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# Uncovering the Truth: A Phenomenological Study of Parent Perceptions about Parent Involvement in a Rural North Carolina Community

Kate Pascoe Smith

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Uncovering the Truth: A Phenomenological Study of Parent Perceptions about Parent  
Involvement in a Rural North Carolina Community

By  
Kate Pascoe Smith

A Dissertation Submitted to  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
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## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Kate Pascoe Smith under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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This is dedicated to my daughter, Kenley Grace first and foremost. Always believe in yourself and know that you can do anything you can dream of. Also to my husband, Kenneth Craig, for your encouragement and support along the way. ILUMTA. And certainly a thank you to my mom, my biggest fan; and to you, Sue and James, for your faithful and always eager babysitting that helped more than you'll ever know.

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## **Abstract**

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Numerous studies have been conducted over the years to define the concept of parent involvement. This phenomenological study sought to understand parent perceptions from bicultural families of varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status through the personal experiences and lived stories of each participant using Irving Seidman's qualitative method of an "in-depth interview process." This phenomenological study looked to discover the following question: What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school? Grounded in Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and Olivos's (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction and Resistance with Parent Involvement, the researcher centered on the narrative story that each participant provided and found thematic connections and relationships between each individual participant as well as differences in experiences and convictions regarding parent involvement.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Overview

Increasing parent involvement is recognized as fundamental in raising student achievement and supporting meaningful relationships between schools and families. Using the qualitative method of an “in-depth interview process” (Seidman, 2006), this phenomenological study sought to understand parent perceptions from bicultural families of varied races, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural backgrounds through the personal experiences and lived stories of each participant.

The literature related to parent involvement extends from the historical foundations of parent involvement in public schools to 21st century issues with parent involvement including cultural differences, human capital discrepancies, bureaucratization of schools, and the disparity in ethnic understanding with the dominant White, middle-class ideation of parent involvement. The term “parent involvement” has been defined in professional literature and in practice to a list of activities that the “expert” parents “do” to blindly support the schools’ agendas (Olivos, 2010, p. 13). Educators’ expectations of parent involvement are often disconnected from the reality of students’ home lives (McKenna & Millen, 2013). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to critically analyze the perceptions of a diverse demographic population of bicultural parents in a small, diverse rural town as they relate to parent involvement.

This chapter outlines the research study’s overarching purpose with support in two theoretical frameworks focusing on race, culture, and socioeconomic status. The researcher defines specific terms related to the problem as well as establishes the research question for the study and outlines the general components of methodology. For the purpose of this research, the term “parent” will refer to the primary caregiver of the

student attending the school under study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research supports student achievement as strongly linked to parent involvement and family engagement. The activities and perceptions of what constitutes parent involvement are oftentimes vague and culturally dependent which creates problematic relationships that can ultimately cause tension, conflict, and miscommunication between schools and families. “Understandings of parent involvement must involve an expansive appreciation of the nuances of different cultural, economic, and geographic circumstances in order for schools to flourish” (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 10). According to Olivos (2010), the public school system has consistently been unsuccessful in establishing authentic relationships with the communities it serves, particularly “hard to reach” parents – African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, and low-income parents (p. 17).

Furthermore, Olivos (2010) asserted that socioeconomic and historical factors influence the everyday interactions between students, parents, administrators, and teachers in the school system through educational assumptions and myths that perpetuate the underachievement of subordinate bicultural communities (p. 33). In addition, low-income families may find access to involvement more difficult than high-income families because schools sometimes make assumptions that effectively make school-based resources for involvement less available to these families. According to Collignon, Men, and Tan (2001), tendencies are to assume that low-income families are not involved because they lack the requisite ability, interest, skill, time, motivation, or knowledge (as cited in Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 114).

Research by Hiatt-Michael (1994) emphasized that further exacerbating the problem with parent involvement in public schools is the development of school

bureaucratization and professionalization of teachers. According to Hiatt-Michael, the bureaucratization of the American educational system emerged as a result of the growing American population, the growth of the industrial centers, the urbanization of the nation, and the utilization of scientific management techniques in business and industry. This process of standardization supports the notion that professional teachers and administrators be charged solely with educating the child. The belief was that parents did not possess the time, knowledge, or talents necessary for a child to meet the challenges of the emerging technology (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). The continued press for more education for teachers separated the social and cultural level of the teacher from that of the school's parents in many communities and urban centers. Research conducted by Shipman (1987) revealed that lower-class parents were hesitant to enter schools because schools belonged to the middle- and upper-class professionals. This separation of parents and schools reflects the notion of the bureaucratization of schools as identified by Hiatt-Michael.

To ensure consistency throughout the study, the researcher defined concepts directly related to the purpose and framework.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Bicultural.** Used to refer to, in general, individuals or social groups who live and “function in two [or more] distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live” (Olivos, 2010, p. 14).

**Critical theory.** Critical theory investigates power dynamics in education-based on social classifications (race, gender, class) and encourages reflection in order to promote equity.

**Cultural capital.** Refers to nonfinancial social assets that promote social

mobility beyond economic means. Examples can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance.

**Ethnicity.** Refers to cultural factors including nationality, regional culture, ancestry, and language.

**Hegemony.** The concealed power the ruling class has over the masses to not only convince them that the current system is fair, legitimate, and commonsensical but also to have them support and defend the continuation of the status quo.

**Paradigm of tension, contradiction, and resistance.** Proposed theory by Olivos (2010) that asserts the deeply rooted struggle for power and humanity between bicultural communities and the schools that serve them. This framework takes into account the socioeconomic and historic factors and the relationship between bicultural parents and the institution of public education.

**Parent involvement.** It is generally defined as the participation of parents in school activities. It is the commitment of time, energy, and goodwill to promote success for students.

**Race.** Refers to a person's physical characteristics such as bone structure and skin, hair, or eye color.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The 2001-2002 data from the United States Department of Education reported that "69% of students in the 100 largest school districts in the US are from bicultural families" (Olivos, 2010, p. 20). Therefore, educators should be aware of the nature of how bicultural parent populations relate to the public school system and their children's schools. Educators must not only attempt to understand more clearly how bicultural parents perceive their roles in the education of their children but also how school

personnel treat and interact with family members who are non-middle or upper class and non-White (Olivos, 2010). Olivos (2010) stated, “The reflection process means that school personnel need to critique and significantly alter traditional practices found in current day parent/school relationships” (p. 20). This phenomenological study discloses bicultural parents’ perceptions of parent involvement based on varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study found foundation in two theories involving culture, capital, and race. Each is unique in its claim, yet they are connected and dependent upon each other as they relate to the study’s research with perceptions of parent involvement with varied backgrounds. These theories include Bourdieu’s (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and Olivos’s (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction and Resistance in Parent Involvement.

