in an apartment that is located between the college and Henry's school, where he is enrolled in a part-day kindergarten class. The boys have visitation with their father, although these visits are somewhat sporadic. Sandy's mother is also involved in the family's life and she

communicates with them frequently. In fall 2006, Sandy became engaged to a younger man she met at the community college and they planned to marry in March 2007.

Claudia. Claudia is a 36-year-old single mother who is Caucasian. She lives with her daughter, Julie, in a house that is not far from their neighborhood school. Claudia works full time at a nearby child care center as a cook and center aide. She enrolled Julie in the kindergarten program at the child care center where she works, because she reports that she could not figure out how to arrange child care for Julie if she had attended the part-day kindergarten at the local elementary school. Julie attended Head Start for 2 years at the same full-day child care center as Henry, but the two children were in different classes. Claudia and Joy live just six blocks apart, but they do not know each other – their children attended different Head Start centers, and, even if Julie were attending the kindergarten at the local school, the children would not be together, because despite living so near each other, their homes lie in different elementary school attendance boundaries. Claudia announced her engagement in January 2007 and planned to marry in May 2007; her fiancé lives with Claudia and Julie.

Preparing For and Conducting the Interviews

Epoche. The Epoche, or bracketing process, was initiated prior to beginning the interviews with parent participants. I prepared a written, detailed description of my own experiences with the phenomena of parent involvement.

Phenomenological research must incorporate the researcher's "thoughts, responses, and decision-making process...throughout the entire research process" (Donalek, 2004, p. 516). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I wrote memos or journal entries in order to capture my values, beliefs and preunderstandings about the data and my responses to it.

This process allowed me to continually examine my assumptions about the perceptions and motivations of the study participants. I challenged myself to question my interpretations of the interview responses, and examined how my own life experiences, and knowledge and experience of the Head Start program and the local schools included in this study might influence the interview process. I also reflected on the ways my roles as doctoral student, interviewer and Head Start staff could influence what participants shared during our times together.

Interviews. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for open-ended responses by the participants. Churchill (1978) summarized interviews "as a method for data collection which may be described as a distinct pattern of interaction involving mutual influence between the interviewer and interviewee" (p. 6). The degree of directiveness of the interviewer will vary throughout the interview based on the context of the interview and the responsiveness of the participant (Churchill, 1978, p. 7). Eyring (1998) noted that, "the context of the phenomenological interview must be characterized by trust, openness, and respect for the co-participant" (p. 142). Interview protocols were used for the three in-depth

interviews conducted with parent participants (see Appendix E). In phenomenological inquiry, the first interview focuses on the individual's past experience with the phenomenon, the second interview focuses on present experiences, and the third brings together the two to describe the experience of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Each interview protocol contained core questions to begin the inquiry, but each participant's responses led to somewhat divergent lines of questioning.

Parents who completed the study participated in three in-depth interviews over the course of the study. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The purpose of the initial parent interview was to learn about parents':

- Previous experiences with school, and their thoughts about parent involvement;
- Comfort level and perceptions of their skill in being involved in and supporting their children's education;
- Aspirations and expectations for their children's school success.

Subsequent parent interviews explored the ways that parents came to understand their role in supporting their children's education by exploring parents' memories of their own education, how parents interacted with and might have been influenced by school staff, and how they interpreted and utilized information from the school.

Once the Head Start staff person had confirmed that the family was expecting my call, I contacted each participant by phone to arrange the first interview time and meeting place. Each participant, except Sandy, met with me in her home. Sandy arranged to meet at the child care center on the community college campus. We then went to a small cafeteria on campus for the interview. All of the interviews took place in the morning or early afternoon, except for the interviews with Claudia, which took place in the early evening after she arrived home from work. I took a set of Duplo blocks, drawing paper and markers to the interviews for the children to use should they be present. The children were present at about half of the interviews throughout the study; I had an opportunity to meet all of the children, except for Henry. At the conclusion of the first interview, I gave each participant a $20 gift card of their choice (to Safeway or Fred Meyer) as a thank you gift, and reminded them that I would be contacting them again after their children started kindergarten to conduct the second interview.

In late August 2006, I mailed a short, handwritten note to each participant (see Appendix D), saying that I hoped they had had a nice summer and reminding them that I would be contacting them again in early September to arrange our second interview. Mandy called me about a week after I sent out these notes to say that she and her husband could not continue in the study because he no longer had custody of his son. She was not planning to enroll in college in the fall "because of the family situation." I thanked her for contacting me, wished her well, and told her

to contact me in the future if her situation changed and she would like to rejoin the study. In early September, I contacted the remaining four participants by telephone and set up second interviews. Again, each participant met me in her home, except for Sandy, who arranged to meet me at the child care center in the morning after she dropped off her younger son, Mark. At the conclusion of the second interview, I again offered each participant their choice of a $20 gift card to either Safeway or Fred Meyer as a thank you gift, and reminded them that we would have our third interview in a few months.

In late December 2006, I again sent each participant a short, handwritten note, saying that I hoped they were well and reminding them that I would be calling to arrange our next interview soon. In early January, I called each participant to arrange the third interview time and meeting place. The interviews were held between January 12 and January 23. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant again received her choice of a $20 Safeway or Fred Meyer gift card as a thank you gift. I asked each participant if I could contact them again to review the final report and if I had any questions during the writing process. Each participant said that I could contact them as needed, and Joy asked if she could have a copy of the final report.

Each of the interviews was tape recorded. In addition, I took notes during the interview in case there were any problems with the recording and I needed to recall parts of the interview by other means. I transcribed each of the tape

recordings within 48 hours of the interview. I had some difficulty transcribing tape recordings of Claudia's interviews, because she has a particularly soft voice and, despite changing the positioning of the tape recorder at subsequent interviews, I failed to capture portions of the interview during each session. The content was recreated, to the extent possible, using notes written during and immediately following the interview. In addition, participants frequently shared important information prior to beginning the tape recording as we greeted each other and moved to where we would conduct the interview. This was often the case with Sandy, since we needed to walk about a quarter mile from our meeting place at the child care center to the cafeteria where we actually sat down to conduct the interviews. I attempted to recall these conversations immediately after the interview session, writing them down as soon as possible, generally when I returned to my car following the interview.

Likewise, participants often shared additional information after the tape recorder had been turned off and I was getting ready to leave. This was especially true of Claudia, who seemed the most quiet and hesitant during the interviews. When possible, I took notes during these conversations and again in the car following the interview, if necessary. I was able to build in time for reflection immediately following each interview. During this time, I made some notes describing my initial impressions of the interview process and content. Prior to the second and third interviews, I prepared by reviewing previous transcripts and notes

for each participant. For each of the interviews, I took a copy of the interview protocol for reference (see Appendix E).

Data Analysis

To help maintain confidentiality, study participants were assigned pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interviews; these pseudonyms have been used in this final report. Most participants suggested the pseudonyms that are used for themselves and their children. When not in use, all data were secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Data analysis was conducted using the methodology of Transcendental Phenomenology, which is based on the work of Edmund Husserl (Drew, 2001; Husserl, 1925/1977; Moustakas, 1994). This methodology employs four core processes: Epoche, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche

The Epoche refers to the setting aside of researchers' prejudgments and predispositions toward the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) referred to the Epoche as the process of "looking, noticing, becoming aware, without imposing our prejudgment on what we see, think, imagine, or feel" (p. 86). The Epoche process takes time and patience to achieve the level of consciousness necessary to recognize and label the preconceptions that influence interpretation of the data.

"Approached with dedication and determination, the process can make a difference in what and how we see, hear, and/or view things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90).

This bracketing of preconceptions and biases is an intensely personal process that requires the researcher to examine why passages in the transcripts hold meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The process begins with the researcher writing a complete description of the phenomenon, including an examination of the values and meanings the phenomenon has for him or her.

Drew (2001, 2004) outlined the steps that can be used for bracketing the researcher's preunderstanding. While Drew (2004) recommended the assistance of a trusted colleague in this process, bracketing can be carried out by the researcher alone. Marshall and Rossman (1999) said that phenomenological inquiry "requires a reflective turn of mind on the part of the researcher" (p. 113). I believe I have such a "reflective" nature, which is one of the reasons I have been drawn to this research methodology. However, I also enlisted the support of a professional colleague, who agreed to assist me with the bracketing process. She has previous experience working with Head Start children and families, and is currently working in the field of early childhood education, including recent work as an adjunct faculty member at a local community college, where she provided supervision to student teachers and taught courses in early childhood education and family support. Currently, she provides instruction and mentoring to family child care providers.

Once I wrote the full description of my own experiences and reflected on the meanings of those experiences, I was ready to begin interviewing parent participants and analyzing the interview transcripts. First, I identified passages in the data that were meaningful to me when they were first read. Next, I wrote a premise statement next to each of these passages that described my beliefs or values about the passage. Once a premise statement was written, I looked for a "personal question for which the statement of premise is relevant" (Drew, 2004, p. 221). I examined these personal questions and considered how they might be related to my own experiences or attitudes and how they might point to the source of my preunderstanding of the phenomenon. Elements of this bracketing process are incorporated into the final written description of the phenomenon.

Reflective time was built into the interview schedule, so that I could note my assumptions and preunderstandings of the data collected during the interviews. I used memos throughout the data collection period as a way to reflect on and document the bracketing process and some of my initial interpretations of the data.

Phenomenological Reduction

Moustakas (1994) summarized the steps in the process of phenomenological reduction. First, through the process called "horizonalizing," the researcher analyzes each interview transcript and creates statements of possible meaning. Next, the researcher deletes statements that are irrelevant or repetitive, leaving only the textural meanings or constituent parts of the phenomenon, called the

"horizons." Finally, the researcher clusters the horizons into themes and organizes all of this into a textural description of the phenomenon. The textural description can be thought of as "what" the participants perceive (Moustakas, 1994).

Once I had attempted to set aside prejudgments and preunderstandings in the Epoche, I was ready to begin Phenomenological Reduction, which is the task of describing the phenomena in "textural language" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). I began this process by reading each transcript and deciding which statements had relevance to the experience of parent involvement. I highlighted these statements in the transcripts. Next I reread each highlighted statement to determine if it represented an element of the experience and if that element could be summarized and labeled. I listed these summarized statements, or horizons of the experience (Moustakas, 1994) in the margins of each of the transcripts. I created a chart which listed these statements for each of the parent participants. I noted the overlapping or repetitive expressions and identified the invariant constituents of the experience (see Appendix G). Next, I grouped the invariant constituents and labeled these core themes of the experience for each participant. Once this process was complete, I returned to the original transcripts and read them again to confirm that the themes were explicitly expressed or at least compatible with each of the participant transcripts.

"Employing the phenomenological method means taking a step back from our usual everyday involvement in things...to gain the distance necessary for a

fresh look" (Fuller, 1990, p. 27). Reduction, in the phenomenological sense, does not refer to making something smaller, but rather, to purifying it or reducing it to its essence (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to view the phenomena from many different angles, reflecting and thinking about each aspect of the phenomena, checking and correcting perceptions, until all of the parts fit back into a whole. "What differentiates the phenomenologically inspired method is the fact that a disciplined spontaneity is allowed...whereby one first discovers the relevant meaning unit...later, based upon a subsequent analysis, explicates its actual full import" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 14).

I periodically checked my perceptions with the perceptions of others with expertise or experience with the phenomenon, including colleagues in the Head Start program and occasionally other Head Start parents. This checking of perceptions sometimes led me to revisit the phenomenon, reshaping my perceptions of aspects of it. The objective of the process was to go deeper into the layers of meaning of a phenomenon until I had gotten to its essence. This task involved repeatedly looking at the data from the parent interviews and reducing it until I could identify the core themes of their experience of parent involvement, and finally describing the phenomena in a rich, detailed description for each participant.

Imaginative Variation

Once a description of the constituent parts of the phenomenon had been written, I conducted the next phase of analysis, called Imaginative Variation. This

task requires the researcher to seek the structural description of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described these structural or underlying factors as, "the 'how' that speaks to the conditions that illuminate the 'what' of experience" (p. 98). As the term implies, this step emphasizes the intuitive, imaginative exploration of many possible factors that might underlie the textural meanings. In Imaginative Variation, the researcher explores the many underlying contextual factors that might lead to the perceptions of the phenomenon, including the structures of, "time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). I read and reread the verbatim transcripts of each of the parent participants, and considered my own experiences explored during the epoche process, journal entries I had written throughout the data collection period, and current research on parent involvement to discover the contextual factors underlying the parent participants' perceptions of parent involvement.

Synthesis

The final step in the phenomenological process is the creation of a unified statement of the essences of the phenomenon under study, which incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions created in the previous steps. It is understood in phenomenology that this statement or report is set within a specific time and place, and incorporates the unique perspectives of the researcher involved in the study. A composite textural-structural description was written for the participants, which incorporated the meanings and essences representative of the

group's experience of parent involvement. It is important to note that this final report contains not only the perceptions of the participants but also my perceptions of the phenomena and accounting of the research process.

Trustworthiness

Despite the risk that qualitative research is often viewed with skepticism (Viadero, 1999), I believe, like Lincoln (1996), that conventional scientific methods have "create[d] unacceptable consequences" (p. 4), because they have not engaged the study subjects as full participants in the inquiry. By maintaining this detachment, traditional science may not have felt the urgent needs of those it studies, nor had as its goal the creation of a "more just, humane, and democratic world" (Lincoln, 1996, p. 13). Donalek and Soldswisch (2004) stated that, "while the quantitative researcher hopes to achieve statistical significance, the qualitative researcher hopes to achieve a full understanding" (p. 356).

Qualitative researchers can improve the credibility or trustworthiness of their findings by incorporating several data collection and analysis strategies into the study. Cresswell (2003) identified eight strategies that add trustworthiness to a qualitative study. The present study incorporated at least five of these strategies. First, phenomenological inquiry results in "rich, thick description to convey findings" (Cresswell, 2003, p. 196). Such descriptions allow the reader to view the data itself and better understand how I reached my conclusions. Second, the researcher's bias, resulting from the bracketing process, is explicitly detailed and

incorporated into the final report. Third, Cresswell (2003) suggests that prolonged time in the field adds credibility to the account. Because parents who completed the study participated in three interviews and the interviews in this study took place over a period of about 9 months, it is more likely that I was able to capture the essence of their experience more completely than a study conducted over a shorter time frame or through one-time interviews. Fourth, Cresswell (2003) advises the use of a peer reviewer who asks the researcher questions in order to enhance the accuracy of the findings. My use of a colleague during the bracketing process, and at other points throughout the study, increased the likelihood that I was making accurate interpretations of the data. Finally, this study included member-checking because I met with study participants to review the final report and authenticate the findings.

Phenomenological research engages participants as co-researchers in the study process. "The researcher's role is not to push particular agendas" but to "formulate ways of...working together that will enhance the life experiences of the participants" (Stringer, 1996, p. 159). Throughout the interview process and during the writing of the final report, I worked with parent participants to verify my interpretation of their experiences and the themes presented. I was able to meet with three of the parent participants, Joy, Sandy and Claudia, in late September 2007 to review the themes, and clarify or suggest changes to my interpretations. Joy and Claudia each met with me in their homes; Sandy met at the coffee shop on

the community college campus. I was unable to contact Anne, because her phone number had been disconnected and she no longer lived at the same address. The parents confirmed that the findings presented here reflect their beliefs and understandings of their experiences of parent involvement. I made minor revisions to the original descriptions of two themes ("hope and expectations" and "teacher-liking") as a result of these follow up discussions with parents.

Eyring (1998) described the challenges of role changes and blurred boundaries that she faced while conducting phenomenological research with her own students, including sorting out what might be known about a participant's experience based on interactions that have taken place outside of the interview context or through third-party accounts, and separating the helper functions of her job from the research process. These were some of the same challenges that I encountered as I conducted research with these current and former Head Start families. Throughout the study, I attempted to handle these situations when they arose. For example, although I had full access to the child and family records for each of the participants, I only used the database to gain contact information and to confirm the children's and parents' ages and other demographic information. When one of the teachers who referred a family inquired about how the child and family were doing in kindergarten, I responded simply that they had continued in my study. When appropriate, the final report incorporates my place in the research

including how my own values and perceptions have contributed to the findings and how my relationships with the study participants might have influenced the results.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Epoche

In considering how these parent participants described parent involvement as their children entered kindergarten, and how their life histories as well as their experiences in Head Start and their early encounters with the school might be influencing their descriptions, I needed to also consider how my own experiences with parent involvement, both as a child and as a parent, might be influencing my interpretations of their descriptions of the phenomenon. Unlike most of the parents in this study, I was raised in a two parent family. But my father's struggles with alcoholism and my mother's struggles with migraines and related health issues, and her full time employment, created some of the same inconsistencies in support and presence experienced by many of the study participants. My parents never volunteered during the school day, although they frequently attended evening programs and extracurricular activities which involved me or my brothers. I do not recall other parents volunteering in school either, but I had a sense that other adults, from either my parents' circle of friends or parents of my classmates, were watching over and monitoring me. I also had the emotional and physical support of my maternal grandparents, who lived nearby during my early youth. In addition, I had the stability of living in the same home throughout my entire school experience

and being surrounded by other families who also stayed in the neighborhood throughout my childhood. I wondered if I could appreciate Anne's experience living in one group home after another with no sense of connection to any particular place or group of people, or Sandy's amazement that a young man she met in high school might actually have a friend he had known since his elementary school days.

Unlike most of the parents in this study, my own four children have also been raised in a two parent family. Their father had a flexible school and work schedule which allowed him to volunteer regularly when they were in elementary school, and we both attended "student-led" parent-teacher conferences, as well as school programs and extracurricular events. We monitored their homework completion, especially in elementary school, and were always able (sometimes with the financial assistance of extended family) to provide our children with the materials they needed to do their school work. They also had the attention of grandmothers, aunts and other family members who went to events and sometimes asked them about school. Also unlike the parent participants, my husband and I, besides having each other as parental supports, had a fairly large circle of friends with children in school, with whom we could exchange stories and ideas. I wondered how I could fully appreciate Anne's comment that it's "just me and him." I wondered how my experience of parenting four children might be the same or different from that of Claudia, Anne or Mandy, who were each raising a single

children. Despite living very near my mother and grandmother when my children were growing up, I wondered if I could understand Joy's experience living with extended family, a situation that sets her up to be both the parent and the child in her household.

As a teen, I, like some of the participants, found that parental support waned. As a result of my father's alcoholism, my home life became more chaotic and dysfunctional, and I spent less time at home, and more time hanging out with friends and working at a local fast food restaurant. I began skipping school and my grades suffered. Once an honor student, I began to receive Cs and Ds on report cards. At 17, with no parent paying attention, I came very close to dropping out of school and moving out into the world. When my father died unexpectedly early in my senior year of high school, my attention returned home, I quit my job and refocused on school. I do not know what path my life would have taken if not for this traumatic, yet awakening, event that took place at a crucial time in my development. I wondered what kind of upbringing and intervening events might have set a different life course for Anne or Joy. I wondered what had inspired Sandy to become so resilient and driven to succeed in school and with her boys.

Each of my children has graduated from high school, although one of the four did not have a successful high school experience until she transferred to an alternative setting midway through her sophomore year. Despite being a straight A student in middle school, she struggled as a freshman, flunking a couple of courses,

attending remedial classes in summer school, and then all, but dropping out by October of her sophomore year. Despite thinking I was being attentive and monitoring her progress, I discovered that she had been skipping classes for most of a month and the school was about to drop her for lack of attendance. At the time, I considered myself to be quite an expert in education – I was on the school board and was a doctoral student with an interest in parent involvement in education, yet I had missed the signs that my own daughter was dropping out of school. Since I had already experienced my older children losing interest during their high school experience, generally during their senior year, and each had successfully moved on to college, I assumed that this daughter's lack of interest would also pass, and with my attention on my own work, school and other interests, I missed her downward spiral. So as I listened to Joy's story about her mother's lack of attention during her high school years and her sense that this contributed to her "veering off the path," or to Sandy's story about being bullied and feeling that she had to deal with this situation on her own, my memories of feeling alone during my own teen years, and my feelings of guilt for failing my daughter during those critical years welled up in me. I wondered how my experiences as a child and as a parent with children in high school might shape my interpretation of these parents' sharing of their experiences as teens. I wondered how my experiences would affect my understanding of their descriptions of parent involvement.

As I searched for meaning in the words of the parent participants, I knew that I had to continually think about how my own experiences might influence the interpretations I was making about the data before me. The following section describes the horizons and themes that I found in the data.

Horizonalization and the Clustering of Horizons into Themes

I analyzed the verbatim transcripts of the five parent participants to determine the significant and invariant meanings that the experience of parent involvement held for them (see Appendix G). Once the invariant constituents or horizons were discovered, they were then clustered into the following themes.

Hope and expectation of a better life for their children: Parents want for their children positive experiences that they may not have experienced in their own childhood or early adulthood. The child represents the parent's own lost or not yet realized potential, and parents hope that their children do not have some of the same struggles that they have encountered in their lives.

Parents as ultimate authority or decision-make: Parents expressed that they are the ones to make the final decision regarding which schools their children attend, what services their children will receive, and how they (parents) will be involved. Parents advocate for their children. Some say they will do "whatever it takes" to help their children be successful in school.

Parents know their own children intimately: Parents can describe their own children's strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. They understand and appreciate their children's uniqueness. They know their children's needs and history, and feel they hold valuable information that must be considered for their children to succeed.

Child as a reflection of the family: Parents consider their children's behavior and success in school to be a reflection of the family's skill and success in parenting. Parents want their children to be well-mannered and obedient. They expect their children to make good choices (i.e., behave). They worry and expect that their children will behave differently at school if they are involved, and cite this as a reason for avoiding school involvement.

Creating stability and structure for their children: Most of the parents cite a lack of stability and structure in their own upbringing and place a high value on providing this for their children. They want to establish schedules and routines for their children, and they want to create security for their children by remaining in the same home for an extended period of time.

Time constraints to at-school involvement: Parents express the various constraints to involvement at their children's schools. Lack of transportation and child care for other children at home are constraints for one parent, but overwhelmingly, time is the constraining factor for all of these parents. Whether working, attending school or participating in "personal appointments," each parent

describes difficulties associated with the school schedule, especially for those with children in part-day programs. One parent did not even enroll her child in the public school kindergarten because she could not reconcile her full day work schedule with the part-day kindergarten schedule (and the lack of extended care opportunities for her child at the school).

Sense of obligation to participate: Parents believe they are obligated to be involved in several key school activities, including attending orientation events, taking their children to school on the first day and attending parent-teacher conferences. Parents feel guilty for avoiding involvement or not being able to be involved in the ways they think the school expects them to be involved. Some parents expressed frustration with school fundraisers, either because they cannot afford to participate or because they do not want their children to be encouraged to sell things. Some parents send things into the school, ranging from canned food and package labels to materials to support the curriculum, such as a bird nest or musical instrument.

Discomfort with the school setting and system: Parents do not know what to expect in the school. They have vague general memories of their early school experiences, and are unsure about school curriculum, rules and systems. The school feels unfamiliar and parents are uncomfortable with the setting and routines. They are uncertain about the schools' expectations for children, and do not know how their children rank compared to other children their age. Despite positive feelings

about their own children's experiences, schools are generally rated unfavorably, with some parents anticipating adversarial relationships in the future. They are unsure of how much they are expected to be involved or in what ways.

Encouraging children's independence: Parents see kindergarten entry as a time to begin separating from their children. They must begin to relinquish control of their children and while some parents view this time with sadness, others are ready for their children to go off to school and become more independent. They believe it is their responsibility to support and assist their children, but not be overly involved or "do it for them." They want their children to be self-reliant.

Awareness of children's progress: Parents monitor their children's progress at school. Most do this through reading weekly newsletters and notes sent home with the children. Others get information from teachers through informal communications during pick up and drop off times or telephone conversations, and through more formal interactions such as parent-teacher conferences.

Teacher-liking related to trust in school and parent-teacher communication: Parents describe school as a good experience for their children when they like and feel comfortable with the teacher. If their children like the teacher, or the parents see the teacher as friendly, respectful and approachable, parents express confidence that the school is meeting their children's needs. A positive relationship with the teacher facilitates communication between the teacher

and parent, and parents noted the importance of letting children know that adults are coordinating their efforts on behalf of the child.

Time and support to child at home: Parents cite the importance of assisting their children at home with homework, devoting time to them, listening to them, and talking to them about school. They cite physical care and nurturing of their children as an important element of parent involvement. Parents look for guidance from the school in the form of "homework sheets." Some parents are actively involved, while others feel that being physically present and available is sufficient. Parents try to provide the materials their children need at home to do their schoolwork. Parents want their children to understand that education is important. Parents view these interactions with their children as times to share and reinforce their family's values, and as the building of a relationship that will assist with communication in the future when their children are older.

Protecting their children: Parents worry that their children will not make friends at school. They have high expectations for their children, but some worry that their children will not achieve these high expectations. They want to keep their children safe, and some worry about how their children will be influenced by their schoolmates.

Individual Textural Descriptions

In the following section, key experiences of each parent participant are described. Brief excerpts from the verbatim transcripts have been used to illustrate their experiences.

Textural Description of Anne's Parent Involvement Experience

Anne's description of herself begins with an explanation that she is a single parent and "it's just me and him at home." She is also quick to explain that Alex has a disability that was diagnosed when he was 2 years old, and subsequently, she "got him involved" in Head Start. Anne wants Alex to grow up and be successful, and "get all his education" by going to college, "even to university," because she "never got to do anything like that" and "could see that happening for my child." In the spring, she says Alex loves Head Start and she is sure he will do well in kindergarten because he likes school so much. While she thinks he is ready for kindergarten and she is too, she still laments, "it seems like it's so soon and it's already kindergarten."

Creating stability for Alex is important to Anne because she grew up in foster care and group homes, which made it difficult to keep up in school, "'cause when it was time to pack up, it was time to pack up and then go somewhere else, so that's basically how my life has been." Although she would like to move to a different neighborhood, she wants Alex to have the stability of staying in the same

home. She wants him to be able to make friends, which couldn't happen if she keeps "bouncing around with him."

In Head Start, she participated in home visits by the teacher and went to school with Alex on his first day. Alex "loves" his Head Start teacher. Anne says his teacher is very involved with the children, and when "you have someone that's supportive like that...that kind of makes me stay focused too." Anne counts on communication from the teacher to tell her how her child is doing, because she knows that the teacher sees her child at a time when she does not.

She feels it is very important to take an active role in supporting her child, and making sure he has the attention and assistance he needs to be successful in school. This includes reading to him and helping him with his homework. To Anne, "an involved parent is gonna take the time" to go to the school, to meetings and school events to "show your children you care" so "they'd be happy" and "want to learn and go to school."

In the fall, Anne reports that she and Alex talk about his kindergarten experience every day when he comes home, and that she has to explain to him on the weekends that he won't be in trouble for not going to school on those days. A stable routine is still very important to Anne; she has him attend an after school child care program, so that he will have the same routine every day while she goes to her various personal appointments.

She learned about the school's rules and expectations by attending the orientation, and then went to school with Alex on his first day because, "that's the first day - you gotta be there!" Despite the fact that she "gave them permission to work with him for his speech," Anne is not certain if Alex is actually receiving speech services at school, but says that she has asked him and he said he was. She worries that her child won't get the care and assistance he needs, but also wants to encourage his independence because "I have to let go" and "just kind of step back." Despite it being "kind of good for him," it made Anne "kind of sad" that he was playing and making friends, and he "wasn't worried about me anymore." Anne says that Alex and his classmates seemed ready for school, not "crying or anything…I think us parents were more…we were scared to let go."

Although Anne wants to encourage Alex's independence, she works with him at home "when he asks me" and the two of them "do a lot of things together." She does not feel like she has been encouraged to volunteer at school, but if the teacher ever asked, "I wouldn't mind going to the school." She relies on written and verbal contact from the school and knows that if Alex were ever absent, "they give us a number to call and then if we don't call, then they will be calling us and maybe ask us why the child is not at school." She thinks it is good that "they are on top of it." In the fall, she hadn't had much school involvement yet, but "it's just the beginning, so not much is happening, not yet, but I know that I'll be getting a lot of things and maybe doing a lot of things." Anne believes that "the more you are

involved with your child...the more successful they will be." In recalling her visit to the classroom on his first day of school, Alex "seen me in the classroom and he had a big old smile on his face, he knew that mommy was there and ...I think that made him feel good, so that he wasn't there alone" and "that makes him want to do better, too." Yet, in January, she hasn't volunteered or been to any school programs, citing conflicts with appointments and her work with a temp agency. She has attended the parent-teacher conferences.

She lets Alex know her expectations for him. "I tell him, you know, learn, listen and be a good boy, and he does that." She says that when the school brings something to your attention, you need to follow up. For example, when she was told that her child might have a disability, "I got him the help he needed. That's called being involved 'cause now he's talking better and there is a chance that he will overcome [his disability]." A parent must do "whatever it takes" to help her child.

The teacher has called her to discuss problems Alex is having at school, and Anne talks with him about his behavior and gives him consequences at home for not behaving at school. She has received a call from the principal, because Alex tried to cut another child's hair at school. She explains that he was probably just interested in hair cutting because he had his long hair cut right before the school year began. She talks to the teacher and "even the day care provider" and makes sure that Alex knows she is communicating with these other adults in his life. Anne

is "going to ask 'cause I want to know if my kid's misbehaving." Anne reports that Alex's behavior at school improved when she restricted home privileges following teacher reports of misbehavior. She knows what motivates her child. "He knows what he has to do to earn [back his privileges] and I know what he wants and I think that's why he's been successful." She goes on to say that "I don't think any parent wants to hear that their son…is, like, not doing well. If the teacher has to call you every day, all you hear is negative, you don't hear anything good." But she did give the teacher "permission to [call] because I want to know how my son is doing."

Anne also says the teacher is "very good at sending stuff home," and Anne checks Alex's backpack every day when he gets home. She feels she is "definitely on top of things." Anne keeps track of how he is doing at school, and helps work on his skills at home, like helping him with his numbers and colors, and writing his name. She talks to Alex every day about school. "I know I'm doing a good job."

Textural Description of Mandy's Parent Involvement Experience

Mandy describes how she and her husband moved Tony from a full day Head Start child care program to a part-day program because they didn't like the first program, "so we took him out and we put him in that one." Mandy says she doesn't really like the schools here [in the Portland area], because she is a "country girl." She says that she wants to move to a less urban area "like Salem."

She says they want Tony to be "well-rounded and adjusted" and they'll "stand behind him and support him" in "whatever he chooses to do [in life]." He is an only child and has "kind of social anxiety problems" and she thinks he will "have a little problem adjusting" to kindergarten teachers who "have more control and tell him more kind of what he needs to do." She says that he is a "very hyper child" and he "doesn't just sit and play games." She says that Tony's father had many of these same problems when he was young. Mandy worries about how Tony will do at school, especially regarding his behavior, but "me and his father...we got it down."

Mandy can identify several areas where Tony is not ready for kindergarten. He is "struggling on the alphabet" and, although he can do certain sections of it, "he doesn't get the other little parts." He needs "more hand control" and she would like him to learn "his phone number and our address, those sort of things he's not grasping yet." She thinks he is excited to go to "big boy school" but "he's a little scared at the same time."

Mandy does not recall her own parents being very involved in her education, but thinks her mom "was really supportive and ...tried to help as much as she could." When I asked if she had registered Tony for kindergarten yet, she said she knows "we have to do it" and that "it's just horrible [that they haven't registered him yet]." She said that she and her husband just haven't been able to find the time do it yet. In Head Start, she and her husband took time for the

"mandatory meetings (home visits) they have once every month." They also "ask him every day how's school, how can we help him." She says there are "different degrees of parent involvement" and a parent "can be over-involved." She thinks you "need to be up on what your child's doing in school...take time to do a couple things" and stay "up to date" on what to help your child with at home. Mandy says that low-income parents probably have more trouble being involved with their children at school because it takes so much time to do things parents have to do when they are poor, such as going to school, so there is less time for parental involvement.

Mandy had to leave the study prior to Tony beginning kindergarten, so it is unclear how her understanding of parent involvement might have changed as they transitioned into school.

Textural Description of Joy's Parent Involvement Experience

Joy describes herself as part of a "pretty close-knit family" with "a lot of people" living in the home. She says Mimi is "a good leader" who helps other students and is "good for the group." Joy says that the Head Start staff report that Mimi is a role model "in a good way." Joy says she "was a smart kid" herself and hopes that Mimi continues to want to learn and doesn't get "discouraged and not focus on school." Joy says she hadn't "always been interested in school" and wishes "I would have stuck it out and, you know, not, um, veered away from school." She says "it wasn't 'cause I wasn't smart." She wants Mimi to be "a solid

little reader" and thinks "that little girl could probably read before she got to kindergarten." Joy recalls that she could read well herself at an early age. She thinks "it's really important [to love school]." She says her family moved around a lot, so she went to "several different elementary schools, a few different middle schools and even two or three different high schools…but I still did okay, I did just fine."

Joy describes her own mother as "a smart lady" with a college degree and says her family is "all into learning and things like that." She says her mother has "been there" for her when she had "problems with a teacher." She does, however, also say that when her mother "wasn't really around to, you know, really be there and be available to me, school wise, was when I started falling off." Joy anticipates that Mimi may eventually have problems in school, and "I'm not going to be intimidated [by the school]." From watching her mom "deal with things" at the schools, Joy knows "when to fly off my handle and when not to." She says that Mimi's education "is an important priority to me" and that "you have to be an advocate for your kids." While she doesn't think her mom "did anything wrong," Joy says she began "causing problems" as a teenager when her mother "stopped being so active… [and] monitoring us and stuff." While she's "got to get out of the house sometime, [Joy is] not sure when that's going to happen." She says that being present for Mimi is very important to her right now.

Joy feels "pretty connected" to the local elementary school, because of her mother's recent involvement with Joy's niece and nephew, whom her mother has adopted. However, Joy does not register Mimi for kindergarten until late in the summer, because "I was really hoping that I would possibly not be living in my parents' house at that point in time." When Joy finally does register Mimi, she finds out that the school boundaries have changed and Mimi will attend a different elementary school. She says that Mimi told her not to worry [that she would be going to a different school], because she would make new friends there. Joy describes Mimi as a "brave little soul."