**Cultural capital theory.** Cultural capital theory originated with Bourdieu (1986) asserting,

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. This starting point implies a break with the presuppositions inherent both in the commonsense view, which sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes, and in human capital theories. (as cited in Philosophy Archive @

marxists.org)

Capital refers to cultural advantages that groups of people possess that benefit them within a particular social context (Bourdieu, 1986). They are advantages that link them to specific resources such as ethnicity, language, appearance, wealth, and education (Miller, Hilgendorf, & Dilworth-Bart, 2014). Capital can present itself in an economic, cultural, or social domain. This concept is often used in research to explain the unequal academic achievement of students coming from varied social classes and their families' levels of parent involvement (Miller et al., 2014).

According to Bourdieu (1986), economists might seem to deserve credit for raising the question of the relationship between the rates of profit on educational investment and on economic investment. Bourdieu asserted that success in our education system is enabled by the possession of cultural capital and higher class habitus (Sullivan, 2002). Students from lower socioeconomic circumstances do not possess these traits; therefore, their failure in educational attainment is inevitable (Sullivan, 2002). In relation to parent involvement, cultural capital is the advantage gained by middle-class, educated European-American parents from knowing, preferring, and experiencing a lifestyle congruent with the culture that is dominant in most American schools (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This advantage comes from having family and work situations that permit involvement at the school at times and in ways that are most valued by the school, whereas working-class and low-income parents may be less able to engage in these activities (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Furthermore, Latino/Hispanic families may face the additional barrier of unavailability of translation services (Heymann & Earle, 2000).

In a study by Lee and Bowen (2006), the level and impact of five types of parent involvement on elementary school children's academic achievement by race/ethnicity,

poverty, and parent educational attainment were examined using Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital. With a sample of 415 third- through fifth-grade students completing the Elementary School Success Profile, it was found, consistent with Bourdieu's theory, that parents with different demographic characteristics demonstrated different types of involvement; and the types of involvement demonstrated by parents from dominant groups had the strongest association with achievement. From the study, Lee and Bowen found that teachers reported significantly higher academic achievement among students not living in poverty, European-American students, and students with more educated parents. Poverty and race/ethnicity consistently played a significant role in predicting children's academic achievement above and beyond the effects of parent involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). With regard to levels of parent involvement and consistent with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the study found group differences in levels of parent involvement; however, they emphasized that these differences across socioeconomic backgrounds may be due to different perceptions about parent involvement.

Furthering the cultural capital theory, Olivos (2010) stated, Liberals understand and acknowledge that there are different positions of privilege within society and believe the subordinate groups (i.e. bicultural families and those with low socioeconomic status) are "lacking" what the dominant group possesses. Disadvantaged groups need appropriate dominant cultural capital. (p. 16)

Latino, African-American, low-income, and immigrant parents bring with them cultural capital and cultural perspectives which mediate how they interact and respond to their social and economic surroundings including the school system. The complexity of

understanding the displays of cultural capital by bicultural parents is complicated by school personnel's low expectations and low desires to work with bicultural parents who are also of low social standing (Olivos, 2010, p. 72).

**Olivos' theory: Paradigm of tension, contradiction and resistance in parent involvement.** Olivos (2010) presented a theoretical framework that takes into account the socioeconomic and historical factors as a means of studying the relationship between bicultural parents and the institution of public education:

This framework lays out a general roadmap for viewing the socioeconomic and historical influences which affect the relationship between low-income bicultural parents and school personnel. I argue that the relationship between bicultural parents and the public school system is neither exclusively limited to the school campus nor to the individuals who comprise the school community. The relationship between bicultural parents and the school system is a micro-reflection of societal contradictions and tensions in the areas of economic exploitation and racism. (p. 99)

This model is influenced by Persell's (1977) work in that the basis for low levels of parent participation in our disadvantaged and non-White communities is found in socioeconomic and historical factors which have maintained the current system of domination in our school systems; and ultimately, those contradictions found in the school system are micro-reflections of societal contradictions and tensions tied to capitalism and race relations (as cited in Olivos, 2010, p. 100). These contradictions which are inherent within the societal structure of dominance and within the institution of schooling are sources of constant tension between the dominant and subordinate cultures. Olivos (2010) asserted, "In the broader society, these tensions arise from the

contradictions related to economic interests, class divisions, ideological differences, and race relations” (p. 87).

### **Research Question**

This phenomenological design was meant to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific situation and extract meaning for the researcher pertaining to parent involvement at the school where the study was conducted. This study used research questions central to the phenomenological method with its purpose to critically analyze the perceptions of a diverse demographic population of parents in a small, diverse rural town as they relate to parent involvement.

According to Creswell (2013), the central research question in a phenomenological study is often of the form:

1. What are the lived experiences of (a group) around a (specific phenomenon);  
or
2. What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of (a specific phenomenon) by (individuals experiencing the phenomenon)?

These questions were modified and framed to uncover perceptual data through a three-part interview process as outlined by Seidman (2006). Overall, this phenomenological study looked to discover the question, “What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school?” This research question is reflective of what is central to a phenomenological study: the lived experience of an individual’s experience with a certain phenomenon or concept, with a deep focus on the *meanings*, *structures* and *essences* of the lived experience. The use of italics throughout the study is to help visually show specific themes as they relate to each of the three core themes listed:

meanings, structures, and essences.

### **Overview of Methodology**

The methodology for this study was a qualitative phenomenological method that mirrors the three-part interview process as used and interpreted by Seidman (2006). According to Dexter (1970); Hyman, Cobb, Fledman, Hart, and Stember (1954); and Mishler (1986), interviewing is both a research methodology and a social relationship that must be nurtured and sustained throughout the process (as cited by Seidman, 2006, p. 95). For in-depth interviewing, the human interviewer becomes the survey instrument to some degree. Rather than criticizing the fact that the instrument used to gather data affects this process, research contends the human interviewer can be a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the nature of this study, the three-part interview process was used to give the researcher the flexibility to converse with parents on a deeper, more intimate level regarding the topic at hand – parent involvement. The format with three separate and open-ended interviews also gave the study a framework for the phenomenology method of research.

According to Creswell (2013), there are several features of phenomenology taken from a psychological perspective (Moustakas, 1994) and a human science orientation (van Manen, 1990). Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (a concept or topic at hand). Oftentimes, data collection in phenomenological studies consists of in-depth and multiple interviews with participants. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that researchers interview between five and 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) mentioned taped conversations, formally written responses, and accounts of vicarious experiences of

drama, films, poetry, and novels. For this study, open-ended questions were the primary method, and the researcher's major task was to build upon and explore participant responses to those questions.

The goal of the three interviews conducted was to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study (Seidman, 2006). For this phenomenological study, the researcher conducted this process with fidelity as outlined by Seidman (2006) for the purpose of collecting perceptual data as they relate to the definition of parent involvement for the parent (or primary caregiver) of five bicultural families with various race, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative studies, there is an assertion that they are limited by the sensitivity and reliability of the investigator (Merriam, 1998). The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and with this arises advantages that can be seen as limitations to a qualitative study. According to Creswell (2013), an investigator will use his or her own abilities and intuitions throughout most of the research effort. Again, with "subjectivity of the researcher," Hamel (1993) called for issues with generalizability overall when conducting a qualitative study (p. 23). For this phenomenological study, the primary researcher is the principal of the school within which the investigation occurred and a triangulation of the data was needed for guaranteed validity and reliability purposes.