Joy feels Mimi has all of the skills she needs to be successful in kindergarten, and says, "I'm ready for her to be in school, so I can have some space." She says she will make sure Mimi does her homework, "making sure there's an appropriate setting" and "making sure she has all the things she needs and help without doing it for her." Joy makes sure that Mimi has access to school supplies, such as crayons and markers, at home. She wants Mimi to understand "how important [homework] is," because not doing homework is "why I had such terrible grades." As Joy leaves Head Start in the spring, she describes parent involvement as "going to meetings" and "helping out…with your time and your talents." She also says it's important to "know what's going on" and let the school "know that if they need you, they can get a hold of you."

In the fall, Joy says that she is "going to have [Mimi] tested for TAG, you know, talented and gifted," but that she is "not going to feel disappointed" if Mimi "doesn't get in." Joy is not sure how to initiate this process, but thinks she needs to "sign a permission slip." She says that she also doesn't really know what the school's "discipline procedures are, but I assume they're probably…not anything I would disagree with."

Joy has talked to the teacher on the telephone and says she "made me feel really at ease." Later, when she met the teacher at school, they realized that the teacher "actually lives right up the street from here." Joy says the kindergarten teacher "just lives right around the corner, so we got along great." She also knows another teacher at the school because the teacher is the mother of a girl that Joy went to school with years before. Joy also reports that Mimi's dental hygienist "used to do the PTA" and "she had a lot of good stuff to say about [the school]." The music teacher "just lives in that house on the other side of this one, so they're all over the neighborhood…yeah, that's quite a community." While Joy moved quite a lot as a child, even moving out of state once, she has actually lived in the same general neighborhood "for a long time." She says she was "so relaxed and ready for this [transition into kindergarten] that I was, like, why do they do this gradual entry thing…why not just start them in school?"

Joy says she has contacted the school several times for things such as finding out the school bus schedule. She wonders if she is calling the school too

much, but says the school "didn't act like [it was a problem]." She describes the school as "very approachable." Joy says there is "good communication" between the school and home, and likes that the teacher's assistant "goes through the backpacks" to look for notes from home. During the winter, the kindergarten teacher asked Joy if it would be all right for her to give Mimi a coat that the teacher's daughter had outgrown. Joy said that the teacher was very respectful and Joy accepted the coat on the condition that the teacher knew that "it's not like [we're poor and] we can't get her a coat."

Joy watches Mimi play at home and is uncertain if the things Mimi talks about are things she has been learning at kindergarten or at Sunday school. She worries that Mimi will mix up her Sunday school topics with things she is learning at kindergarten, and says, "I don't want her to do that stuff in school," because "it's not appropriate." As the school year progresses, Joy is impressed with the things that Mimi is doing at home, such as math and writing, but continues to be uncertain "if she's doing that in school or if she's just making it up." She describes how Mimi is "almost a published artist" because Highlights magazine sent the family a reply letter stating that they had received the family's submission of one of Mimi's drawings, but "weren't necessarily going to print it." She helped Mimi write thank you cards at Christmas time, because it "supports good habits and education." Joy attended the parent-teacher conference and says that the teacher "had a lot of good things to say about [Mimi]." Joy thinks Mimi is "doing average at least."

As the kindergarten year progresses, Joy reports that she has purchased discount movie tickets and a sweatshirt that the school was selling. She also sends in soup can labels, "Box Tops for Education" and food for the canned food drive. She is planning to bake cookies for a parent event that is happening in the evening, but is unsure if it is okay to send in food prepared at home ("usually the policy is to buy store-bought ones, [but] baked cookies to me means that I'm supposed to bake them"). Joy says she appreciates the school's "direct approach" to fundraising, which consisted of a letter requesting $20 from each family, but says that she can't afford to give the school money.

As the year progresses, Joy is uncertain that she will volunteer at school, saying that "for some reason Head Start is more fun." She describes the challenges of transportation and care for her infant son if she were to volunteer at the kindergarten. Joy has been to the school a "couple times" and "definitely drive[s] by it sometimes." She says "the people are inviting enough, but you don't feel like that's necessarily the place where you would feel comfortable doing a lot of stuff" and "just the thought of going to the class and volunteering doesn't really appeal to me." She says that "if they approached me about something specifically that I could help out with, I would." Joy says if, "they said, 'we need you for this reason,' I would totally do it." But she also says that "if they did anything more [to get her involved], I would probably feel annoyed by it." Joy says she could cut out things sent home by the school, but she doesn't "really want to do that because these

[younger children at home] would probably complicate that." She doesn't want to "feel bad" for saying "no" to a school request. Later in the school year, Joy says her "first thought when somebody says parent involvement is going to the school to volunteer and be in the class and I don't think you have to do that at all." She says "there are different ways you can be involved without even being there physically." She says the most important things are advocating for your child and knowing their needs.

Joy reports that some mothers she has met in her "mothers of preschoolers" parent group "are so overwhelmed with all the stuff that they've volunteered for." She is a "more well-rounded person when I say 'no' to things I don't want to do." Joy says the school sends home a newsletter and handouts that keep her informed about what is happening. She says the teacher "would probably send a note home with [Mimi] if she felt she needed to talk to me."

Joy has considered home schooling for Mimi, because she goes to church "with a lot of people who home school" and because "it seems like the schools are having lots of problems these days." But she thinks there are "so many benefits to going to public school" and [Mimi's school] is "probably not having those types of problems [that other public schools are having]." She says Mimi's experience in school "has been good" and "there's no reason to keep her home."

Textural Description of Sandy's Parent Involvement Experience

Sandy, like Anne, begins her description of herself by saying she is a single parent and that "it's been very difficult." After becoming "very frustrated" and "completely stressed out" trying to balance parenting and attending college, she was able to enroll her two young sons in a full day Head Start child care center on the community college campus, which allowed her to set up a schedule where she attended school and completed homework while the boys were at the center, and "evenings and weekends were completely devoted to my children." Sandy says the Head Start teachers "are so friendly" and "I've seen that Head Start [teachers] really back me up [on things]." Sandy keeps track of what Henry is learning at school, and extends his learning at home by looking up things in books they have at home, or going outside and "poking around in the dirt…'look at the beetle, look at the worm,' you know, I like to teach them." She says it is "amazing to see them just grow and watch and learn and being part of that. I'm going to miss them when they're grown up."

Sandy hopes that Henry grows up to be a "caring, concerned" person and not be "involved in the wrong things." She says that Henry's dad is a "really bad role model" and she worries that Henry idolizes his father. Sandy hopes that Henry's life "isn't a struggle" and that he'll go to school, have a "nice, stable job" and "find a woman he can care about." Sandy did not develop lasting friendships growing up and has no ties with any of her childhood friends. "I have known so

many people in high school that met their best friend in like first or second grade…and I'm so envious of that…I think having lifelong friendships are very important." She wants Henry to have friends in his life and is happy that "he'll have one transfer friend" from Head Start when he transitions to kindergarten. She is also happy that he will have older children to learn from, rather than the same age or younger children he sees in his child care setting. She reports that "apparently, he's very obedient" at school," but that Henry is "still emotionally vulnerable" and has "issues with anger."

Sandy wants to provide structure and stability for her boys. She says, "I remember having an unstable childhood myself, and it's not good." She has "tried to provide that with [her boys], not moving around and having routines." Sandy thinks Henry gets upset with her, because "he wants me to be with his dad." Henry's father visits Henry sporadically. Sandy tries to "teach [Henry] some skills on how to handle emotional issues…but he doesn't listen to me so much…because I'm his mom. I'm too close."

Sandy's parents divorced when she was one-year-old, and her dad "was never involved" in her education. She does not remember her parents being involved at school "except for on Family Night when you come in and look at all the art work and stuff." She remembers her mother reading to her and her brother each night, but otherwise not being very present and available to her. Sandy says, she "never really felt that close to my mom" and that her mother "treated us like

little soldiers." Sandy says it is very important that she give her children "one on one attention...not just running around cleaning house while they're there. That's not attention." She says that "the time to build bonds of trust and friendship" is when children are young, "because when they get older [they will] still be able to talk to you and stuff."

Sandy has regularly dropped in and observed at the Head Start center, sometimes playing with the children in the classroom, or bringing in musical instruments from home for the children to use at school. She plans to attend with Henry on his first day of kindergarten, but worries that "parents would not be as welcome to watch and be involved in the classrooms." She thinks she might have some difficulty knowing "exactly what [Henry is] doing in school" because "I don't think parents and teachers have that much of a connection [in kindergarten]." Nevertheless, Sandy thinks it is important for children to know that "parents and teachers really do work together...moms and dads, too." She tries to get to know Henry's friends' parents, too, "so it's more of a community involvement."

As the school year progresses, Sandy worries about a situation that Henry has told her about, in which one of his classmates "punched him in the stomach" each time Henry was near him at the cubbies. Sandy is not sure if she should contact the teacher about the incidents, because she says that Henry "really knows how to manipulate...if he wants sympathy." She recalls being "beat up" in high school and tells Henry that he is "not going to be a victim." She wonders if, instead,

she should encourage Henry to stand up for his "rights" because "sometimes violence is the only way." She says she will contact the teacher to "keep an eye on these two" if the situation isn't resolved soon.

Sandy is disappointed with kindergarten when Henry begins, because he did not make friends at first. She thinks it's because the school day is only 3 hours long and there is not enough time for children to get to know each other. She worries that he is not very excited about school as he enters kindergarten. Sandy tries to motivate Henry by telling him, "You're learning new stuff, you know, even if it's boring for you, you can still teach your brother." She says that "makes him feel special." Sandy extends Henry's learning at home by playing word games that "actually…get him to recognize the letters…instead of just memorizing the entire word." As the school year progresses, Sandy reports that she spends "at least a half hour to an hour talking to him about his day…not just 'oh, it was fine' – I want more than that, I want details." However, she also wants Henry to develop independence. She recalls an opportunity he had to participate in "Reindeer Lane," a school event where children could bring some money from home and use it to shop for inexpensive Christmas gifts to give to family members. Sandy says she explained to Henry that the permission form let parents direct their children to certain items to purchase, but she wrote, "I trust [Henry's] judgment [to choose whatever he wants to purchase]."

Sandy's "pet peeve" with the school was their early fundraising effort which included an assembly that she feels misled Henry into thinking he would get a drum set and other prizes. She says she would rather have Henry "spending his time making friends, learning stuff at school, being active and running around… [rather than] being a salesperson – the lowest job ever!" She says, "I wanted to go and give [the fundraising materials] back to them and say don't you ever do this to me again!"

Sandy describes the kindergarten teacher as "interesting" and "very pleasant." Sandy has attended the kindergarten orientation, where "I sat down and I talked with them and they were telling us the rules and stuff and they seemed pretty practical." She and the boys also attended the school's Open House, which Sandy describes as overwhelming. She says "there was no structure to it" and "I guess they were serving dinner there, but there were no instructions on when or why or how." The school's physical layout was also "weird" with the library in the middle just past the foyer, with all of the classrooms around it. "I like form; I like to know where I'm going and what I'm doing, so I really didn't enjoy the Open House." Sandy also wishes the school had a covered area for parents to wait when picking up their children after school. "Henry's class always gets out late" and the parents have to wait in the "freezing cold."

Sandy describes the kindergarten classroom as "busy" but was pleased to learn that the teacher "only focus [es] on one little section [of the room] at a time."

She also thought it was "pretty neat" that the teacher has a variety of "hands on stuff" in the room. She likes that there is an assistant teacher in the room. She has only seen the principal at pick up and drop off time and says "he was just standing there smiling, directing traffic a little bit and watching everybody. I didn't really talk to him."

She says her own schedule is "a lot more stressful" now that Henry is in kindergarten, because she doesn't have as much time for her classes and studying. She appreciates the calendar that the school has provided and uses it to determine "what am I doing today?" It helps her know what "we have to do for school" each day. She says the school offers "opportunities [to volunteer] all the time." But Sandy can't "see a way to be involved other than to be a volunteer" and "I don't have the time" for that. She is unsure if she would volunteer at school, even if she had the time, because "most kids tend to act worse around their own parents than around their teachers." She "can do the volunteer part where you can hand in things." She has "donated stuff, but I haven't given any time." While she is uncomfortable at some school functions and has trouble fitting them into her busy schedule, she says they are important because they "give me a chance to see the other teachers and parents and kind of be familiar and have them be familiar with me." She says she has made most of her connections with other parents during pick up and drop off time. "We start talking and getting to know each other and I like that."

Sandy considers "taking care of my kid" an important parent involvement responsibility. She has "long talks" with Henry to try to explain why he can't do certain things (like seeing how Sandy will react when he is pretending to choke). She checks his understanding by asking him, "Do you understand what I was trying to tell you about lying?" and when he says he doesn't, she tells him, "I'll have to come up with a better way to tell you tomorrow." She also reads to Henry and his brother each night.

Sandy checks the weekly newsletter that the teacher sends home, and makes sure that she and Henry follow through on any homework assignments as well as review things he has done throughout the week. She thinks "it's a good way to get Henry to tell me about what went on." She says that the homework "requires adult involvement, so kids that don't have their parents looking at it...wouldn't be able to do it...so it's a good way to try to facilitate the parents getting involved." As the school year progresses, Sandy is pleased that "they're doing so many different things now." She is not sure if Henry is actually reading words or "just memorizing." She thinks that Henry "has an affinity for math" and he "got a lot of, like, check plusses" on his progress report. Sandy thinks "he's probably higher than everybody else in the numbers."

Sandy thinks that "there is a stereotype for a Head Start parent not being involved...and not taking care of their kids." While she has seen parents who personify the stereotype, she knows that "you can be such a better parent." She says

it "makes her so mad, because income does not have to determine people's circumstances in areas like parent involvement." Sandy describes how her next door neighbor yells at her own children frequently, and "it makes me sad…all she does is she yells at her kids, she never has any positive time with them." She notes that "your kid is always learning from you…you want to have good relationships with your kids and enable them to have good relationships with others." Sandy finds that the stress of parenting can be "overwhelming" but then she remembers that her children "reintroduced me to life." She would "much rather be broke, and have good friends and family than to be rich and have nobody."

Textural Description of Claudia's Parent Involvement Experience

Claudia says that she and her daughter, Julie, "enjoy having a lot of fun and laughing" but they "don't do too much yet because of her age." She hopes Julie "has good manners" and "finds something that makes her happy [when she grows up]."

Claudia is unsure about what to expect in kindergarten, because "things have changed so much since I went." She thinks that Julie will probably work on recognizing letters, and learning how to share and work through her frustrations, but she's "not sure exactly what all they do, you know." Julie is an only child, but Claudia thinks Julie is "pretty on track after what I see there in the five-year-olds" at the child care center where she works.

She wishes that schools were still configured kindergarten through eighth grade. Claudia remembers kindergarten as a time of "fun activities, such as making peanut butter balls and clay pots." Because she works full time, Claudia is unsure how she will work out the part-day kindergarten schedule with her need for extended day child care. She decides by the end of the summer that Julie will attend the "private" kindergarten at the child care center when she works, because "I couldn't quite figure out how to work it over there at [the school] she should have been in...how are you supposed to have a job?" Claudia really likes the kindergarten teacher at the child care center, which is "another thing that encouraged me to want to bring her there." She likes "the fact that I know the people there."

Claudia's parents were not involved in her education. Her father was absent from her life and her mother "was kind of a young mom [who] wasn't really focused on [Claudia's education]." Her grandmother "tried to help as much as she could...she'd say, 'this isn't the way we used to do it.'" Claudia expects that she will work with Julie "on things" but will "back off when I need to." She says it is important to "take good care of [your child]" and to be "able to connect, listen to them...and help them make good choices." It is also important to help them "have the best behavior possible." She wants to be more involved with Julie, encouraging her and being a "positive person for her," saying that she (Claudia) "really didn't get a lot of encouragement and stuff" when she was a child. Claudia tries to have a

balanced approach to guidance with Julie, being "kind of firm" yet "try[ing] to relax" and being "kind of strict and not too laid back." She tries to balance a set schedule yet "have our little free time, too."

Claudia likes to have Julie with her at the child care center. "It's nice to just be able to go in at the same time, and I get to walk by and she comes and hugs me." Claudia likes that she gets to "pop in and see what she is doing throughout the day." Claudia helps Julie with her weekly homework sheet, but is unaware of any other opportunities for parent involvement, such as parent-teacher conferences ("I remember from last year they had them") or is unable to participate due to her work schedule and duties ("I wanted to go to the Pumpkin Patch, but I couldn't"). She says that parent involvement means making sure your child is learning and developing, and making sure "she's proper" by "help[ing] her not be frustrated." Claudia says she "went through a stage where I think I was trying to help the teacher too much…I tried to learn to just kind of back off."

As the school year progresses, Claudia feels that Julie has made good progress in her skills and will be ready for first grade. She says that, "skill-wise, she's going to be really up there." Claudia worries that the "structure [of the center's kindergarten program] hasn't been as strong as when we first started" and she worries when older children join the classroom due to staffing shortages at the center. "I guess I just want to shelter her…I don't like her being influenced by them…I sometimes would just like to keep her with her own age group." But

Claudia acknowledges that "that's not always going to happen, so I better get out of my fantasy world." Likewise, she's "really going to miss Julie next year when she's not there and she's in first grade."