With the use of a phenomenological study using the interview process, the range of people and sites from which the sample is selected should be fair to the larger population (Seidman, 2006). This sampling technique should allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading. For this study, five parents

were interviewed without the idea of generalizability for all families with similar backgrounds in cultural and socioeconomic status but to tell the story of their lived experiences, thus creating perceptions pertaining to parent involvement.

### **Summary**

This phenomenological study intended to uncover perceptions about parent involvement for five diverse, bicultural parents in Elle (pseudonym), North Carolina. This study looked to investigate and describe parent perceptions regarding parent involvement based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in a rural North Carolina community. Through the study, the researcher gained insight into the concept at hand in order to share information with local school district personnel. This study was not meant to quantitatively define parent involvement; it was designed to share the stories and experiences of those families in an effort to uncover perceptual data that are rich in authentic thoughts and reflections.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of families identifying themselves as bicultural and with varying race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This chapter examines the research related to parent involvement with a focus on the history, varied definitions, and barriers for bicultural parents.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

Vast amounts of research defend that student achievement is strongly linked to parent involvement and family engagement with schools. Henderson and Mapp (2002) argued that many in the field of education and public policy are convinced that involving parents in their children's formal education is one of the most beneficial interventions for their academic success (as cited in Olivos, 2010, p. 17). However, the activities and perceptions of what constitutes parent involvement can be seen as vague and culturally dependent, creating problematic relationships between schools and families (Olivos, 2010). "Successful implementation of parent involvement activities must involve an expansive appreciation of the nuances of different cultural, economic, and geographic circumstances in order for schools to flourish" (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 10). Yet, the public school system has consistently been unsuccessful in establishing relationships with the communities it serves, particularly "hard to reach" parents – African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, and low-income parents (Olivos, 2010, p. 17). To explore these concerns, this literature review is organized into four specific sections: the history of parent involvement in our nation, barriers to parent involvement for families, perceptions of parent involvement, and the theoretical framework for this study.

### **History of Parent Involvement**

The development of American public education grew mostly from a period when

North American colonies were under British rule in the late 16th and early 17th centuries and local colonial authorities had control over education (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

Responding to local needs, colonies began passing laws requiring parents to provide their children with education in reading, religion, and a trade (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Pulliam (1987) stated that even the earliest years of American education proved to value the role of parents in the control and management of schools (as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 1994, p. 247).

The first schools stemmed from religious leaders in North America and representatives of the parents in the community were left to oversee the management. The American scene in elementary education was one of local parent control in governance, curriculum, and choice of teachers and religion (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). This emergence of localized, controlled public education at its earliest stages bore the organization of schools along social class (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). The growing middle and upper class supported schools through fees paid by parents; those children with parents who could not afford fees were provided rudimentary education in charity schools supported financially through concerned philanthropists (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

According to Pulliam (1987), under the rule of American leaders Benjamin Rush and George Washington in the 18th century, it is reported that this era was the first to implement tax-supported universal education (as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 1994, p. 249). Educational reformers' ideas surrounding public education for all were received well throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Along with Thomas Jefferson's ideologies about public schooling for every child, the American public attitude began to shift to support universal public education. By the second half of the 19th century, it appeared that public schools were providing the "melting pot" for the diverse cultures of America with

Jefferson's model of egalitarianism: schools would serve the educational desires of all parents for their children, not only that of the poor, minority, and immigrant population of the United States (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Along with this came tension and friction between social classes in America about the role of parent involvement due to the professionalism of teachers and the bureaucratization of schools that stemmed from this very early model of public schools birthed in our nation.

In the late 19th century, Horace Mann and Henry Barnard were notable leaders in the professionalism of faculty and bureaucratization of public schools (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Both men maintained that the education of children should be in the hands of the professional teacher and administrator because parents did not possess the time, knowledge, or talents necessary for a child to meet the challenges of emerging technology (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Katz stated, "Professionalism of administrators and teachers led to keeping parents out of power and influence" (as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 1994, p. 253). Parents increasingly became separated from daily decision making in their child's educational process.

This professionalization of faculty and bureaucratization of schools left parents feeling powerless. Many resisted the diminishing role of their influence to their children's education and out of this concern was formed the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, now known as the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012). Their focus and efforts were to reestablish the role of parents in the education of their children.

Continuing this plight for more involvement with parents and their child's education, post-World War II (1945) parent involvement focus included activities such as parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, fundraising events, and serving as school

volunteers (Watson et al., 2012). During the 1960s, federal policies secured the notion of parent involvement as a fundamental key to improving the education of poor and disadvantaged children (Watson et al., 2012). This resulted in various parent involvement mandates and models of parent involvement that focused on movements for community control of education – the integration of African-American and Latino children (Watson et al., 2012).

According to McLaughlin and Shields (1986), federal parent involvement mandates called for “maximum feasible participation of residents of the community served” in Title II of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act (P.L. 88-452) with Congress initiating parent participation requirements in education programs this same year with the passage of Headstart (p. 3). Project Headstart was enacted as part of President Johnson’s War on Poverty, with overt obligations to support the involvement of parents; it was intended to support disadvantaged children in inner cities (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). This law was followed by passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which required that parents serve on school advisory boards and participate in classroom activities. Policy related to the handicapped was passed in 1974, which required parents to be active partners in educational decisions related to their children (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

In addition to the Headstart Project in 1964, ESEA in 1965, and the Handicap Act in 1974, other policies related to the involvement of parents in education included the Economic Opportunity Act P.L. 88-452; Follow Through, 1967; and the Bilingual Education Act, 1968: all of which required parent participation in the development and implementation of school programs in advisory or collaborative roles (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986). With all of the previous mandates requiring inclusion of parents in the

development of education programs for students, no policy was more explicit than No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Section 1118, outlining the responsibilities of families in their child's education (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986). The struggle for parent involvement has dynamically progressed in America with varied beliefs, definitions, and ideologies about what parent involvement means for schools and families. While it remains clear with extensive research and through decades of federal mandates requiring parent involvement in our public schools, the barriers that have ascended from the legislation are unintended consequences of the unyielding pursuit to define what parent involvement truly means.

### **The Varied Definitions of Parent Involvement**

Throughout its evolution in American history, parent involvement has directed its intentions on enhancing the school's capacity to understand and appreciate values and cultures of families and be more effective in meeting student needs; even more, adding value to the educational development of students of all ages and populations (Ascher, 1988). Among the many solutions proposed for improving the quality of public education, parent involvement appears high on many lists for reversing past trends of minority student academic underachievement (Olivos, 2010); however, there is a conceptual gap in thinking and practice when it comes to parent involvement, particularly since it often appears that both parents and school personnel have a fundamentally different and sometimes contradictory view of what parent involvement is or what it entails (Olivos, 2010).

Bakker and Denessen (2007) focused their attention on the "concept of parent involvement" with varied theoretical and empirical considerations complicating the understanding of what parent involvement is and how to ultimately measure it (p. 188).

They argued the term itself is “value-loaded” and with its focus on activities like parent-teacher conferences, it illustrates how schools honor certain types of middle class family culture and discourse, leading us to an “ideal type” of parent involvement, which almost by definition excludes other, mainly lower class parents, who are missing the required social and cultural capital to comply with educators’ vision of the ideal parent role (Bakker & Denessen, 2007). Furthermore, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argued that much of the literature about parent involvement is not about parent involvement as such, but about parents who are not involved or who are not involved the right way but can get really well involved if they accommodate to the invitations to involvement from school and its members (as cited in Bakker & Denessen, 2007, p. 189).

Definitions of the concept of parent involvement range from a set of group-specific actions, beliefs, and attitudes that serve as an operational factor in defining categorical differences among children and their parents from different racial-ethnic and economic backgrounds (Desimone, 1999) to a variety of parent behaviors that directly or indirectly influence children’s cognitive development and school achievement (Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsberg, 1995). For others, family and community involvement for many educators and schools means “working to reach goals defined by the schools” (Olivos, 2010, p. 18). Olivos (2010) asserted that parent involvement is often considered to be quantitative rather than qualitative in nature: number of parents attending open house, field trips, assemblies, and volunteering in the school (p. 19).

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2002), capitalizing on parent involvement requires schools to use strategies to help parents decide how they will become involved in the school; how they will receive support from the school; and how school, family, and community partnerships will better enhance student achievement. NCLB (2001) defined

parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—

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

According to Epstein et al. (2002), parent involvement is defined as (a) basic obligations of the parent, (b) basic obligations of the schools (schools communicate to parents about programs and progress), (c) parent involvement in schools (volunteering and participating in extracurricular activities), (d) parent involvement in learning activities at home, and (e) parent involvement in governance and advocacy of children. Most notably, Epstein’s et al. (2009) framework for the six types of involvement was developed to support educators’ work to create more comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. These types include

Type 1 – Parenting: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

Type 2 – Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and

student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

Type 3 – Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

Type 4 – Learning at Home: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

Type 5 – Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

Type 6 – Collaborating with the Community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

De Carvalho (2001) critiqued the above parental involvement model and discussed seeming methodological problems in Joyce Epstein's work: "This model, however, is based on a small number of actual successful school-family community partnerships and on the characteristics of the already involved parents and communities, and their schools" (p. 2). Additionally, de Carvalho argued these policies encourage an idealistic view of the family and can result in teachers blaming parents when children struggle academically. Since low-income, minority parents are involved at lower rates according to Epstein et al. (2002), current parental involvement policies may "consecrate and increase discrimination" (de Carvalho, 2001, p. 6).

Many current home-school engagement and parent involvement models and

policies adopted by schools hold common assumptions that educators must teach parents how to be involved and train them when this can be seen as insensitive to the realities of different parenting styles and family constructs (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This ambiguous and shifting perception of parent involvement is often the perpetrator to the barriers for productive and effective parent involvement.

### **Barriers to Parent Involvement**

Barriers to parent involvement are consistently attributed to school ideologies and practices about what parent involvement means versus the perceptions parents bring relative to their role and circumstances. These barriers include family structure and socioeconomic status, parent perceptions about school based on past experiences, and the expectations of schools without regard for cultural differences and capital.

**Family structure and socioeconomic status.** The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) revealed that 67% of African-American children, 42% of Hispanic or Latino children, and 25% of non-Hispanic White children live in single parent homes. According to Weiss et al. (2003), single-parent families face multiple demands from family and work. Trotman (2001) argued the drastic decrease in our “nuclear family structure” – a father, mother, and children all in the same household – has been especially prevalent in urban settings. Davies stated that this generates a belief among teachers that parents with low incomes and single-parent households do not value education highly and have little to contribute to the education of their children (as cited in Trotman, 2001). Furthermore, research suggests that it becomes challenging for those families who are among the lower-income status to become involved due to work demands and time (Weiss et al., 2003).

According to Chavkin and Williams (1990), one study reveals twice as many low-

income parents as middle-income parents believed that their work prohibited school participation; furthermore, 63% of low-income parents as compared with 42% of middle-income parents believed that they did not have time to both work and be involved in school activities (as cited in Weiss et al., 2003, p. 881). A study conducted by Heymann and Earle (2000) focused on whether low-income working mothers have the same opportunity to become involved as higher-income working mothers with analysis focused on paid sick leave, paid vacation leave, and flexibility revealed the inflexible work schedules limited low-income mothers' opportunities to help their academically at-risk children. The Families and Work Institute states approximately two thirds of working parents with inflexible work schedules report that they do not have enough time to meet their children's needs (as cited in Trotman, 2001, p. 280).

With regard to income level and marital status, a key finding indicates that those low-income families and those of single-parent homes spend significantly less time with extracurricular activities and activities related to volunteering due to the small amount of time they have due to work schedules (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002). When resources are scarce, as in low-income families and single-parent families, there is a decline in the amount of resources designated for interactions and activities outside the family system (Ritblatt et al., 2002). This supports Epstein's (1987) description of the five levels of parent involvement. Parents busy with demanding work schedules focus their resources on their child's needs at home rather than investing time with the school overall due to lack of resources (Ritblatt et al., 2002).

Additionally, Bracey (2001) suggested that the working poor have less time to devote to their children with Smith and Wohletter (2009) asserting educators lack awareness and can devalue the invisible strategies minority and low-income parents use

to support their child's education. Largely, single-parent and low-income households are linked with minority families and have become a catalyst for the lack of parent involvement in and at schools. The combined effect of these factors is seen to make it difficult for parents to develop optimal involvement in the education of their children.

In a case study conducted by Smith (2006) at a public elementary school in the Pacific Northwest, low-income families were given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts regarding the concept of parent involvement in an effort to create strategies for more engagement at the newly reconstructed school. During the planning stage for the new school, community members and agency professionals along with educators developed and implemented programs to both support families and engage them in their children's education. This study used qualitative research methods, interviews, observations, and document reviews to investigate the impact of efforts undertaken to involve parents at the new school. Smith revealed that whether because of past school failure, family life circumstances related to financial stress, or other crises, some parents will be unable to respond to invitations for involvement. She also asserted that based on her research, parents may also choose to leave the responsibility for educating their children to the teacher out of respect and trust (Smith, 2006). Smith emphasized in her research that educators need to accept that even though parents desire academic success for their children, they may not choose to be involved in education in commonly accepted ways. With this acceptance, teachers may be less likely to judge parents harshly for a perceived lack of involvement.

The promotion of parent involvement to increase academic success raises issues of equity, since rates of parent involvement are significantly higher among middle- and upper-class parents than in low-income families (de Carvalho, 2001). Smith (2006) noted

that with low-income families and parent involvement, many researchers agree that rates of parent involvement are lower in low-income communities than in higher-income schools. Therefore, low-income children, with less involved parents, often experience fewer of the academic benefits than children coming from higher-income homes, and children of higher-income families are receiving more of the academic and attitudinal benefits of parent involvement than low-income children (Smith, 2006). For these children, rather than acting as a benefit, the lack of involvement by their parents only leaves them farther behind their higher-income counterparts.