Claudia's experience is different from that of many parents in that she works in the same program where her child attends kindergarten. While she has not participated in any parent-teacher conferences or parent meetings, she "can ask the teacher about things" on a daily basis. She believes her opportunities for parent involvement are "basically like the other, like the public school." Claudia describes parent involvement as making sure your child is "well taken care of" and "properly fed." Parent involvement is "just trying to provide them with positive guidance" and "kind of letting them be their own self."

Individual Structural Descriptions

In the following section, each parent participant's experience is reported again, this time from the perspective of the structures that underlie the experience for each of them. The structural description describes "how" the parent experiences the "what" of parent involvement.

Structural Description of Anne's Parent Involvement Experience

Anne's experience of parent involvement is shaped by her own upbringing in foster care and group home settings, where frequent and unanticipated moves were the norm. Her father was absent from her life, and her mother's drug addiction and abuse was unsettling and necessitated placement in the foster care system,

including a stay with relatives that was also cut short by dysfunction there. Because of her troubled childhood, Anne has made stability for Alex a high priority in her life. She will not move out of their apartment, because she does not want him to change schools. She enrolls him in an after school child care program, in part so that he has a place to go if she has appointments that extend beyond the school day, but also because she needs the support of other consistent adults to care for Alex. Anne craves stability herself and feels it is critical that she provide a consistent and stable routine for Alex.

In Alex's early childhood years, Anne received support and guidance from her GED staff, early intervention and Head Start staff, and most recently from the kindergarten teacher. She wants to do everything possible to help Alex do well in school and not have the problems she experienced. But Anne had no role models for the kind of involvement that she says she wants to engage in with Alex, including attending school events and volunteering at school. She has had few, if any, positive role models for parenting; her own parenting style combines instruction and friendship, qualities she experienced in her interactions with the GED and Head Start staff. She worries about some behavior problems that Alex is exhibiting in kindergarten and wonders if she, as a single mother, will be able to provide the type of parenting that Alex needs to be successful. Alex's father has begun to have more contact with her and she has begun to question if Alex is missing the influence of a father.

Anne values education. She returned to school and received her GED when Alex was younger, because she "wanted to have something." She is proud of this accomplishment and feels that she has modeled the importance of education for her son. She has happy memories of her early elementary school years, because school was a place to get away from the chaos and abuse of home, "the only place where I can actually have fun." She frequently was kept out of school, so regular attendance for Alex is very important to her. Anne is pleased that Alex enjoys school and that he wants to go every day.

Time and presence are critical factors in Anne's description of parent involvement. She feels that an involved parent must take the time to go to school events, work on homework with her child, and discuss the events of their day. Anne did not feel supported by the adults in her foster care and group home placements, and wants to always be available to Alex. She wants to be his friend and guide. She loves and cherishes him in ways that she wishes she'd been loved and cherished by an adult in her own childhood. Anne never felt that there was someone looking out for her or giving her the attention that she needed, so she "failed a lot" and thinks she didn't "ever really get a chance." She knows her son intimately and works closely with him to support and teach him. She wants to have open and regular communication with Alex's teacher and other adults in his life, so that they can all work together to help him succeed. She has been very close to Alex in early childhood, "it's just me and him at home," but as he enters kindergarten, she

recognizes that he is entering a new stage of life and she will need to make adjustments in her relationship with Alex as he makes friends and looks to other adults for guidance in his life. She approaches this time with sadness that her little boy is growing up, but also with pride that he has developed well and adjusted to his new school, feeling that she has contributed to his progress. She has no regrets about the path they have taken and she is focused on the future, "just looking forward to…seeing him grow."

Structural Description of Mandy's Parent Involvement Experience

Mandy's role as a stepparent, and perhaps her youth, shape her understanding of parent involvement. She downplays her own significance in supporting Tony's education, and generally describes parent involvement in the plural rather than singular tense, as in "me and his father,…we got it down," or "we'll stand behind him." Mandy is hesitant to express hopes and dreams for Tony, saying that, "I don't think we have concrete goals for him." She says that they will stand behind him in "whatever he chooses to do." When early in the interview I clarify that she has been Tony's stepmother for 3 years, she briefly describes the things that she (not she and her husband) want Tony to learn in school ("I really want him to work on…"). Although she has been involved in Tony's life for 3 of his 5 years, and she knows a great deal about his skills and interests, she is quicker to point out his weaknesses than the other parent participants in this study. As a stepparent, Mandy sees Tony's weak points as a reflection of his father's, not her,

genetics and parenting, and she displays ambivalence in her parenting role, perhaps because she does not feel as personally vested and responsible for Tony's success.

Mandy does not remember her own parents being actively involved at school, but she does feel that her mother was "really supportive...and tried to help as much as she could." Mandy feels guilty for not fulfilling what she sees as obligations to parent involvement in Tony's education. At the end of May, she says, "It's just horrible" that she and Tony's father haven't registered Tony for kindergarten. She says she is "hoping I will do better, be more involved, like go to parent meetings and that sort of thing" when Tony is in kindergarten. Mandy struggles to prioritize her commitments. She links lack of time to her and Tony's father's lack of involvement, saying, "Both of us are college students; it's been hard, you know." Of kindergarten registration, she says, "It's at the tip of my head and one of the first things I need to get done, but it's just the time, you know, to get it done."

Mandy says that despite her time commitment to college, she is "focused...100% taking care of him." She has told Tony that he has "one person [who gave birth to you] and another person who cares for you." She and Tony's father, Anthony, try to be available to talk to Tony about school and ask him how his day went. She says there are different degrees of parent involvement and rationalizes her lack of school involvement by maligning parents who "want to

control every aspect" of their children's education. She believes appropriate involvement includes monitoring her child's progress and helping him at home.

During my interview with Mandy, I do not meet Anthony, nor learn much about Tony's mother, but since Tony is returned to his mother's custody in the fall prior to the end of the study, it is likely that there are other factors, besides stepparenting, that have affected Mandy's perception of the experience of parent involvement. Mandy refers to Anthony as having a "power control complex," which could have contributed to her perceived lack of influence in her stepson's development and education.

Structural Description of Joy's Parent Involvement Experience

Joy's experience of parent involvement is influenced by her embeddedness in her extended family and her perceived lack of success in her own education and life goals. Her mother is a strong presence in her life and has served as Joy's role model for parental involvement in education. This involvement is defined by strong advocacy for one's children, but little day to day involvement at school or home. Joy feels that her mother's lack of direct involvement and availability to her during key times in her life might have led to her struggles in school. However, family loyalty is important to Joy, so she is hesitant to implicate her mother in her (Joy's) perceived failure to advance in her own education and personal life.

In addition, Joy's mother has set a high standard for Joy's conduct as a parent and a person, and Joy struggles to achieve this standard. Joy is disappointed

in herself for still living in the family home, although it is clear that she contributes to the household in significant ways, such as caring for the young children in the home and preparing meals for the family. She is embarrassed by her current circumstances, and explains that she has always been smart and that she just "veered away from school." Likewise, Joy sees Mimi as an extremely bright and capable child. She is quick to point out Mimi's strengths. Joy does not want to appear boastful, but she can think of no ways that Mimi is not prepared for success in kindergarten. She sees her own lost potential in Mimi and worries that Mimi will also become "discouraged" and stray from school, thus missing her chance for a successful life. Joy has many regrets about the path her life has taken thus far and hopes for a better future for Mimi.

Joy places a high value on education and sees it as the basis for positive outcomes in life. Joy's mother has a college degree and Joy views her as a successful career woman and parent. She says her family is "all into learning and things like that." Joy hopes to return to school herself someday and maybe study "something science-y."

Joy is sure she will be comfortable interacting with the school, and looks to her mother's experience in Joy's education, and more recently as a parent to Joy's niece and nephew, for guidance in how she will be involved in Mimi's education. She feels it is important to provide the materials and supports necessary for Mimi to complete her homework, but also feels it is important for a child to be self-

reliant. She is unsure of the right balance between supporting one's child and encouraging independence, noting that she herself could have used more support and motivation to complete her schoolwork when she was in high school.

She says she will advocate for Mimi if there are any "problems with teachers or anything." Again, her own mother has been a role model in this area, letting her know that "you gotta speak up sometimes." Joy's description of parent involvement changes over the course of the study as she reconciles her anticipated participation and her actual participation at school. Prior to beginning kindergarten, Joy says that parent involvement includes going to meetings, volunteering, and helping out and making yourself available [at school]. By the second interview, Joy feels that the most important way to be involved in her child's education is by letting her know that education is an important priority, and by monitoring her homework and being available to help her if she needs assistance. By the third interview, Joy states that being an advocate for your child is "a big part of parent involvement." She says that,

> My first thought when somebody says parent involvement is going to the school to volunteer and be in the class, and I don't think you have to do that at all. I would wrap it up by saying that involvement in general is really open for interpretation. There are different ways you can be involved without even being there physically.

As she realizes that she is not comfortable interacting in the school setting, she adjusts her definition of parent involvement to more closely align with her experience. Joy feels that Mimi has been successful in school, and justifies her

involvement as sufficient to ensure Mimi's success. She does, however, recognize that her own troubles in school occurred later in her education, so she feels she may have to be involved in different, more intense ways, in the future. She looks ahead to this time with some trepidation.

Structural Description of Sandy's Parent Involvement Experience

Sandy's involvement with her children and their education is built on a foundation of unsatisfying personal relationship-based experiences from her own upbringing and her relationship with her sons' father that she does not want repeated or perpetuated in her sons' lives. She recalls an unfulfilling childhood in which her mother took care of the children's basic needs for food and shelter, and completed the tasks of parenting and parent involvement, such as reading to her and her brother, but Sandy does not remember feeling emotionally connected to her mother in these experiences. Sandy's mother set high standards for the children's behavior and achievements at home and school, and Sandy has felt compelled to strive for perfection. Later, she has an unsuccessful relationship with her sons' father, and is frustrated by his infrequent and inconsistent visits with the boys, and his poor role modeling, such as smoking in their presence.

Despite her parents divorcing when she was one-year-old and her description that he "was never involved," Sandy recalls some happy times with her non-custodial father, playing outside in the woods and looking for "interesting" things. Sandy's involvement with her own children tries to combine some of the

routines and structure that were present at home with her mother, with the spontaneity and enjoyment that she experienced with her father. Relationships are very important to Sandy, and while she wants to provide her children with stability and structure in their lives, she wants to do it in ways that develop and nurture positive relationships and bonds of trust.

Sandy wants to ensure that Henry makes friends at school. She did not develop any lasting friendships with her own peers growing up, citing frequent moves and general instability in her life. She recalls meeting fellow students during their senior year in high school and being so envious that they had known each other and been friends since kindergarten; she could not even imagine how a person could develop and maintain such a friendship and marveled at the possibility that someone could experience such a thing. "I want that for [my children]; I want them to make friends, be around them, have them available for their entire lives." By the time she has reached college, she believes it is too late to develop such close friendships, stating that "you don't make friends like that in college, you make acquaintances." So in addition to developing a close personal relationship with Henry herself, Sandy also focuses much of her attention on how the school schedule and curriculum are facilitating his ability to make friends. She questions whether a part-day kindergarten experience is adequate for children, because it does not allow enough time to provide recess and lunch, two activities where she believes friendships can be developed in early childhood.

Sandy worries about Henry's report of a child who might be bullying him in the cubbie area during transition times at school, but she is unsure of the appropriate way to intervene. She recalls her own experience being bullied in school, when she was in junior high, and feeling alone in solving the problem. She always felt alone, at home and at school, and she does not want this for her children. Yet, she wants her children to grow up to be confident and independent, so she also doesn't want to intervene unnecessarily.

Sandy is devoted to her children. Because she feels she has not had close, satisfying personal relationships in her own life, she places extreme value on developing positive, nurturing relationships with her boys. In many ways, they are the friends she has never had. They are her source of joy and comfort. "They're fun little people that reintroduced me to life."

Sandy is a guide and teacher for her children. She schedules time each day to spend one-on-one time with Henry and his brother. She talks to Henry about what is happening at school and extends his learning by doing follow up activities at home, including going to community events, such as the Health and Safety Fair at a local hospital. She shares her religious and personal values with him. Sandy says she has always enjoyed learning and considers herself an "academic" person. She wants Henry to enjoy school, too.

Structural Description of Claudia's Parent Involvement Experience

Claudia wants her child to be successful in school and life, but is unsure of the appropriate way to support Julie's development. Claudia describes her own mother as young and "unfocused," so much of the support and guidance she received growing up came from her grandmother, who reportedly loved Claudia, but did not necessarily know how to provide much direction in Claudia's education. Claudia did not know her father and she describes her life as "kind of dysfunctional - let's just leave it at that." Claudia is a somewhat older mother herself, waiting until she was 31 before having Julie.

Claudia wants to protect Julie from peer influences, fearing that Julie is not yet able to handle the demands of the elementary school setting, which would include older children. Claudia values the emotional and physical closeness of having Julie attend kindergarten at the child care center where she works. She struggles with her competing desires to have Julie become more mature and independent, and her need to keep Julie close. In some ways, Claudia treats Julie as her friend and confidant, but also as a "fun little person" who does "cute" things. She will "miss her" when she has to move on to another school for first grade.

Claudia does not have a good understanding of the kindergarten curriculum. She was surprised to hear, early in the school year, that Julie would be expected to do "homework" one time per week in kindergarten. Despite working at the child care center where Julie attends kindergarten, Claudia is unsure of the school's

expectations for students and parents. She does, however, feel that Julie is performing well, rationalizing that Julie's peers attend extracurricular enrichment programs, such as phonics classes, whereas Julie does not. Claudia is glad that Julie attends a "private" kindergarten, because she has a generally unfavorable impression of public schools, based on "things she has heard" from co-workers and others, and she believes that the public school curriculum is not as "high" as that of Julie's kindergarten.

Claudia sees her primary role in parent involvement as ensuring that Julie is well taken care of and that she is well-behaved in public. Julie had "emotional problems" in preschool, frequently crying and "stomping her feet." Claudia worried that she did not know how to effectively intervene and that Julie's misbehavior was a reflection of her parenting skill. One of the reasons she enjoys having Julie attend kindergarten where she works is because she is able to see Julie's behavior in relationship to that of other children about Julie's same age, so Claudia feels she can better understand and appreciate differences in children's abilities, and knows better what to expect from Julie now. Claudia wants to be a positive influence in Julie's life, which she says is in contrast to her own upbringing. She hopes to be able to encourage Julie and motivate her to do well in school.

Composite Textural Description

In the composite textural description, the parent participants are viewed as a whole. The description accounts for their collective experience and what the experience of parent involvement is like for them as a group.

These parent participants do not recall parental role models for day to day involvement in the school. They do not report having a network of family and friends that provide support or guidance to them in determining appropriate ways to be involved in their children's' education. None of the study participants can recall her own parents volunteering in the classroom. All, but one recall parents attending parent-teacher conferences or school programs. Three remember their parents providing some encouragement to do homework or reading to them at home.

While all of the parents have contact with their own mothers or live with extended family or a roommate, all, but Mandy, see themselves as single parents and singularly responsible for supporting their children's education. With the exception of Mandy, none are married and the children's fathers, for the most part, are absent or have infrequent or sporadic contact with their children. They are somewhat isolated and belong to small or less personal social networks from which to draw support and guidance, interacting with just a few close family members or with people they encounter in their work or college settings. Two of the participants get ideas about parenting and parent involvement through their churches.

Parenting and parent involvement go hand in hand for these parents. All describe the general physical and emotional care of their children as an important aspect of parent involvement. Two of the parents described their childhood homes as "dysfunctional" with at least one experiencing physical abuse. Some described the lack of emotional warmth and connection between themselves and their parents. Only one recalls a father being present in their lives in any significant way.

Four of the parents in this study specifically describe wanting to provide structure and routine for their children. Two grew up in homes that they describe as chaotic or dysfunctional. Parents were nonexistent or were busy with their own work and education. Three of the parent participants said they moved frequently during their childhood. They want their own children to be able to remain in the same home for enough time to feel settled and to be able to establish friendships with children at school and in the neighborhood. They try to set up regular routines and schedules for their children. Three of the parents struggle to maintain consistent contact for their children with their children's fathers.

They expect their children to be well behaved. They are pleased when their children follow the rules, display good manners and are "obedient" and "proper." All of the parent participants described behavioral problems their children had displayed in preschool and kindergarten, and the importance of parents "being on top of what is happening" and intervening to correct problem behavior. They expect to be informed of problems and to be given responsibility to direct and assist

in corrections. These parents believe that they must provide discipline and guidance at home as a consequence to misbehavior at school. They do, however, observe that their children sometimes behave differently at school and home, and wonder if their interventions will be effective in correcting problems at school.

Parents in the study describe their role in supporting their children's learning at home. All describe checking backpacks for school newsletters and homework, and monitoring their children's learning. Two assist with homework directly, reviewing homework sheets with their children and helping them complete assignments. They extend their children's learning by providing supplemental materials and activities, such as looking in reference books, going for nature walks or playing word games. All say they are available if their child has questions or needs their assistance. All described the need to provide time and basic materials, such as paper and pencils, to support their children's learning at home. Most of these parents do not recall a parent assisting them directly with their school work, although most remember being encouraged and expected to do well in school. One remembers being read to regularly. One does not recall an adult ever supporting her in her school work.