**Parent perceptions of schools.** Overall, parents become involved in school related activities and functions in part because they perceive opportunities, invitations, or demands from their children or their children's school (Epstein, 1986). For bicultural (defined as minority, at-risk, and disadvantaged) parents, Olivos (2010) asserted that they often perceive feelings of threat and intimidation upon entering schools and are too often marginalized by their race and class. Additionally, Olivos emphasized the harmful educational practices toward low-income bicultural parents and their constant battle for their children's educational rights. Moreover, Laureau and Horvat (1999) argued that "social class seems to influence how black and white parents negotiate their relationship with schools; for blacks, race plays an important role, independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationships" (p. 38). In the study conducted by Laureau and Horvat focusing on parent involvement with their third-grade children using interviews and classroom observations, researchers found that Black parents encountered more barriers in complying with school expectations than White parents of the same social class. The perception from parents in low-income communities of color find themselves in a "paradox of minority parent involvement," according to Olivos, in that, they are

criticized by school personnel for their lack of involvement and low presence at school but are actively dismissed when they demonstrate activism on behalf of their children. White parents are seen as the key to their children's success, whereas ethnically diverse and low-income parents are viewed as barriers to theirs (Olivos, 2010). Furthermore, Laureau and Horvat affirmed that African-American parents are quite aware of race relations in the school system and often approach the school with distrust, particularly if they are low income. Lopez (2001) argued that migrant Latino parents view themselves as being involved in their children's education by supporting their children's educational endeavors through advice and encouragement, though this is not commonly recognized by their children's schools (as cited in Olivos, 2010, p. 56).

In the study conducted by Riblatt et al. (2002), surveys from parents of students from schools in San Diego County revealed data specific to perceptions of parent involvement and variables with significant differences among means found for both the school perception factors and the time factors based on ethnic background, income, and marital status. The study used the hierarchical model suggested by Grolnic, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) which focused on a hierarchy of individual, contextual, and institutional factors that affect the level of parent involvement in schools. This study's findings give support to the notion of interrelationships between contextual factors and the individual's perception about and behavior with another system. Ethnicity, income level, and family structure were found to relate to levels of parent involvement in education and schools (Riblatt et al., 2002). This research concluded that Latino families felt more confident that the schools were sensitive to their needs and that the African-American parents tend to interact with the schools in modes of resistance, relating their perceptions to both groups' personal experiences with the system as well as

Obgu's Theory of Academic Disengagement (1978) which divides minorities into two distinguishable groups: voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Foley, 2004). This theory emphasizes that most African-Americans are descendants of slaves who were brought involuntarily to the United States, while Latinos were eager to come here and become members of the majority culture; thus, Latinos are less likely to perceive a gap between the treatment to which they feel entitled and the treatment they receive from school personnel (Ritblatt et al., 2002). Ritblatt et al. pointedly argued that although the study's results indicate that Latino parents rated schools higher on the sensitivity factor than did their Caucasian counterparts, the study cannot conclude that these Latino families perceive schools as culturally sensitive and well trained to deal with parents due to the cultural value they place on the school.

**Expectations of schools without regard for culture and capital.** According to Olivos (2010), bicultural parents have a direct effect on their children as their primary source of nurture and socialization, and they have a vital role in the production of education at the school. A significant body of research has acknowledged that the home of the bicultural child is rich in social and cultural context of learning and cognition, even if it differs from that of the dominant culture and even in the poorest of homes; school-like literacy and learning activities are present as well as "alternative conceptualizations of involvement activity" which are not recognized by the schools (Olivos, 2010, p. 20). Latino, African-American, low-income, and immigrant parents bring with them cultural capital and cultural perspectives which mediate how they interact and respond to their social and economic surroundings including the school system. These bicultural parents frequently find the American schooling process completely foreign especially since they are expected to imitate the parenting strategies of middle- and upper-class White parents

(Olivos, 2010). Olivos explained, “Immigrant parents must come to terms early that physical presence at school is expected if one is to be considered involved for the educational opportunity to be maximized” (p. 63).

Several studies have found that families of all incomes and education levels and from all ethnic and cultural groups are engaged in supporting their children’s learning at home. According to Clark (1983), White middle-class families tend to be more involved at school, and there appears to be a desperate need to have underrepresented parents become more vigilant and active participants in school-related matters such as school policy. In the school system, teachers and administrators convince bicultural parents and their children that the primary reason they are failing is due to their lack of effort and cultural capital (Olivos, 2010, p. 34).

Under a capitalist system, Young (1990) stated there is “no doubt that racialized groups in the United States, especially Blacks and Latinos, are oppressed through capitalist superexploitation resulting from a segmented labor market that tends to reserve skilled, high-paying, unionized jobs for whites” (p. 51). The consequences become lower-paying wages, more physically demanding jobs, and fewer privileges to take time off from work to visit the schools and attend school sponsored events; they do not receive the social status and respect that is given to those families who occupy the higher-paying jobs (Olivos, 2010, p. 28).

Furthermore, Marianna deFrancia argued that in the school setting, decisions from administrators and bureaucrats are made into policy “for students in schools from which they are exceedingly detached” and are orders that come from “powers and prestige,” creating a concept of hegemony in schools against those families of low social class (Olivos, 2010, p. 31). This hegemony convinces the parents that their child’s failure is

not due to the school or any teacher's shortfalls but due to the parent's failure to support the school's earnest efforts (Olivos, 2010). Olivos (2010) continued to debate the argument that America schools have always been one of the most effective tools for carrying out the will of the dominant culture in relation to its needs; thus, they have been on the front lines of the Americanization process of immigrant children, particularly with regard to language, and they have legitimized the status quo and the dominant cultural capital as an indicator of success (p. 32).

Research by Cummins (2001) held the point of view that Latino parents have not held up their part of the responsibility for educating their children – “teachers are not miracle workers” and “Hispanic pupils and their parents have also failed the schools and society, because they have not been motivated and dedicated enough to make the system work for them” (as cited in Olivos, 2010, p. 65). Their view is that the failure of bicultural communities to measure up to Anglo-American perceptions of success is reflective of inherent cultural inadequacies or deficiencies that limit their ability to succeed in American schools and society.

Moreover, Olivos (2010) defended that ultimately, the cause of the achievement gap between bicultural, low-income students and middle- and upper-class Whites is a debate between two distinct camps, one liberal and one conservative. Conservatives believe those who fail within the current system of education have only themselves to blame to put forth more effort and dedication if they are to reap the rewards; those who fail to succeed academically and socially must be held more accountable for their actions and personal choices (Olivos, 2010). In contrast, liberals recognize that there are different positions of privilege within society and subordinate groups are lacking what the dominant group possesses. Liberal solutions are to propose programs that will help

disadvantaged groups acquire the dominant cultural capital they need to overcome their status (Olivos, 2010).

McKenna and Millen (2013) conducted a qualitative research study based on a grounded theory model with a small sample of parents involved with a local parent education program to further understand parent engagement. Resulting from this study, the researchers claimed, “the understanding of parent participation in children’s lives is fluid, robust and specific to context and culture” (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 9). One participant (Serena) in this study noted,

I think that they [the school] could probably go out and try and bring in more Black parents because it kinda seems that, um [long pause], I don’t think that they quite understand, like, the Black family. And I don’t think they’re trying to understand. So . . . in that aspect, I think some more could be done. (p. 40)

McKenna and Millen stressed the notion that parent engagement must be communally, culturally, and personally tailored.

Engaging parents in a respectful, meaningful, reciprocal avenue of communication is a commitment to the civic-minded, democratic, community-centered principles our schools were founded upon and we should put aside preconceptions about parenting and the abilities of children and their families based on race and class. (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 44)

Without argument, the expectations of schools without regard to culture and capital resources are a barrier to parent involvement for non-White, low-income families.

### **Summary**

Research continues to suggest that parents’ decisions about becoming involved in their children’s education are influenced by role construction for involvement, sense of

efficacy for helping the child succeed in school, perception of invitations to involvement (from school, teacher, and student), and life-context variables (skills and knowledge, time and energy); in addition, the research suggests that involvement is influenced by school responsiveness to life-context variables (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 123). Moreover, assumptions around educator perceptions of parent involvement can misconstrue what many parents' expectations, participation, love, and care for their children look and feel like on a daily basis. McKenna and Millen (2013) stated that these erroneous assumptions can be doubly harmful when put in the context of working with low-income and/or minority parents since, in many cases, these children have fewer opportunities to prove these assumptions wrong (p. 10). There is ample evidence for educators to know, understand, and realize the complexities of parent involvement perceptions dependent upon ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

This phenomenological sought to investigate and explore the perceptions of families in a rural elementary school in North Carolina as they relate to parent involvement. It delved into parent perceptions with a population that represents bicultural families from varied backgrounds who do not represent the dominant White, middle-class population. Through the three-part in-depth interview process, the researcher investigated perceptual data through conversations with families and worked to gain insight into how public schools and families can reconnect to support student achievement through the eyes and interviews of five selected families.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the research design and methodology that carried out the study. The researcher first presents an overview of the chapter, following with a restatement of the problem. Next, the researcher presents the research design and a description of the setting in which the research was conducted as well as the participant selection. The researcher then explains the interview data collection and the instrument used to outline the focus questions for each of the three interviews. The researcher discusses the method of data collection specific to the study's foundation in heuristic research associated with phenomenology. Lastly, the researcher discusses the limitations and delimitations of the study with a summary to follow.

#### **Overview**

The methodology for this study was founded upon the structures of phenomenology. According to Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010), the phenomenological method of research has a primary objective to explicate meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person or a group of people around a specific phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) was the founder of phenomenological research and insisted that research should focus on the wholeness of experience and a search for essences of experiences. According to Creswell (2013), the central research question in a phenomenological study is often of the form:

1. What are the lived experiences of (a group) around a (specific phenomenon);  
or
2. What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of (a specific phenomenon) by (individuals experiencing the phenomenon)?

In line with its central focus as discussed in Chapter 1, this phenomenological

study looked to answer the question, “What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school?” This research question is reflective of what is central to a phenomenological study: the lived experience of an individual’s experience with a certain phenomenon or concept with a deep focus on the *meanings, structures, and essences* of the lived experience. The researcher looked to gain access to specific, individual experiences and perceptions regarding parent involvement through the three-part in-depth interviewing process. With qualitative data analysis centered on the narrative story that each participant provided, the researcher worked to find thematic connections and relationships between each individual participant as well as differences in experiences and convictions regarding parent involvement.

Creswell (2007) described a phenomenological study as one that “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences or phenomenon” (p. 57). For this study, the researcher used specific phenomenological methods of heuristic research for data analysis. Moustakas (1994) claimed, “Heuristic research is a process of an internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (p. 32). Heuristic research “engages in scientific research through processes that are aimed at discovery – a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Most relative to this study, heuristic research finds significance within an individual’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments (Moustakas, 1994). Each person for this study was interviewed on three separate occasions to capture their meanings of lived experiences as they relate to the phenomenon under study: parent involvement.

This qualitative, phenomenological study used the three-part in-depth interview process (Seidman, 2006) with five purposefully selected participants in an effort to uncover the perceptions of parent involvement as they relate to the varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of each participant. According to Johnson (2001), a researcher using in-depth interviewing commonly seeks information and knowledge that is deeper in nature; more so than in surveys, informal surveys, or focus groups (p. 104). This process allows the researcher to interview the participants on three separate occasions that reflect an individual's self, lived experiences, values and decisions, cultural knowledge, or perspective (Johnson, 2001). Additionally, Moustakas (1994) asserted that "Heuristic research requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered" (p. 33). For this study, the researcher found confidence that this methodology maintained the integrity of the data collected: conversations and personal experiences that have shaped perceptions with respect to parent involvement with relation to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.

The researcher chose the qualitative method of criterion sampling to select the five participants for the study. This method of purposeful sampling involves searching for individuals or cases that involve a specific criterion (Palys, 2008). This specific sampling technique ensured the researcher interviewed and documented the lived experiences of participants with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds and collected perceptual data regarding parent involvement.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

It is debated that parent involvement is a vital factor that may play a role in facilitating systematic change in education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Parent

involvement in children's education has been shown to be associated with academic achievement and positive development (Fan & Chen, 2001). According to Delgado-Gaitan (2004), Fan and Chen (2001), Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), when schools support parent involvement in their children's learning, regardless of family income, education level, or ethnic background, children are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills; show improvement in behavior and adapt well to school; and graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education. This phenomenological study sought to understand perceptions from bicultural families with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status pertaining to the concept of parent involvement as it relates to a diversely populated small, rural school in North Carolina.

Throughout the studies conducted concerning parent involvement, it is clear there are various definitions explaining ways in which parents and/or primary caregivers become engaged and for what reasons they decide to become an active participant in their child's education. Research has repeatedly specified the issues challenging those parents who seek to engage in their child's education, predominantly those parents who live in high-risk communities (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Some evidence suggests that involvement may vary depending on race, ethnicity, and culture (Wa Wong & Hughes, 2006); where minority parents, immigrant parents, or families deriving from a low-income status may be at a disadvantage and it may be impossible to be involved. Also, the willingness for parents to be involved may have more to do with their physical, emotional, or intellectual capabilities rather than motivation or desire (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Undoubtedly, there are factors outside the control of parents that impede their

abilities to be involved. Therefore, it is increasingly important to consider why these barriers may prevent parents from becoming actively engaged in their child's education. Through the three-part interview process, the researcher worked to reveal any existing barriers and furthermore sought to understand how these barriers could be realized and overcome for the parents and the school.

### **Research Design**

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Qualitative research is based on the view that reality is created by individuals interacting with their social worlds and those who conduct qualitative research are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed (Merriam, 1998).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981),

Data is mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer. Certain characteristics differentiate the human researcher from other data collection instruments: the researcher is responsive to the context; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered; what is known about the situation can be expanded through sensitivity to nonverbal aspects; the researcher can process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and can explore anomalous responses. (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 7)

The understanding of parent involvement as it relates to families with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status was studied using the theoretical framework of

Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and Olivos' (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction and Resistance in Parent Involvement using a qualitative approach: the phenomenological method. Using the phenomenological method, the researcher interviewed five different families to uncover each individual's story as it relates to their understanding of the term parent involvement.