All of the parents in the study say that it is important to motivate and encourage their children to do well in school, but most also say that they think it is inappropriate to help their children too much and be overly involved. These parents want their children to grow up to be strong and independent. They want them to be

confident and self-motivated. Most of these parents expressed high expectations for their children. They want their children to be successful in school and in life, and to not experience some of the struggles and disappointments they have endured. All expect their children to do well in school, completing high school and, in some cases, moving on to college. Two parents in the study are college students themselves; for two others, college is a goal or dream that they also have for themselves, although they are not sure it is an attainable goal. They do not want their children to lose interest in school or go down the wrong path. Two say that the lack of encouragement and support by their own parents might have led to their failure to reach some of their goals. Their challenge, as parents, is to motivate and encourage without "doing it for" their children.

All of the parents in this study described constraints to their involvement at school. Two are challenged by lack of transportation or child care for younger children at home. Two described their discomfort with the school setting, from the physical layout of the school to the age of children to the lack of understanding about school expectations. All described the challenge of time. Three have work or school schedules that conflict with the kindergarten schedule, so are unable to volunteer in the classroom. All describe the multiple demands on their time, including time needed for their own school work, housekeeping, counseling and other appointments, and the demands of caring for children as a single parent. For the most part, the participants do not have extended family, networks of friends or

parental partners to assist with the daily tasks of parenting. They struggle to find time to perform their duties at home, which leaves little time or energy to participate at school.

Two parents expressed frustration with school fundraisers, because they put undue pressure on the parents to give money or sell (buy) things, which they cannot afford due to financial constraints. One parent describes her frustration at having to tell her child that he was not going to get a prize he heard about at the school assembly, because it required selling many items from a catalog, and they were not going to go door to door, nor did they have a network of friends and families to sell to. Another parent feels guilty for not participating in fundraisers and hope that their children are not singled out as a result of their lack of participation.

These parents do, however, believe it is important to participate in at least some activities at the school. Their reasons for doing so are varied. Some believe it is an expectation and requirement to participate in certain activities, such as parent-teacher conferences. Others see the value in meeting face-to-face with the other adults involved in their children's lives, saying that it enhances their communication when the need arises to discuss things that are happening at school with their children. Two parents view at-school involvement, such as taking their children to school on the first day, and viewing their children's work and meeting classmates at Back to School events, as a support and encouragement to their children. None of the parents in the study recall much, if any, at-school

involvement by their own parents, which they say contributed to their lack of motivation to do well and their subsequent problems in school. They want their children to feel supported and to do well, and believe that some at-school involvement will demonstrate their caring to their children.

All of the parents in the study associated their positive feelings about their children's school experience with their liking of the teacher. Many described the teacher as friendly or nice. Others describe the affection their children have for their teachers. Parents in the study feel that the teachers really know and care about their children. They report that they feel comfortable communicating with the teacher and trust the teacher's assessment of their children's skills and abilities.

All of the parents in this study say they are prepared to advocate for their children should the need arise. One believes that her early awareness and acceptance of her son's disability, and her advocacy in having it addressed through evaluations and services has led to his current success in school. Another parent is prepared to intervene directly if her at-home coaching with her child to deal with possible bullying at school does not resolve the problem soon. Another recalls her own mother supporting and advocating for her in high school when she was in trouble. She anticipates that she will do the same for her daughter one day. These parents expect their children to do well and do the right thing, but are prepared to support and defend them should they ever need it. They will do "whatever it takes" to help their children be successful.

Composite Structural Description

Using the process of Imaginative Variation, a composite structural description is created to describe "how" the group of parents as a whole experience the "what" described in the composite textural description. The following section depicts the underlying meanings that the experience of parent involvement holds for this group of participants.

The experience of parent involvement for the participants in this study is a process that is generally undertaken alone and in the absence of significant role models. They have a sense that they should be involved with their children in certain ways, but feel like they are on a road without a map. Two depend on their church affiliations to provide a foundation for their values and parenting practices. All lack parental models for at-school involvement in their own upbringing, and have a limited number of friends or family members to look to for support and ideas about parent involvement. They are uncertain about how to be involved, and even whether or not it matters, but they have no one with whom they can share their concerns and worries, or check out if they are doing the right thing. Interestingly, by the end of the study, two had become engaged to be married, another was discussing marriage with a parental partner, and another was considering the value of increasing contact with a non-custodial parent. These parents sense that it takes more than one person to successfully support children in their education and development.

These parents are uncomfortable with the thought of participating at school, but sense that it is an important thing to do. They feel obligated to attend school events and volunteer in class, but their discomfort and lack of time mean they avoid at school involvement and feel guilty for not participating. They are ambivalent about the value of at school involvement, and some believe that their children would misbehave if they were to volunteer at school, but they worry that they will be judged for their lack of at school involvement. Their bonds with Head Start staff, and the ease with which some of them participated in the Head Start classroom setting is not replicated when they transition to kindergarten. They miss that welcoming place, but their feelings are tangled up with their sense that their children are no longer "little" and most mourn the loss of dependence that their children had on them. They are unsure of their next steps in the parenting process and this extends to their involvement in the school setting.

An area of focus for the parents in this study is in their nurturing and caring for their children. At least three of the parents feel they were not well taken care of as children and they strive to provide for their children's physical and emotional needs. They crave stability in their own lives, and want to ensure that their children feel protected and secure. Most express a deep devotion to their children and have strong attachments to their children, which motivates them to take care of their children's physical, social and emotional needs. At least three of the parents never developed close friends themselves, and want more than anything for their children

to build close, lasting friendships with other children at school and in the neighborhood.

Parents in this study place a high value on conformity. They want their children to fit in and be liked. These parents feel judged themselves, because of their lack of postsecondary education or their living situation. They try to point out their exceptionality to the stereotypes of those who are poor, but don't feel that they can ever justify their circumstances. They are not sure that they have the skills needed to guide their children as they get older, and they can't count on others to support them in teaching and disciplining the children. The parents in this study worry about their children misbehaving at school, and fear that the children's misbehavior will be viewed by the school as a reflection of their lack of parenting skill or caring.

Supporting children's learning at home is very important for these parents. Many felt alone growing up. Whether being raised by a grandmother who wasn't familiar with the things being taught at school or living in group homes, where individual attention was nonexistent, these parents felt unsupported and they want to provide their children with the support and assistance that they craved as children. All believe that education is valuable and they want to pass along this value to their children by helping their children with homework and encouraging them to do well at school.

But these parents are uncertain of the best way to support their children. They see themselves as survivors. Many struggled in school, as a result of problems at home or in relationships with classmates. They often felt alone in their adversity. But each has made it to adulthood, each has achieved her high school diploma or its equivalent, and two have moved on to college, with at least one other believing she will do that one day. They want to pass this sense of capability along to their children. While they want to be fully present and supportive to their children, they also want to instill confidence and self-reliance in their children, so are careful to avoid doing too much for them. This is unfamiliar territory, and they are uncertain where the line between helping and abandoning is drawn.

Parents in the study want their children to like school and school liking is associated with how much they or their children like the teacher. During the course of this study, all of the parents expressed their approval and liking of their children's Head Start teachers. They saw these teachers as supportive of them as parents, and partnering with them in decisions that affected their child. They often looked to the teachers for support and guidance in ways to help their children to do well in school, and they trusted the teachers' opinions and viewpoints. Three of the parents started the kindergarten year being hesitant or even somewhat displeased with their children's early experiences at school, either because their children were getting into trouble or not making friends right away. But quickly the parents found ways to feel connected to the teachers, by viewing them as neighbors, or noting the

similarities between themselves and their children's teachers, or by viewing them as partners in their children's support team. As their bonds with the teachers grew, their trust in the school and their positive feelings about their children's school experience grew, too.

These parents have a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring that their children are given every chance to succeed in school and life. While they feel constrained by their socioeconomic status, which manifests itself in limitations of time and financial support for the school, they do feel empowered to speak up and advocate for their children whenever they feel their children would benefit from their activism. While many felt alone or abandoned at different times in their growing up, most sensed that they could only fall so far before someone would intervene on their behalf. These parents are vigilant about their children's needs and have intervened or are prepared to do so if they ever feel their children cannot help themselves overcome a difficulty.

Synthesis of Meanings and Essences of the Experience

School itself was not an unpleasant experience for these parent participants. For many, it was a "sanctuary" from the dysfunction they experienced at home. Most report that they love and value learning, with some describing themselves as "smart" or "academic." All place a high value on education, and most believe that attaining education beyond high school is a desirable goal and necessary to have a successful life. While some have a general impression that public school education

has some problems, none believe that their own children's schools have any particular deficiencies. They all have vague general memories of their early childhood education, but all can recall at least one specific, fond memory from their preschool or kindergarten experience.

Rather than actually being about school, the negative experiences that these parents associate with education come from their unpleasant childhood experiences and memories of their family life, and interactions with their peers much later in their education. Frequent moves during childhood interfered with the development of friendships and positive relationships with school staff. The lack of consistency caused some to feel disconnected from school or to lose interest, perhaps because they were never sure what the expectations were for them in each new setting. They value education, but tend to be uncomfortable in the school setting and unsure of the school system and how to be involved with it.

The parents in this study cannot separate parent involvement from parenting. The physical and emotional care of their children is a key task in their role as an involved parent. While none of the parents describes clear lines between the roles of parents and those of the school and school staff, the parents in this study clearly believe that their primary responsibilities are in the home, nurturing their children, instilling values, and encouraging and motivating their children to do their best. Joy goes so far as to say that a parent doesn't even need to go to the school to be involved.

Most of these parents have few, if any, close friends, parental partners or extended family members to interact with. They do, however, crave the comfort of community, and look to neighbors, family members, and child care and school staff for supportive relationships that can assist them in raising their children and insuring that their children are successful in school. Over the course of the study, all four of the mothers who are single parents become engaged to be married (Sandy and Claudia), contemplate marriage (Joy) or wonder if her child would benefit from the involvement of his father (Anne). They crave relationships with other adults in their lives and look to any connections they find between themselves and these other adults, such as a kind word or gesture, or knowledge of or roots in the neighborhood, to form the basis for these relationships.

These parents demonstrate a love and devotion to their children that places the children's needs above their own. Their sense of aloneness in raising their children leads them to believe they must choose between their own and their children's needs. Despite placing considerable stress on her, Sandy has adjusted her school and homework schedule to ensure that she can give her children undivided attention when she is at home. Joy has postponed her goals of furthering her education to be able to stay at home and provide Mimi with support and guidance. Claudia considered quitting her job when she could not reconcile the school's part-day kindergarten schedule to her work schedule. These parents care deeply about

their children and will forgo their own needs and dreams to help their children succeed.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND OUTCOMES

Summary of Present Study

The present study involved five parents who were transitioning their first child from Head Start into kindergarten. I interviewed these parents up to three times over a period of about 9 months to learn about their perceptions of the phenomenon of parent involvement and how their life experiences and their experiences in Head Start and their early encounters with the school might influence their perceptions.

Using a phenomenological research approach, I examined my own background and experiences of parent involvement and considered how my experiences might influence the findings and even the interviews themselves. Interview transcripts were analyzed, using the process of Phenomenological Reduction, to determine the invariant constituents or horizons of the experience for the parent participants. A textural description, which is a description of "what" the participants perceive about the phenomenon, was written for each of the parents. The next phase of analysis, called Imaginative Variation, was conducted to explore the underlying contextual factors that might lead to the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. A structural description was written for each participant. The structural description describes "how" each of the parent participants might be

experiencing the phenomenon of parent involvement. Composite textural and structural descriptions were then written, which incorporated the meanings and essences of the experiences for the participants as a group.

The following themes emerged from the data:

- Parents hope for and expect a better life for their children;
- Parents see themselves as ultimate authority or decision-makers in matters concerning their children;
- Parents view their children as reflections of the family;
- Parents know their children intimately;
- Parents want to create stability and structure for their children;
- Parents perceive time constraints to at-school involvement;
- Parents feel a sense of obligation to participate;
- Parents experience discomfort with the school setting and system;
- Parents encourage their children's independence;
- Parents are aware of children's progress;
- Parents relate teacher-liking to trust in school and parent-teacher communication;
- Parents provide time and support to their children at home;
- Parents want to protect their children.

While some of the findings revealed by this study support previous research on parent involvement of parents who are low-income, there are a number of

findings that contradict current research in this area. Parents in this study described deep caring and dedication to their children, and articulated a profound sense of obligation and commitment to provide their children with the support and guidance necessary to ensure their success in school and life.

In some ways, the experiences and beliefs of parents in this study are similar to findings in educational research. Research indicates that parents who are low income are uncomfortable with school and unsure of their role in their children's education (Diamond et al., 2000; Kagendo-Mutua, 2001; Lareau, 2003; O'Connor, 2001). In general, parents in this study experienced some discomfort and lack of understanding of school expectations and systems. At times, parents were unsure of the appropriate ways to be involved or in what ways their involvement mattered to their children's development and success in school. For example, despite contacting the school several times to clarify bus schedules, Joy was still unsure when to expect the bus on various days of the week, and did not question the school directly when the bus stop time she was given appeared to conflict with her understanding of the school's scheduled dismissal time. In another instance, she planned to bake cookies for an evening function at the school, but she did not contact the school to clear up her confusion regarding the request to send in "baked" cookies, even though she worried that her homemade cookies would not be acceptable. Sandy attended the school's Open House, but did not really understand the purpose of the event, had trouble finding the restroom for her

younger son, and never found the dinner being offered as part of the event. The school's physical layout confused her and she wished the design was more straightforward, with a front lobby and ell-shaped wings extending from it. She has seen the principal during pick up and drop off times, but has never spoken to him and is unclear about his role in the school. Paula acknowledges that she doesn't understand the school's curricula or schedules, which contributed to her decision to enroll her child in the kindergarten at the child care center where she works.

Another way that these parents' beliefs are similar to those described in research about families in poverty is in their expectation that their children become independent and self-reliant. This finding confirms research presented by Lareau (2003), which described the parenting style of parents who are low-income as a style that encourages clear boundaries between children and adults, with children learning to be self-directed and able to manage their own play and work time independently. Parents in this study, while wanting to be available to and supportive of their children, want their children to learn to be self-sufficient. Parents worry about the possible negative consequences of their being "too" involved in helping their children.

This study, however, did find numerous ways that the perceptions of these parents regarding parent involvement are different from the assumptions and findings presented in other educational research. Families living in poverty are generally portrayed as having multiple problems, including low literacy, poor

parenting skills, substance abuse, and few materials, such as books, in the home, which inhibits their ability to be involved in meaningful ways in their children's education (Delany, 1998; Levy & Duncan, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2003; Swick & Graves, 1993). Parents in this study defied these stereotypes. Two of the parents were college students and one was employed full time outside of the home. All have completed high school or the equivalent. Having fewer adults in the home, as was the case for all of the parents in this study except Joy, is generally associated with poorer outcomes for children (Ramey & Ramey, 1999), yet all of the parents in this study described high levels of at-home involvement. Most of these parents described positive conversations with their children about school, and regular monitoring of homework assignments and school activities, which included reviewing weekly newsletters and homework sheets sent home by the school.

Current research describes the difficulties of parents who are low-income in navigating school systems, and their subsequent relinquishing of control of the education of their children to the school and its staff (Lareau, 2003, O'Connor, 2001). While the parents in this study did demonstrate some discomfort with the school system, and sometimes did not follow up on questions they had about school rules and procedures, they did report that they have ultimate control or authority over decisions regarding their children. For example, when Anne described how she "gave the teacher permission" to call her, Joy reported that she "is not going to be intimidated [by the school]" if she needs to advocate for her daughter, Sandy

refused to have her son participate in the school fundraising efforts, Claudia elected to not participate in the public school system due to scheduling conflicts, and Mandy said that she and her husband chose a different Head Start center for their son because they did not like the first one he attended, all of these parents indicate that they feel entitled and empowered to make important decisions about their children's education.

Another finding not well documented or explained by existing research is the desire these parents expressed in finding or creating a community of caring adults who could assist them in supporting their children's development and education. While educational research does note that many families who are low income include a number of "significant others" who assist in raising the children (Ramey & Ramey, 1999; SEDL, 2004), it is unclear how or why this is the case. The present study suggests that parents may actively seek out connections with other adults, including non-custodial or potential parental partners, extended family, or child care and school staff, in an effort to provide stability and support for their children. Three of the parents in this study became engaged to be married or were considering the possibility during the time of the study, Joy and Sandy sought guidance on parenting from their mothers, and even Anne was in the process of trying to reestablish contact with her mother. Anne and Joy were choosing to remain in their current living situations to provide the stability and security found in knowing the neighborhood and the people who lived there. In

addition, parents looked for similarities between themselves and school staff which could provide the basis for positive relationships and trust in the school setting.

Possible Future Studies

Parents in this study perceive themselves to be actively engaged in their children's education at home, monitoring their children's school work and talking positively about school with their children. While certain demographic factors, such as education and employment status, might have contributed to these findings, it seems likely that the phenomenological inquiry methods employed in this study were a key factor that allowed for discovering the meaningful ways that these parents were involved in their children's education, which are not typical of the findings in much correlational or descriptive research.

The employment and educational status of these parents was determined after their selection for participation in the study. In addition, all parents in this study were sending their first child to kindergarten, so none had had previous experiences as parents in the school setting. A future study could be conducted using similar methods, but involving other parents who are low income, perhaps parents who have not completed high school, or ones who have not participated in Head Start or who are sending subsequent children to school. In depth interviews could be conducted prior to kindergarten entry and once again after the children have been in school for several months or one year to discover if perceptions change during this time.