**The three-part interview process.** Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) designed the series of three interviews that characterizes the approach and allows the interviewer and participant to investigate the experience and to place it in context. The first interview established the context of the participants' experience. The second allowed participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. The third encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. The purpose of this methodology is not to get answers to questions, to test hypotheses, or to "evaluate" as the term is normally used (Seidman, 2006). At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.

According to Johnson (2001), this type of methodology for research requires a specific style of social and interpersonal interactions (p. 104). To be effective in its purpose, the method of in-depth interviewing requires a level of intimacy between the interviewer and interviewee (Johnson, 2001). With foundations of Schutz's (1967) ideology and writings regarding phenomenology, this research method combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing to uncover perceptions and deep-rooted beliefs (Seidman, 2006). In this approach, researchers primarily use open-ended questions with the major task to build upon and explore participant responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the

topic under study (Seidman, 2006). In alignment with Moustakas's (1994) heuristic research design, the focus for each of the three interviews was for the participant to remain close to depictions of their experience, telling their individual stories with increasing understanding and insight.

**Moustakas's heuristic inquiry design as guide for data collection.** This study used the six phases of Moustakas's (1994) heuristic inquiry design as a way of guiding the research, collecting the data, and ensuring validity throughout the process. Moustakas noted, "The six phases include: initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis" (p. 34). With this design, the researcher collected the data from each interview and returned repeatedly to the data to check the depictions of each participant's experience to determine whether the qualities or constituents that were derived from the data embrace the necessary and sufficient meanings. This facilitated the process of achieving validity with the documented and transcribed experience of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). This ultimately enabled the researcher to achieve repeated verification that the explication of the phenomenon and the creative synthesis of essences and meanings actually portrayed the phenomenon investigated (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, the researcher enhanced this verification process by returning to each participant for an opportunity to share the analysis of the transcribed verbatim interview to seek further comprehension and accuracy.

### **Description of the Community**

The North Carolina county in which this study was conducted has a very diverse population overall with regard to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. According to census.gov (2015), the county demographics include 62.4% identifying as White, 31.4%

identifying as Black, 6.4% identifying as Hispanic, 3.1% as American Indian and Alaskan Native, and 2.0% as two or more races. With regard to socioeconomic data, the household income median for the county is \$34,060 with 24.7% of the population considered in poverty (census.gov, 2015). Pertaining specifically to cultural data, 7.2% of the county's population speaks a language different than English at home (census.gov, 2015). The county's demographic and socioeconomic data are somewhat reflective of the data representing the research context site.

The school site for this study is a rural community the researcher identified as Elle, North Carolina with the research conducted in a period of 2 months beginning in early June 2016 and ending in early August 2016. The school within which the research was conducted is an elementary school with a diverse population of students and families. According to the 2010 Census, 1,054 people reside in Elle with 46.6% identifying as White, 39.1% as Black, 11.1% as Hispanic, and 2.6% as two or more races. The estimated median household income in 2013 was \$26,955 (rising from \$21,118 in 2000).

The school's enrollment at the time of the study was 501 students ranging from prekindergarten to fifth grade. Within the elementary school population, 100% of the students participated in the free and reduced lunch program. At the time of the study, the school population demographics were considerably different than the 2010 census report with race breakdown for the town Elle. Approximately 34.3% of the students are White, 32.5% are Hispanic, 25.9% are Black, and 3.6% are identified as two or more races.

With the school's diverse population, the researcher had access to bicultural families who reflect varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, reflective of the study's purpose for research. According to Johnson (2001), "researchers often use the process of in-depth interviewing for qualitative research, life-story research, the gathering

of personal narratives, oral histories, and to analyze the accounts of members of some social setting” (p. 105). With this being the focus, the researcher is certain this methodology was most appropriate for this study.

### **Participant Selection**

Purposeful sampling was used for this research study. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling is done when a researcher selects specific persons or sites because they provide the particular information being sought for the specified problem. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2013). Specific to purposeful sampling, the method of criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). For this qualitative study seeking to uncover rich, perceptual data from bicultural parents, purposeful criterion sampling was the method the researcher used to ensure participants were from varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds – each characteristic as a criterion of importance.

To fully support the intent of this study, it was important that the researcher purposefully select participants who were willing to share their personal stories and experiences around the phenomenon, or concept, of parent involvement. The researcher contacted five families who were preselected by the principal and researcher of the study and stated the purpose and basic design of the research study over the phone (Appendix A). Based on conversations and the willingness of those five preselected families to participate, the researcher began scheduling initial meetings. The initial meetings allowed the researcher to discuss the purpose of the study with each participant again and prepare them with a short introduction to each individual interview in the process (Appendix B).

The participants also had the opportunity to discuss any questions concerning the study as well as gave the participants a chance to sign the consent form (Appendix C). Through this method of criterion sampling, the researcher ensured the criterion of importance was met.

### **Interview Data Collection**

Using the in-depth interview process, the researcher conducted three separate interviews with each of the five participants all within a 3-week timeline. The time allotted for each interview was a minimum of 60 minutes and a maximum of 90 minutes.

In alignment with Seidman's (2006) process of the in-depth interview, the first interview required the researcher as the interviewer to put participant experiences in context related to the topic "up to the present time" (p. 17). The purpose of the second interview was to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present-lived experience in the topic area of the study. For the third interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience (Seidman, 2006). Collecting information verbatim was vital and was ideal if the subsequent analysis was to be considered valid and meaningful (Johnson, 2001). Each interview lasted within a range from 60-90 minutes to ensure the participant had ample time to relay perceptions as well as tell their story and experiences related to the topic of parent involvement.

Through this in-depth interview process, the researcher worked to gain an authentic understanding of the perceptions relating to parent involvement for families who are bicultural (non-White and underprivileged) and from various races, socioeconomic statuses, and ethnicities. According to Seidman (2006), a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants. For this study, five different

participants who range in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were selected from the school's population of primary caregivers. Through purposeful selection, these five families underwent the interview process with the administrator of the school, also the researcher.

For qualitative research involving the interview process, participants must consent to be interviewed, so there is always an element of self-selection in an interview study. According to Seidman (2006), self-selection and randomness are not compatible. The job of an in-depth interviewer is to go to such depth in the interviews that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual's experience (Seidman, 2006). For this study, the researcher purposefully selected the participants to partake in the interview process to ensure variance in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The collection of data began with each interview being recorded by the researcher and transcribed at the completion of each interview. The researcher's duty was to transform the spoken words into a written text to study (Seidman, 2006). With regard to transcribing the interview in its entirety or transcribing selected portions for perceptual data analyses, the researcher chose to transcribe the interview in its entirety, noting patterns of similarities and differences as well as specific perceptual data for each participant. Preselecting parts of the tapes to transcribe and omitting others tends to lead to premature judgments about what is important and what is not (Seidman, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher then organized excerpts from the transcripts into categories. According to Seidman (2006), this type of analyzing helps the researcher to search for threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes (p. 125).