A powerful addition to the study would be the inclusion of teacher and school staff perceptions of parents living in poverty through interviews and observations conducted prior to and after several months of interacting with study families in the school setting. Graue (2005) noted that preservice teachers have low expectations for involvement of parents and that they expect antagonism between parents and teachers. There is a general tendency for school staff to question the ability of parents who live in poverty to be able to assist their children in their education (Fine, 1995; O'Connor, 2001). A future study could question teachers about their perceptions of involvement of the parents involved in the study; their perceptions could be compared and contrasted with the perceptions of the parents of their own involvement in the education of their children. The researcher could ask parents and teachers to ponder how each perceives the other, and how these perceptions might be influencing the parents' involvement at home and at school. It would be interesting to note how these perceptions change over time. If parents were involved in Head Start, the perceptions or experiences of Head Start staff's interactions with the parent participants could be explored to see if and how they align with the perceptions of the parents regarding their involvement in their children's Head Start experience.

Another possible study could be an action research project that begins with sharing the results of this study with Head Start and/or kindergarten teachers, and discussing and planning ways for them to build on the reported home-involvement

of these study participants with future parents, and ways to engage study parents more fully in the education process with their children. The teachers could then reflect on their interactions with these families, and consider how their interactions might be improving or inhibiting the involvement of these parents.

Limitations of Present Study

I recognize that the parent participants in this study may not be typical of other families living in poverty. Head Start staff identified parents from their caseload who had participated consistently in Head Start services, including sending their children to school regularly, and completing their scheduled home visits. While many parents in the Head Start program also accomplish these tasks, others have chaotic lives, suffer from drug or alcohol addictions, and experience homelessness. The parents in this study had all completed high school or general equivalency testing, and two were college students. The parents all displayed strong literacy skills, and all were native English speakers. Payne (2001) suggested that there may be differences between those who experience long-term, generational poverty and those who are poor for a shorter time due to circumstance, such as divorce. This study did not clarify the type of poverty each parent experienced. Nevertheless, these parents did all live at or below the federal poverty guidelines at the time they entered the Head Start program, so did represent at least some families of the poor or working class (see Appendix F).

Another limitation of the study is that all data were anecdotal and from the parent perspective only. Parents' descriptions of their involvement were not verified with observations in the home or school setting, or by verification from school records or personnel, or from the children themselves.

In addition, parents knew I was affiliated with the Head Start program and this may have influenced them to describe Head Start and their experience in the program in more positive terms than if I had been viewed as a more neutral party. Parents also knew that I was conducting this research as part of my doctoral studies, and may have felt obligated to make claims to parental involvement activities that they believe are valued by schools and society.

Finally, it is recognized that this research took place with only five participants in a particular time and setting, and that their perspectives can never fully be disentangled from my own.

Implications of Present Study

The findings in this report contradict some current research assumptions and findings regarding the involvement of parents who are low income in the education of their children. Why might this be the case? One reason could be this study's focus on the perceptions of parents regarding their involvement in their children's education. So much educational research views involvement from the school's perspective, measuring parents' capacity to interact within the school setting and with school staff in ways that make sense from a perspective that is

based on middle class expectations and experiences (Foster, 1997; O'Connor, 2001; Solomon & Battistich, 1996). When parents are engaged directly, intensely and intimately, as was done in the present study, it appears that a new and deeper understanding of their perspectives emerges for our consideration.

When viewed from the school's perspective, it is understandable how one might conclude that these parents were not involved in their children's education. They seldom came to the school and did not volunteer in the classroom. They did not participate in school fundraisers and appeared uncomfortable when they came to school Open House. Perhaps the reason research hasn't captured the educational participation and decision-making of some parents living in poverty is because of the passive nature of the involvement. When these parents did not like the school's approach to their children's education, whether it was the classroom they had been assigned to or the imposition of fundraising activities, these parents *actively* decided not to participate. This has probably been construed by school staff and by researchers as lack of involvement and disinterest, when, in fact, it may be based on conscious decisions by these parents to withdraw from the situations that they do not approve of or cannot reconcile with other demands placed upon them.

Smith (2005) noted that teachers persisted in defining parent involvement from a narrow, school-based perspective, even as their school worked toward embracing a school culture that recognized a broader definition of parent involvement. The parents in this study do not feel comfortable or are not able to be

involved at the school, and they may not have the skill or inclination to discuss the reasons for their lack of school involvement with school staff. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) described how personal characteristics, including dispositions, resources and demand, influence interactions between persons in any given setting. Parents who are low-income bring different characteristics to the educational setting than those expected by the school, and these different communication styles can inhibit successful interactions (and understandings) between the people in these environments (Graue, 2005; Lareau, 2003, Payne, 2001).

The parents in this study wanted their children to make friends, and to be supported by a network or community of adults who are all working together to ensure that children receive the attention and guidance they need to succeed. The parents wanted to feel connected to the school staff, and looked to the school and teachers for a sense of direction in the best ways to support their children's education at home. Likewise, while they may not have initiated school contacts, they did expect to be consulted with and involved in decisions involving their children, such as evaluation and provision of services for their children's special needs, be it disabilities or talents and gifts, and in solving disciplinary problems. They were highly tuned in to their children's strengths and needs, and assumed that their children's teachers were as well. They expected that their input would be solicited if the need arose. Moles (1993) noted that "educators and disadvantaged parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting effectively" (p. 31).

Most of these parents have not had positive experiences establishing and maintaining their own friendships and support networks. Their lack of outreach and communication with school staff could be interpreted as lack of caring or lack of awareness of their children's needs, when in fact, it may be that these parents simply are not very skilled at reaching out to the school to make these connections.

If the parents in this study are typical of other parents who are low-income, schools will need to shift their assumptions about these parents' lack of involvement in their children's education and about these parents' capacity to assist their children at home. The parents in this study demonstrated that some parents living in poverty are actively engaged with their children at home. They were caring and concerned, and wanted nothing more than for their children to be successful. While they may not have volunteered in the classroom or participated in many at-school functions, they read school newsletters, and stayed informed regarding school activities and their children's progress at school. They encouraged their children to behave and wanted to be informed if their children were struggling. They knew their children's strengths and weaknesses, and how to motivate them to do their best. Lee and Bowen (2006) suggested that, "while parent involvement at school has received more attention in the schools and in the literature than parent involvement in the home…both may be related to the achievement gap" (p. 196). Jeynes (2005) found that current beliefs about parent support considered exemplary (e.g., attending school functions) may not be the

most important type of involvement. Instead, a "general atmosphere of involvement" that resulted from parents' expectations and encouragement for school success was strongly correlated with scholastic outcomes for children (Jeynes, 2005, p. 262).

A key finding in this study is the parents' desire to feel connected to school staff. Teachers, principals and other school staff could build on this desire by learning more about families and finding ways to bridge the worlds of home and school. Lee and Bowen (2006) suggested the importance of increasing the connections and congruence between the home and school. Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted that times of transition are "influenced by the presence or absence of prior connections between the settings [and that the] linkages may take the form of previous social interactions between participants in the settings...or of information, attitudes, and expectations existing in each setting about the other" (p. 734). Joy's comfort in knowing that school staff lived in and were familiar with her neighborhood contributed to her satisfaction with the school. Sandy attended school events and talked to other parents during pick up and drop off times, because it contributed to her sense that there was a developing community of support for her child. Schools could build on this interest in community by highlighting the ways that the school is a contributing part of the community that helps link the people in ways that support and comfort all who live there. If schools and school staff do not already see themselves as this hub of support, they need to begin to do so now.

Goddard et al. (2001) suggested that the development of trusting, supportive relationships between parents and school staff is the key to helping children in poverty be successful in school. While it is important for teachers and other school staff to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, it also appears important that they find ways to connect and develop positive relationships with the parents, because these relationships are critical to parents' liking of the school and their children's experience in it.

The parents in this study expressed a lack of comfort with the school setting, despite their involvement in and apparent comfort with Head Start settings and staff. One reason may be the close relationships that Head Start staff members build with parents through home visits and other regular contacts that are common in Head Start and some other early childhood programs. Schools should find ways to ease the transition from Head Start to school, by helping parents understand school expectations and systems, and by finding ways to cultivate positive relationships with parents early in the transition.

Schools should also find ways to build on parents' at home involvement, because it appears that time and other constraints might be serious hindrances to their at school involvement. The parents in this study clearly depended on school newsletters and homework sheets to provide guidance to them in their home involvement in their children's education. They spoke regularly with their children about the importance of school, and their expectations for their children to behave

and do well. Teachers would do best to assume that parents are involved in meaningful ways, even if they do not see direct evidence of this at home involvement. They should not, however, assume that parents know the best ways to support their children's learning at home, because the parents do not understand schools well, and have few, if any, memories and experiences of their own parents' involvement in their education. These parents struggle with finding the balance between supporting their children and wanting their children to become independent and self-sufficient. Lareau (2003) described the different child rearing styles of parents who are low-income and those who are middle class, noting that parents in poverty tend to engage in less active involvement and explicit coaching than parents of the middle class. Parents in this study clearly want to support their children's education, but worry about being overly involved. Teachers and other staff could discuss these concerns with parents, and work with them to find the best ways for each to support children's learning and development.

Conclusion

Is the involvement of the parents in this study typical of other parents who are living in poverty? Why do these parents appear to be more actively involved in their children's education than previous research findings and assumptions would predict? I believe that the answer lies in the methodology, which approached the experiences of these parents from a position of openness about the meanings these parents bring to the phenomenon of parent involvement. My own life experiences,

including my roles as a parent and as a longtime staff member of a Head Start program, allowed me to consider the strengths and meanings these parents might bring to their role in parent involvement. By challenging and setting aside currently held assumptions about involvement of parents who are low income, I was able to consider their stories openly, and their stories told me that they do care deeply about their children and that they are engaged in a myriad of meaningful ways. It is in the prejudging and setting of expectations of noninvolvement that school staff are fulfilling the prophecy that parents in poverty cannot support their children's education, and ultimately that these children's chance for success in school is greatly diminished.

> Understanding of human development demands more than the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

Educators must examine their assumptions about the involvement of parents living in poverty, and consider the many influences acting on these parents and their children, as well as the school staff who interact with them. We must bear in mind the multiple contextual systems and proximal processes that act upon, not only parents, but also staff, impacting the interactions they have with each other. Historically, parents living in poverty have been assumed to lack the skills and resources to adequately care for their children, and these assumptions continue to influence educators' beliefs about the role these families' play in their children's

lack of success in school (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Cutler, 2000; Graue, 2005; Kagan & Cohen, 1996).

These assumptions are powerful and changing them will not be easy. But the parents in this study have renewed my commitment to speak up against prejudgments of parents who are low income as parents who are uncaring and who do not have the skills to assist their children in their education. This study finds that at least some parents living in poverty can be and are involved in meaningful ways in their children's education. Schools are doing irreparable harm to children who are poor by not embracing and engaging parents living in poverty as true partners in their children's education. Teachers, and other staff working with children and their families, must value parents and assist them in feeling comfortable and connected as they transition to school. The findings in this study can provide a starting place for discussions with parents, and Head Start and school staff, encouraging them to reach out to one another, so that mutually supportive relationships can develop, providing the necessary support for children living in poverty to be successful in school. Likewise, I hope these findings inspire those who train and mentor teachers, at both the pre-service and in-service levels, to assist these teachers to challenge any prejudgments or assumptions they bring to the educational setting, and to learn new, effective ways to engage parents living in poverty so that these children can succeed. Will all parents be as caring and capable as the parents in this study? No. But if we assume more parents are caring and

capable, we will increase the likelihood that children living in poverty will get the network of support they need from all of the adults in their lives, and we will improve the outcomes for all children entrusted to our care.

REFERENCES

Aaron, H. J., Mann, T. E., & Taylor, T. (Eds.). (1994). *Values and public policy.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Administration of Children, Youth and Families. (2001). *Head Start program performance standards and other regulations* (rev. 7). Alexandria, VA: Head Start Information and Publication Center.

Alexander, K. L., & Entwisle, D. R. (1996). Schools and children at risk. In A. Booth & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* (pp. 67-88). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Balshem, M., Chaille, C., Banach, P., & Ramsperger, S. (1994). *Profiles of Oregon's preschool children: A call for public discussion.* Unpublished report, Portland State University.

Barnett, W. S., & Hustedt, J. T. (2005). Head Start's lasting effects. *Infants and Young Children, 18*(1), 16-24.

Berns, R. M. (2004). *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wasdworth/Thomson Learning.

Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1996). Interpersonal relationships in the school environment and children's early school adjustment: The role of teachers and peers. In J. Juvonen & K. R. Wentzel (Eds.), *Social motivation: Understanding children's school adjustment* (pp. 199-225). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Booth, A., & Dunn J. F. (Eds.). (1996*). Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Bowman, B. T. (1999). Kindergarten practices with children from low-income families. In R. Pianta & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 281-304). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Bradley, R. H. (2004, April-September). Chaos, culture and covariance: A dynamic systems view of children's experiences at home. *Parenting, Science and Practice, 4*(2-3), 243-257.

Braun, S. J., & Edwards, E. P. (1972). *History and theory of early childhood education.* Worthington, OH: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company.

Bredekamp, S., & Copple, C. (Eds.). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (rev. ed.).* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723-742.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). The ideological model from a life course perspective: Reflections of a participant observer. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 599-618). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In P. H. Mussen & Wikessen (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1* (pp. 993-1028). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Brooks-Gunn, J. (1995). Children in families in communities: Risk and intervention in the Bronfenbrenner tradition. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 467-522). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Brooks-Gunn, J., & Markman, L. B. (2005, Spring). The contribution of parenting to ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *The Future of Children, 15*(1), 139-168.

Campbell, F. A., & Ramey, C. T. (1994). Effects of early intervention on intellectual and academic achievement: A follow-up study of children from low-income families. *Child Development, 65*, 684-698.

Carlton, M. P., & Winsler, A. (1999). School readiness: The need for a paradigm shift [Electronic version]. *The School Psychology Review, 28*(3), 338-352.

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc. (1996). *Making the move to kindergarten*. South Deerfield, MA: Author.

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc. (2000). *Starting your child in school*. South Deerfield, MA: Author.

Christenson, S. L. (1999). Families and schools: Rights, responsibilities, resources and relationships. In R. Pianta, & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 143-178). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Churchill, L. (1978). *Questioning strategies in sociolinguistics*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.

Connard, C., & Novick, R. (1996). *The ecology of the family: A background paper for a family-centered approach to education and social service delivery*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Cresswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Cresswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Cutler, W. W., III. (2000). *Parents and schools: The 150-year struggle for control in American education*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dale, R. (2000). Globalization and education: Demonstrating a common world educational culture or locating a globally structured educational agenda? *Educational Theory, 50*(4), 419-427.

Delany, B. (1998). The micro-politics of school, teacher, and student failure: Managing turbulence. In B. M. Franklin (Ed.). *When children don't learn: Student failure and the culture of teaching* (pp. 134-159). New York: Teachers College Press.

Devore, S., & Hanley-Maxwell, C. (2000). "I wanted to see if we could make it work": Perspectives on inclusive childcare [Electronic version]. *Exceptional Children, 66*(2), 241-255.

Diamond, K. E., Reagan, A. J., & Bandyk, J. E. (2000). Parents' conceptions of kindergarten readiness: Relationships with race, ethnicity, and development [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Educational Research, 94*(2), 93-100.

Donalek, J. G. (2004). Phenomenology as a qualitative research method. *Urologic Nursing, 24*(6), 516-517.

Donalek, J. G., & Soldswisch, S. (2004). An introduction to qualitative research methods. *Urologic Nursing, 24*(4), 354-356.

Drew, N. (2001). Meaningfulness as an epistemologic concept for explicating the researcher's constitutive part in phenomenologic research. *Advanced Nursing Science, 23*(4), 16-31.

Drew, N. (2004). Creating a synthesis of intentionality: The role of the bracketing facilitator. *Advances in Nursing Science, 27*(3), 215-223.

Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. A. (2005, Spring). Can family socioeconomic resources account for racial and ethnic test score gaps? *The Future of Children, 15*, 35-54.

Edwards, P. A., Pleasants, H. M., & Franklin, S. H. (1999). *A path to follow: Learning to listen to parents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1995). The life course paradigm: Social change and individual development. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 101-140). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Entwisle, D. R., & Alexander, K. L. (1999). Early schooling and social stratification. In R. Pianta, & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 13-38). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Epps, W. J. (1996). *The transition of parents from Head Start to public school settings*. Florissant, MO: Southern Research Associates.

Epstein, J. (1985). Home and school connections in schools of the future: Implications of research on parent involvement. *Peabody Journal of Education, 63*(1), 18-41.

Epstein, J. L. (1996). Perspectives and previews on research and policy for school, family and community partnerships. In A. Booth, & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* (pp. 209-246). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Eyring, M. (1998). How close is close enough?: Reflections on the experience of doing phenomenology. In K. Bennett deMarrais (Ed.), *Inside stories: Qualitative research reflections* (pp. 139-150). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Fantuzzo, J. W., Lamb-Parker, F., Watson, D., & Christenson, S. (1999). Family involvement in Head Start and beyond: An investigation of home-school connections in Head Start, kindergarten, and first grade. *NHSA Dialog, 3*(1), 5-26.

Feuerstein, A. (2000). School characteristics and parent involvement: Influences on participation in children's schools. *The Journal of Educational Research, 94*(1), 29-40.

Fine, M. (1995). The politics of who's "at risk." In B. B. Swadener & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 76-96). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). *The unknown city: The lives of poor and working-class adults*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Finley, R. B. (2001). Parents' perceptions of a change in parental involvement in an urban school. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 62* (10), 3281. (UMI No. 3028806)

Foster, M. (1997). Race, gender, and ethnicity: How they structure teachers' perceptions of and participation in professional and school reform efforts. In B. J. Bank & P. M. Hall (Eds.), *Gender, equity, and schooling: Policy and practice* (pp. 159-185). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Fuller, A. R. (1990). *Insight into value: An exploration of the premises of a phenomenological psychology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Galper, A., Wigfield, A., & Seefeldt, C. (1997). Head Start parents' beliefs about their children's abilities, task values, and performance on different activities. *Child Development, 68*(5), 897-907.

Garbarino, J. (1993). The human ecology of early risk. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 78-96). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gay, J. E. (2002, Fall). The gift of a year to grow: Blessing or curse. *Education, 123*(1), 63-72.

Giorgi, A. (Ed.). (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Goddard, R. D., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2001). A multilevel examination of the distribution and effects of teacher trust in students and parents in urban elementary schools. *Elementary School Journal, 102*(1), 3-17.

Goldenberg, C., Gallimore, R., Reese, L., & Garnier, H. (2001). Cause of effect?: A longitudinal study of immigrant Latino parents' aspirations and expectations, and their children's school performance [Electronic version]. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 547-82.

Gonzales-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Doan Holbein, M. F. (2005, June). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review, 17*(2), 99-123.

Graue, E. (1999). Diverse perspectives on kindergarten contexts and practices. In R. Pianta & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 109-142). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Graue, E. (2005). Theorizing and describing preservice teachers' images of families and schooling. *Teachers College Record, 107*(1), 157-185.

Graves, S. L. (2006). Parent involvement at school entry: Differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational level and specific occupation. D*issertation Abstracts International, 68* (04). (UMI No. 3259123)

Greene, J. P., & Forster, G. (2004, September). *The teachability index: Can disadvantaged students learn?* (Education working paper, no. 6). Retrieved February 12, 2006, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_06.htm

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Halpern, R. (1990). Poverty and early childhood parenting: Toward a framework for intervention. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 60*(1), 6-18.

Highreach Learning, Inc. (2003). *A summer transition: An activity-based packet for families and children*. Charlotte, NC: Author.

Hudley, C. A. (1997). Issues of race and gender in educational achievement of African-American children. In B. J. Bank & P. M. Hall (Eds.), *Gender, equity, and schooling: Policy and practice* (pp. 113-133). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Husserl, E. (1977). *Phenomenological psychology: Lectures, summer semester* (J. Scanlon, Trans.). The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff (Original work published 1925)

Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004, P. L. 108-446 (2004).

Jackson, S. (2002). A study of teachers' perceptions of youth problems. *Journal of Youth Studies, 5*(3), 313-323.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005, May). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement and urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 40*(3), 237-269.

Kagan, S. L. (1994). Readying schools for young children: Polemics and priorities [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*, 234-238.

Kagan, S. L. (1997). Support systems for children, youth, families, and schools in inner-city situations [Electronic version]. *Education and Urban Society, 29*(3), 277-295.

Kagan, S. L., & Cohen, N. E. (Eds.). (1996). *Reinventing early care and education: A vision for a quality system*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Kagendo-Mutua, N. (2001). Policied identities: Children with disabilities [Electronic version]. *Education Studies* (American Educational Studies Association), *32*(3), 289-300.

Kaiser, A. P., & Delaney, E. M. (1996). The effects of poverty on parenting young children [Electronic version]. *Peabody Journal of Education, 71*(4), 66-85.

Karweit, N. L. (1994). Can preschool alone prevent early learning failure? In R. E. Slavin, N. L. Karweit, & B. A. Wasik (Eds.), *Preventing early school failure: Research, policy, and practice* (pp. 58-77). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Kelley-Laine, K., Cooper, M. J., & Mosley, M. H. (2002). Should parent participation in schools be required? In K. M. Paciorek (Ed.), *Taking sides: Clashing views on controversial issues in early childhood education* (pp. 106-117). Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education, 60*, 73-85.

Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006, Summer). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(2), 193-218.

Lee, V. E., & Burkam, D. T. (2002). *Inequality at the starting gate: Social background differences in achievement as children begin school.* Washington, DC: The Economic Policy Institute.

Leventhal, T., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000, March). The neighborhood they live in: The effects of neighborhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(2), 309-337.

Levy, D., & Duncan, G. J. (2000, April). *Using sibling samples to assess the effect of childhood family income on completed schooling* (JCPR Working Paper No. 168). Evanston, IL: Joint Center for Poverty Research, Inc.

Lincoln, Y. S. (1996, April). *At the contentious edge: Postmodern criticism of modernist science*. Paper presented as an address at Portland State University, Portland, OR.

Lloyd, J. W., Steinberg, D. R., & Wilhelm-Chapin, M. K. (1999). Research on the transition to kindergarten. In R. Pianta & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 305-316). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Lopez, A., & Cole, C. L. (1999). Effects of parent-implemented intervention on academic readiness skills of five Puerto Rican kindergarten students in an urban school [Electronic version]. *The School Psychology Review, 28*(3), 439-447.

Mantzicoupoulos, P. (2003). Flunking kindergarten after Head Start: An inquiry into the contribution of contextual and individual variables. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(2), 268-278.

Marcon, R. A. (1999). Positive relationships between parent-school involvement and public school inner-city preschoolers' development and academic performance. *School Psychology Review, 28*(3), 395-412.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999*). Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Masse, L. N., & Barnett, W. S. (2002). *A benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian Early childhood intervention.* Retrieved November 29, 2002, from http://nieer.org/resources/research/AbecedarianStudy.pdf.

McGill-Franzen, A. (1993). *Shaping the preschool agenda: Early literacy, public policy, and professional beliefs*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

McIntyre, L. L., Echert, T. L., Fiese, B. H., DiGennaro, F. D., & Wildenger, L. K. (2007, August). Transition to kindergarten: Family experiences and involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(1), 83-88.

McWayne, C., & Owsianik, M. (2005, May*). Family involvement in preschool children's educational experiences: A multidimensional look across Head Start sites.* Paper presented at the meeting of the National Head Start Association, Orlando, Florida.

Moen, P., Elder, G. H., Jr., & Lüscher, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Moles, O. C. (1993). Collaboration between schools and disadvantaged parents: Obstacles and openings. In N. F. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (pp. 21-52). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

National Association for Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2000). *Still unacceptable trends in kindergarten entry and placement.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved May 24, 2002, from http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psunacc.htm

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1992). *Ready or not: What parents should know about school readiness.* Washington, DC: Author.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2001). *NAEYC at 75: Reflections on the past, challenges for the future.* Washington, DC: Author.

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Early childhood longitudinal study: kindergarten class 1998-9* (Project Summary). Retrieved November 29, 2002, from http://nces.ed.gov/ecls/pdf/essaysmisc/ksum/pdf

National Head Start Association. (n.d.). *Parents' guide after Head Start: Success in public school.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

NICHD Early Childhood Care Research Network. (2002). Early child care and children's development prior to school entry: Results from the NICHD study of early child care [Electronic version]. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(1), 133-64.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, PL 107-100. (2002).

O'Connor, S. (2001). Voices of parents and teachers in a poor white urban school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 6*(3), 175-198.

Oregon Department of Education. (2005). *Oregon database initiative* [Data file]. Available from Oregon Department of Education Web site, http://www.ode.state.or.us/sfda/reports

Payne, R. K. (2001). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

Perry, K. E., & Weinstein, R. S. (1998). The social context of early schooling and children's school adjustment. *Educational Psychologist, 33*(4), 177-194.

Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (Eds.). (1999). *The transition to kindergarten*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (2002). *Transition to kindergarten* [Early Childhood Research and Policy Brief, *2*(2)]. Chapel Hill, NC: National Center for Early Development and Learning.

Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., Taylor, L., & Early, D. (1999). Kindergarten teachers' practices related to the transition to school: Results of a national survey. *The Elementary School Journal, 100*(1), 71-86.

Pollio, H. R., Henley, T. B., & Thompson, C. J. (1997). *The phenomenology of everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Portland State University, Population Research Center. (2002). Community assessment report for Mt. Hood Community College Child Development and Family Support Programs, Portland, OR: Author.

Ramey, C. T., & Campbell, F. A. (1984). Preventive education for high-risk children: Cognitive consequences of the Carolina Abecedarian Project. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 88*, 515-523.

Ramey, C. T., Campbell, F. A., Burchinal, M., Skinner, M. L., Gardner, D. M., & Ramey, S. T. (2000). Persistent effects of early childhood education in high-risk mothers and their children. *Applied Developmental Science, 4*(1), 2-14.

Ramey, S. L., Lanzi, R. G., Phillips, M. M., & Ramey, C. T. (1998). Perspectives of former Head Start children and their parents on school and the transition to school. *The Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 311-327.

Ramey, C. T., & Ramey, S. L. (1999). Beginning school for children at risk. In R. Pianta & M. Cox, (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 217-252). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Rathbun, A. H., & Hausken, E. G. (2001, April). *How are transition to kindergarten activities associated with parent involvement in kindergarten?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED452951)

Resnick, M. (2002, November). *No child left behind.* Paper presented at the Oregon School Boards Association 2002 Annual Convention, Portland, OR.

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L., & Mann, E. A. (2002). *Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Title I Chicago-Child Parent Centers*. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. (2003). Teacher-rated family involvement and children's social and academic outcomes in kindergarten. *Early Education and Development, 14*(2), 179-198.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc.

Rouse, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., & McLanahan, S. (2005, Spring). Introducing the issue. *The Futures of Children, 15*(1), 5-14.

Schweinhart, L. J. (2005, October). *The High/Scope Perry Preschool study to age 40.* Paper presented at the National Head Start Association Transition Conference in Washington, DC.

Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27. *Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 10.* Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Seefeldt, C., Denton, K., Galper, A., & Younoszai, T. (1998). Former Head Start parents' characteristics, perceptions of school climate, and involvement in their children's education. *The Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 339-349.

SERVE. (2005). *Planning for terrific transitions: A guide for transition-to-school teams* (rev. ed.). Tallahassee, FL: Author.

Shank, G., & Villella, O. (2004). Building on new foundations: Core principles and new directions for qualitative research. *The Journal of Educational Research, 98*(1), 46-55.

Smith, J. A. (2005). Parental involvement in a low-income school: A case study. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 66* (03), 906. (UMI No. 3169490)

Solomon, D., & Battistich, V. (1996). Teacher beliefs and practices in schools serving communities that differ in socioeconomic level. *Journal of Experimental Education, 64*(4), 327-347.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (2004). *Readiness: School, family and community connections (annual synthesis 2004).* Austin, TX: Author.

Stipek, D. (2004). Teaching practices in kindergarten and first grade: Different strokes for different folks. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 19*(4), 548-568.

Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research: A handbook for practitioners.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Swick, K. J., & Graves, S. B. (1993). *Empowering at-risk families during the early childhood years.* Washington, DC: National Education Association of the United States.

Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, H. R., III. (1990). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: A special partnership.* Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1986). *Easing the transition from preschool to kindergarten: A guide for early childhood teachers and administrators.* Washington, DC: Author.

Viadero, D. (1999). New priorities, focus sought for research. *Education Week 18*(41), 32-37.

Zigler, E., & Styfco, S. J. (2000). Pioneering steps (and fumbles) in developing a federal preschool intervention. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20*(2), 67-70, 78.

Zill, N., Resnick, G., Kim, K., O'Donnell, K., McKey, R. H., Pai-Samant, S., & Clark, C., et al. (2003, May). *Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Head Start Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement During Their Children's Transition to Kindergarten: A Phenomenological Study

Hello, my name is Dawn Barberis and I am a doctoral student at Portland State University in the Graduate School of Education. I also work at Mt. Hood Community College Head Start as a supervisor and Transition Coordinator.

I am beginning a study on the parent involvement of Head Start parents during their children's transition into kindergarten. I would like to invite you to be in the study, because your child will be entering kindergarten in the fall. As part of the study, I am interested in learning about your parental involvement experiences as you and your child move into kindergarten. I would like to interview each parent at least three times beginning this spring and ending in December.

Do you think this is something you might be interested in? Could we schedule a time to meet so that I can tell you more about the study and you can ask me any questions you might have? *(Schedule meeting)*. I'll see you then.

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO FAMILIES

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Because your child will soon be leaving Head Start and moving on to kindergarten, you may be eligible to participate in a study about Parent Involvement. I am looking for parents who are willing to be interviewed about Parent Involvement three (3) times in the next few months – once while you are still in Head Start, once in September and once more in December. Your family will receive a small "thank you" gift after each of these interviews.

You might be eligible if:

* This is your first child to attend kindergarten,

* You are not planning to move out of the area between now and December,

* You plan to enroll your child in the local kindergarten program.

If you are interested in participating in this study and think you are eligible, let your Teacher or Family Worker know, or call me directly at (503) 491-6060.

Sincerely,

Dawn Barberis

Head Start Transition Coordinator

APPENDIX C

INFORMED PARENT CONSENT DOCUMENT

Head Start Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement During Their Children's Transition to Kindergarten: A Phenomenological Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dawn Barberis from Portland State University, Graduate School of Education. The researcher hopes to learn more about how Head Start parents become involved in their child's education during the kindergarten year. She is doing this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and is working under the supervision of Sara M. Davis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Head Start parent and your child will be attending kindergarten in the fall.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in three interviews in a place of your choice. These interviews will last about one hour each and are designed to find out what you think about parent involvement and how you might be involved in your child's education. The interviews will be audiotaped. The information you share in the study may help Head Start programs and schools better understand the ways they influence parent involvement of parents who have participated in Head Start. You will receive a $20 grocery store gift card as a thank you gift each time you complete one of these interviews.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that could identify you or your child directly will be kept confidential. You, your child and your child's school will be assigned pseudonyms at the beginning of the study to reduce the likelihood of identifying you as a study participant. All information will be kept in locked file cabinets. The only exception to confidentiality would be in the event that you share information that gives the researcher reasonable cause to suspect that your child has suffered abuse. In this case, the researcher will be required by law (ORS 419B.010) to report the suspected abuse to the authorities.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study and it should not affect your relationship with Head Start or your child's elementary school. You will not be asked to respond to any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw from this study at any time.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University,
(503) 725-3423. If you have questions about the study itself, contact Dawn Barberis, (503) 491-6121.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

_____ _____

Participant's signature Date

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE NOTE SENT PRIOR TO SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEWS

August 2006

Dear [parent's name]

I hope your summer has been enjoyable. I will be contacting you in the next couple of weeks to set up a second interview with you to talk about kindergarten and how things are going for you and [child's name]. I am hoping we can get together sometime toward the end of September. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dawn Barberis
Transition Coordinator
(503) 491-6121

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

A. Interview guide for first parent interview

Prior to the interview

- Interviewer will gather toys (Duplo blocks or similar) for child to play with during interview.

During the interview

- Have parent sign consent form, giving permission to interview and observe parent and child (let parent know they may rescind this permission at any time during the study).
- Use interview questions as a guide (prompts are in parentheses). Other questions may be added as themes emerge.
- Take detailed notes and tape record the interview for later transcribing.

Questions for first parent interview

A.1. Getting to know the child and family

1. Tell me a little about *child's name* and your family (interests, pre-kindergarten experiences, hobbies).

A.2. Parental aspirations for their child's school success

1. What are your hopes and dreams for *child's name* (educational attainment, career, family, character/values)?
2. What do you think kindergarten will be like for *child's name* (curriculum, social, safety)?
3. What do you hope s/he will learn?

A.3. Parental background experiences with education

1. Tell me a little about your own experiences with school (When did you begin school, what was your early school experience like).
2. How were your parents involved in your education (what did they do to support your education, what did they do to block or hinder your education?)

A.4. Parent's thoughts about kindergarten and their role in supporting their child's education

1. Have you registered *child's name* for kindergarten? What was that like (what did you have to do, how did you feel)?
2. In what ways is s/he is ready for kindergarten? In what ways is s/he not quite ready (academic, social-emotional, physical)?

3. How will you be involved in his/her education? What are things you are concerned about?
4. In what ways has Head Start prepared you and your child for kindergarten?
5. What would you like to add about your child going to kindergarten? Do you have any questions about his/her going to kindergarten that I haven't asked?
6. How would you describe parent involvement?

At the end of interview, thank the parent for their time, tell them the plan for the next interview and schedule next appointment (approximately fourth week of September). Give thank you gift. Encourage the parent to save any written information they may receive from the school that they might want to talk about during the next interview session. Give contact information and encourage them to call if they want to add anything or have questions.

B. Interview guide for second parent interview

Confirming the appointment

- Interviewer will call to confirm the interview date, time and place. Remind the parent that they will receive a thank you gift for participating in the interview.

Prior to the interview

- Interviewer will gather toys (Duplo blocks or similar) for child to play with during interview.
- Review responses to the first interview. Determine if additional or alternative questions are needed.

During the interview

- Add to or revise any consent forms as needed.
- Use interview questions as a guide (prompts are in parentheses). Other questions may be added as themes emerge.
- Take detailed notes and tape record the interview for later transcribing.

Questions for second parent interview

B.1. Child and family update

1. How was your summer? What kind of changes have there been in your family's life since we last spoke?

B.2. Child's adjustment to kindergarten

1. How is *child's name* adjusting to kindergarten (feelings, comfort, routine)?
2. What kind of things is s/he learning (cognitive, social, physical)?

B.3. Parent involvement

1. What is the teacher like? Have you met the principal or other school staff? What was that like?
2. Have you had a chance to go to the school? (If yes) What did you do there?
3. What activities have you participated in? What activities did you not participate in? What were the reasons you did not participate?
4. How are you involved in *child's name* education (parent involvement in school, home care, reading, values)?
5. How does the school inform you about your child and ways you might be involved in his/her education (written, telephone, in person)?
6. How comfortable are you in getting involved in *child's name* school? What things could the school be doing that would make you feel more comfortable?
7. What things about the school do you really like? What do you wish were different (staff, curriculum, facility, climate)?
8. What would you like to add about your parent involvement experiences in kindergarten? Do you have any questions about your parent involvement experience that I haven't asked about?
9. How would you describe parent involvement?

At the end of interview, thank the parent for their time, and remind them that you will want to do one more interview in approximately three months. Give thank you gift. Give contact information and encourage to call if they want to add anything or have questions.

C. Interview guide for third parent interview

Confirming the appointment

- Interviewer will call to confirm the interview date, time and place. Remind the parent that they will receive a thank you gift for participating in the interview.

Prior to the interview

- Interviewer will gather toys (Duplo blocks or similar) for child to play with during interview.
- Review responses to the first and second interviews. Determine if additional or alternative questions are needed.

During the interview

- Add to or revise any consent forms as needed.
- Use interview questions as a guide (prompts are in parentheses). Other questions may be added as themes emerge.
- Take detailed notes and tape record the interview for later transcribing.

Questions for third parent interview

C.1. Child and family update

1. How have you and *child's name* been? What kind of changes have there been in your family's life since we last spoke?

C.2. Child's kindergarten experience and parental expectations

1. What has *child's name* been learning?
2. How do you feel s/he has been doing in school? Do you feel s/he is doing better, worse or about the same as other children in her/his class?
3. Tell me about any concerns you may have about how *child's name* is doing at school?

C.3. Parent involvement and comfort with school

1. In what ways have you been able to be involved at the school?
2. In what other ways are you involved in *child's name* education?
3. In what ways do you feel the school has been supportive of your involvement? Can you give me any examples (phone calls, interactions with teacher, training)?
4. In what ways has the school not been supportive of your involvement? Can you give me any examples?
5. In what ways do you think your own school experiences may influence your involvement in *child's name's* education?
6. What memories do you have of your own family's involvement in your education? How do your memories of your family's involvement with your education influence what you do now?
7. What else would you like to add about your parent involvement experiences in kindergarten? Do you have any questions about your parent involvement experience that I haven't asked about?
8. How would you describe parent involvement?

At the end of the interview, thank the parent for their time. Ask if they would be willing to talk with you again to review the final report of the study and if you have more questions. Give thank you gift. Leave contact information and ask parent to contact you if they have anything to add or future questions.

APPENDIX F

2006 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

Background

Section 673(2) of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981 (42 U.S.C. 9902(2)) requires the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to update, at least annually, the poverty guidelines, which shall be used as an eligibility criterion for the Community Services Block Grant program. The poverty guidelines also are used as an eligibility criterion by a number of other Federal programs. The poverty guidelines issued here are a simplified version of the poverty thresholds that the Census Bureau uses to prepare its estimates of the number of individuals and families in poverty.

As required by law, this update is accomplished by increasing the latest published Census Bureau poverty thresholds by the relevant percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). The guidelines in this 2006 notice reflect the 3.4 percent price increase between calendar years 2004 and 2005. After this inflation adjustment, the guidelines are rounded and adjusted to standardize the differences between family sizes. The same calculation procedure was used this year as in previous years. (Note that these 2006 guidelines are roughly equal to the poverty thresholds for calendar year 2005 which the Census Bureau expects to publish in final form in August 2006.)

2006 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia

Persons in family unit	Poverty guideline
1	$9,800
2	13,200
3	16,600
4	20,000
5	23,400
6	26,800
7	30,200
8	33,600

For family units with more than 8 persons, add $3,400 for each additional person

APPENDIX G

HORIZONS AND THEMES

Horizons

Anne	Mandy	Joy	Sandy	Claudia
Alone - single mom - on own Hope/expectation – want something for child that she never had (1) Connect to school through child (12) Create stability (6) Vivid memory amongst vague memories of early education (8) Early/school failure (1) Little school involvement – busy with own appointments, etc. (4) Fulfills/completes obligations (9) Guilt over not being involved as much as she think she should (9) Makes ultimate decisions re: child – Power (2) Trust in teacher – likes HS teacher because child likes her, she loves him (12) PI: Time given to child and school - presence for child motivates them (14) Establish a schedule (routine) (6) Help with homework (14)	Authority - school choice – parents moved child from CDC to PD site (2) General goals for child – ultimately child decides (parent has little control over child's ultimate outcome) (10) Advocate for child (stand behind him) (13) Parent knows how to handle child (has strategies) (3) Vivid memory of early schooling (but otherwise vague memory) (8) (own) parents not very involved at school. Mom busy with work/school, but does remember/thinks she helped she and her sister a lot (14) Parent's own needs (school, etc.) prevent involvement, especially at school (4) Worries about child's behavior at school (reflection / example of family) (5) PI: Don't get over-involved – do a couple of things (10) Be aware of what child is doing (11)	Child reflection (example) of family (5) Hopes/expectations – child represents parent's lost or yet to be realized potential (1) Sees child's strengths (3) Parent is embarrassed – rationalizes lack of education/circumstances – not worthy (8) School is a good thing (15) Lack of stability in own upbringing (6) (own) mother as inspiration and support – but can she live up to her expectations (13) no model of day to day (in school) involvement (8) Confident that she'll know what to do re: school (2) Ready for child to be off at school – independent (10) Provide support/setting for learning, but let child be self-reliant (10) Advocate for child (13) Proud of child (3) PI: Do stuff at/for school (9) Know what's going on (11) Be available (14)	Schedule/ Structure (6) Devoted time to child (14) (preK) teacher friendly – linked to school liking (12) hope/expectation – be a good person, treat others well (5); goal – a life that parent has not yet realized (1) encourage independence (10) friends very important (1) vivid early childhood memory. Nice teacher linked to school liking (12) (own) dad not involved; mother not fully present/ available (8) go on first day (7) bring things to school; share talents (17) child example/reflection of family – good behavior is important (obedient!) (5) provide stability (don't move); routines (6) Aware of child's feelings/ motivations (3) Track progress in school work (11) Model (14)	Child as reflection (example) of family – good manners (5) Hesitant/unsure - of school experience (what will it be like?); not sure how school system/child care work (8) Fond (vivid) individual memory of early schooling (but vague memory of general experience) (8) Liked (own) teacher (12) (own) father not present during childhood (6) (own) mother not very present – had her own issues (6) PI: Be supportive (14) Help but not too much (10) Take (physical) care of child (14) Be available – listen to child, connect with them (14) Direct child to make good choices (behave) – VALUES (5) Understand/ appreciate individual differences in children (3)

	Low income doesn't determine parent's ability – it affects the TIME they can be involved (4)		Extend learning at home (14) Values education (15) Parents not as welcome in kindergarten (8) Parents and teachers need to talk/coordinate efforts (12) Community surrounding child (friends, other parent) (12) "the system" is set up to see low income parents as bad parents (8) relationships (time together) is key – not money (14)	
Counts on support from school/day care (6) Explain/talk with child about school (14) Provide structure/routine (6) Knows child history, skills (3) Worries about/protects (16) Learns thing about child from teacher – believes these things (even if they are different from her experience of child at home) (12) Authority (power) in decisions about child (2) Relinquish control of child – allow independence (rite of passage) (10)		High expectations of child (but worries they won't be met?) (16) Unsure of school rules/system -doesn't ask for clarification; not entirely sure what is being taught at school (8) Friends/belonging very important (16) Use of jargon – friendship sticks (18) Sense of belonging – connection to teachers, neighborhood (16) PI = buying things (movie tickets, sweatshirt) (17) Confusion – talks to school but still doesn't fully understand (8) Not sure of social boundaries of school (did I call too much?) (8)	Didn't like school at first – child had no friends (relationships) (16) Motivate (14) Extend learning – work with child at home (14) Fundraising is bad - values – money focus is bad (17) Keep child safe (16) Teacher is friendly (and other characteristics) create feeling of connection; helper is "sweet" (12) Didn't know purpose/ structure of PI/Open House (8) School rules are "practical" (8) Drops off/picks up – daily (9)	Enrolled in "private" daycare (K) (8) Use of jargon – "popcorn words" (18) Pledge of Allegiance as curriculum (8) (child's) teacher is NICE, awesome, caring, on top of things (relates to parent liking school) (12) unsure of school program and expectations (despite being present every day) (8) school schedule does not work for parent (4) wanted "private" school – perceived problems with public (2) homework help – 1 x/week (take home sheet) (14)

Expects/relies on communication from school (11) Waits for/expects invitation from school (to be involved) (9) Motivate child (14) Follow up/be responsible when school brings something to parent's attention – do whatever it takes (13) Talk with child about school (14) Be on top of things – aware (11)		School staff welcoming/ approachable (12) Not comfortable, doesn't want to volunteer in class – also cites barriers such as child care, transportation; roadblocks to involvement at home (baby might get into scissors if she offered to cut things out) (8) Will give stuff to school – (can labels, bird's nest) (17) Depends on school for communication - school communication via written information (no email in home) (11) Was very close to Head Start staff – in person relationship, volunteered, parenting class (12) Avoidance – doesn't want more outreach from school (9) Guilt (over avoidance) (9) Lack of knowledge/ awareness of school rules, but assumes they would align with her rules/ expectations (8) PI: Physical presence/ availability to child at home (14)	Does not volunteer at school – schedule conflicts (4) Take (physical) care of child (14) Weekly newsletter (11) Homework sheet (weekly) (14, 11) Was uncomfortable in school (at Open House) – didn't know expectations, schedule, no guidance (8) School setting felt unfamiliar – not intimate, tied to relationships (8) PI: Talk to child re: school (14) Know what they are doing (11) Homework support (14) Give message that school is important (15) Hates school functions but will go to show support/ stay informed – develop relationship with teacher to facilitate communication (9) Relationships built during informal times (like drop off/pick up times) (6)	unaware of PI opportunities (8) PI: Monitoring learning (11) Managing behavior (5) Help, but not too much (10) Worried about how daughter would act if she were around (at school) (5)
Provide stability for child (6) Be on same page as teacher – let child know all adults are talking together (12) Link school behavior to home consequences (5)		Doesn't attribute child's learning/demonstrations at home to school – no home-school link (8) Jargon – phonics? (18) Hears positives from teacher re: child (12)	School schedule doesn't work for parents (4) Aware of school curriculum – follow up at home (11) Not sure of child's progress in relation to others – describes mixed report from	Getting married (6) (now) unsure of 1st grade school system (8) thinks child does well compared to others (but hedges bet/prepares to hear she is not doing as well) (8)

Champion for you child (stand up for them) (13) Authority – makes ultimate decisions re: child (2) Reconnecting with father (phone contacts only, but could lead to visitation out of state) (6) Do things together (read, write, talk, play games) (14) Strong bond with child important (3) Knows about PI events, but hasn't gone due to being too busy (4) Stay informed about what is happening at school (read stuff sent from school) (11) Sees education as important (15) Give child opportunities/ experiences parent did not have (1) Friendships are key goal of school (16) (own) parents not present – no model for involvement (8) feels competent as parent (5) responsible for child's success (do whatever it takes) (13) Understands child and what makes them successful – is an important source of information re: child (3)		Child is what parent isn't (or wasn't able to be) (1) Expectations for child are moderating – has no basis for comparison to other children (8) Not comfortable at school – bakes cookies, buys sweatshirt, sends in canned food (8) Avoidance (9) Too much involvement = burn out (9) Goes to parent group (at her church) – "that's involvement" (8) Does not include "helping child at home" in descriptions of PI (14) Provide child with access to materials (14) Teach values at home (14) Stay informed by reading weekly newsletter (11) Assumes/imagines what happens at school (8) Belonging – community connection to school (6) Anticipates future problems (16) Advocate for child (13) Anticipates adversarial relationship with school (8) Relates to hype re: public school is bad, despite good experience with child's school (8) Conflicted – how much/ what kind of involvement is right? (9)	teacher – estimates his ability compared to others (8) Not sure how to handle a situation at school (child being bullied) – tells child how to solve it Value – no victimization (16) Doesn't want child to have bad experience she had (16) Donate stuff, but knows few ways to be involved other than volunteering (17) Motivate child – give message that school is good (15) Talk to child now, so they'll listen later (14) Weekly written communication from school and weekly homework (11) Assist with weekly homework (14) School setting/system (at drop off/pick up) not parent friendly (8) Volunteer by handing things in (14, 17) Buy things (Christmas shop – different than fundraising because child could take initiative) (17) Trust child; encourage independence (10) Does not remember own parent volunteering at school (8) Read to child (14)	wants to shelter daughter – not allow to separate and be independent (16) still no P-T conference, but feels day to day contact lessens need for this (12) PI: Homework help (14) Go to evening program (9) Volunteering in classroom not possible due to work schedule conflict (4) Encourage/motivate (15) Be a positive influence (not like own upbringing) (1) Provide structure/schedule (6) Set limits – firm, but balanced (5) Unfavorable opinion of public school (based on things "others" tell her) – public school curriculum not as "high" (8) Care (physically) for child (14) Understand/accept individual differences in child (3) Guide/teach (14)

Monitor progress at school (11)		Physical presence at home is key (14) Hopes to get married to baby's father (6) Teacher is nice – feels respected, not treated as "poor" (12) Don't have to be at school at all to be "involved" (9) Knows child's needs (3)	Explain things (consequences) (16) (own) parent did things with children, but not in personal, 1:1 level (14) believes kids would be/act worse if she volunteered (5) school not what she expected, but rationalized why it is that way (8) making friends very important (16) PI: Listen (14) Be positive influence (14) Model (14) Income does not determine people's circumstances (i.e., parent involvement) (8)	

Themes

1. Parent wants for his/her child something s/he did not have when growing up; hope and expectation of a better life.

2. Parent has ultimate authority, power, regarding decisions about child (i.e., placement, services, etc.).

3. Parent knows his/her own child intimately (i.e., his/her strengths, motivations, how to handle behaviors). Parent cares deeply for child.

4. Parent experiences time constraints to at-school involvement, including ability to even participate in the public kindergarten school setting.

5. Parent sees child's behavior as reflection of family, and its ability to parent/raise child. Child is the family ambassador.
6. Parent must provide stability and structure for child (including stability of home setting and provision of consistent schedule for child). School, itself, as source of stability.

7. Parent is responsible to introduce child to new experiences (i.e., take child to school on first day). #7 is later collapsed into #9.

8. School is unfamiliar and unwelcoming place. Parent has vague memories of the experience and few role models. She makes assumptions about school expectations and happenings, and is unsure of what is expected of her.

9. Parent has a sense of obligation to fulfill certain parent involvement functions. She experiences guilt if she does not participate in ways she thinks she is expected to be involved.

10. Parent encourages her child to be independent; she believes a parent can be over-involved in child's care and support.

11. Parent is responsible to be aware of what child is doing; she gains this information through information received from the school or the child him/herself.

12. Parent trusts and likes the child's school and school experience if she has a positive relationship with the teacher. Teacher-liking enhances this relationship.

13. Parent is an advocate for their child. #13 is later collapsed into #2.

14. Parent provides time and support for child in the home. The support can be active (i.e., homework help) or passive (i.e., being present and available if child has question).

15. Parent values education. #15 is later collapsed into #14.

16. Parent worries about child and wants to protect him/her. Parent wants child to be safe, have friends and a sense of belonging. #16 is later related to #1 and #6.

17. Parent gives things to the school or buys things from the school to demonstrate involvement. #17 is later collapsed into #9.

18. Parent tries to use jargon to describe school activities. #18 is later collapsed into #8.

APPENDIX H

SCHOOL DATA

The following school data were taken from the Oregon Department of Education Database Initiative reports on school profiles at http://www.ode.state.or.us/sfda/reports/

Grade Range	K -05	Henry's School* Tony's School* (had he remained in study)
Student Enrollment		509
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch		62.3%
Percent ESL Students		19.2%
Minority Students		36.2%

Grade Range	K -05	Mimi's (original) School* Julie's School* (had she gone to public K) [2]
Student Enrollment		438
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch		37.9%
Percent ESL Students		9.9%
Minority Students		29.2%

Grade Range	K -05	Mimi's School* (after transfer in fall)
Student Enrollment		365
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch		32.1%
Percent ESL Students		10.7%
Minority Students		24.9%

Grade Range	K -03	Alex's School*
Student Enrollment		506
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch		72.7%
Percent ESL Students		35.8%
Minority Students		46.4%

* School names changed

[2] no data available for Julie's "private" school