To ensure validity of the comments each participant made throughout each of the three interviews, the researcher allowed each participant the opportunity to reread each transcription with the choice to keep and/or change or delete any transcribed data collected by the researcher. This validated each participant's thoughts and ideas so the researcher and participant felt comfortable and successful that the story for each parent was appropriately captured.

### **Phenomenological Data Analysis**

Phenomenological data analysis steps are generally similar for all psychological phenomenologists who discuss the methods (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Creswell (2013), based on the data from the interview questions, data analysts study the data and highlight significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (p. 82). In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses, that keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology finds foundation in "questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 73-74). This study used Moustakas's (1994) modified version of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) phenomenological data analysis to complete the transcription of each participant's interview.

**Modifications of van Kaam's phenomenological data analysis.** Beginning van

Kaam's (1959, 1966) framework for data analysis of each transcribed interview was the technique of horizontalization. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalization stems from the idea that the researcher should be receptive to and place equal value on every statement or piece of data. This receptivity allows the researcher to give equal value to each statement both spoken and uttered by the participant and ultimately encourages a flow between the researcher and the participant (Moustakas, 1994). Following this horizontalization process, the researcher then used the reduction and elimination technique to determine invariant constituents. If a participant's expression contained a moment of the experience that was sufficient and necessary to understand it, the researcher used it as face value. Additionally, an expression was labeled a horizon if it was possible to abstract and label it (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, any expression insufficient in understanding the phenomenon or not able to be labeled abstractly was eliminated. Furthermore, with regard to van Kaam's (1959, 1966) framework for phenomenological data analysis, any overlapping, repetitive, or vague expressions were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Any horizons that remained were invariant constituents used for clustering and thematizing (Moustakas, 1994).

Once this portion of the data analysis was complete, the researcher clustered the invariant constituents of the experience that were related into a thematic label around the core themes: meanings, structures, and essences. The clustered and labeled constituents were identified as the subthemes of the experiences noted by each participant as they related to the core themes established in the research question. According to van Kaam's (1959, 1966) framework, the following questions should be asked:

- (1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
- (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?

- (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the participant's experience and should be deleted. (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 135)

Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes derived from the interviews, the researcher constructed an individual textural description of the experience for each participant that included a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This description was the underlying dynamic of the experience, the themes and qualities that accounted for "how" feelings and thoughts connected with each participant's perceptions of parent involvement. The researcher then constructed textural-structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes to finalize the data analysis for the study.

This method of data analysis maintained the study's theoretical framework involving two separate theories concerning culture, capital, and race. Each of the two theories supporting the study's framework was connected to and related to the study's purpose for research regarding perceptions of parent involvement with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and Olivos' (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction and Resistance in Parent Involvement are directly connected to the research question established for this research study concerning perceptions of bicultural families as related to parent involvement. Olivos presented a theoretical framework that accounts for the socioeconomic and historical factors as a means of studying the relationship between bicultural parents and the institution of public education. With basis in Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, "capital" refers to cultural advantages that groups of people possess that benefit them within a particular social context that link them to specific resources such as ethnicity,

language, appearance, wealth, and education. Both theories support the research question established for this research study focused specifically on bicultural parent perceptions regarding the concept of parent involvement.

### **Interview Instrument**

In order to develop a full understanding of the parent perceptions of parent involvement as related to their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, the instrument used for the interview process included one specific question that began each interview with supplemental and spontaneous questions guiding the participant in expressing their experiences as related to the question. The instrument was selected by the researcher in order to provide the most information concerning the perception of parent involvement for each participant in three separate sessions.

The interview questions for each of the three interviews invited parents to discuss their perception of parent involvement. Due to the nature of the questions, the interview sessions allowed a certain aspect of storytelling for each participant. Schutz (1967) asserted that this process of selecting precise details of an experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them, makes telling stories a meaning-making experience (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Vygotsky (1987) claimed every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Individual consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people (Seidman, 2006).

This phenomenological study was based on a theoretical framework that supports two theories involving culture, capital, and race. The survey instrument used for each participant in each of the three interviews supported the study's investigation regarding

bicultural families' perceptions of parent involvement with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The three-part interview process provided qualitative data based on the stories each participant provided connected to their own lived experiences and perceptions. Each participant was given the opportunity to provide their thoughts and speak about their lived experiences concerning the concept of parent involvement. During the interview process, the questions were used as a guide, allowing conversation to happen naturally so each participant had the chance to tell his or her story and come to a natural closing (Moustakas, 1994). Each interview question was directly aligned to the description and exploration of the research phenomenon reflecting Seidman's (2006) questioning model.

Table

*Interview Focus Questions*

Interview Focus Questions	Alignment to phenomenon
<p>Interview # 1. Talk about your experience in light of parent involvement up to the present time. What were some life experiences with parent involvement as a child, teenager, and now as a parent?</p>	<p>This question will establish the context of the participants' experience.</p>
<p>Interview # 2. Talk about your relationships with this school or any other schools administrators, teachers, and experiences with parent involvement at the school. Tell me a story that directly relates to your experience with parent involvement. Feel free to share stories about your experience in schools as a parent.</p>	<p>This question will allow participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. The purpose is now to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study.</p>
<p>Interview # 3. Given what you have said about your life before you became a parent and given what you have said about your role as a parent at the school now as it relates to parent involvement, how do you understand parent involvement in your life? What sense does it make to you? What do you see in the future with regard to parent involvement for you and your child?</p>	<p>This question encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them.</p>

The above interview process was conducted with parents who were selected by the researcher, also the principal at the school. Given the nature of this three-part interview process, there were various follow-up questions that were impromptu and elicited specific, personal experiences from each participant. Since Creswell (2012) suggested that qualitative interviews consist of “unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants,” the interview was guided by the three focus questions represented in the table to cover overall themes but not be confined by specific universal questions (p. 190). Each of the three interviews was audio recorded to ensure validity of the statements and full attention of the researcher throughout the process. Furthering the validity, each participant was given the opportunity to read their transcripts to clarify or add to their given information. This process afforded the participants an extra measure of internal consistency and validity (Seidman, 2006).

To ensure validity of each question as it relates to parent involvement, the researcher asked three other principals in the same district for feedback. Each principal was given the opportunity to read Seidman’s (2006) original format of the three-part interview process and compare it with the concept under study with this research to ensure alignment. This process helped the researcher to reshape any question in each of the interviews as needed to invoke a deep, meaningful response to each participant’s lived experience of the phenomenon. No modifications were needed based on the feedback.

### **Researcher’s Role**

The researcher for this study was also the principal of the school, Elle. At the time of the study, the researcher had been in the role as principal for approximately one

and a half years and was formerly an assistant principal at the school. Throughout the 5 years with the school and community, the researcher had multiple opportunities to meet families of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Developing relationships was a priority for the researcher with both roles as assistant principal and principal.

Selecting appropriate candidates for the study was an advantage in that the researcher included participants willing to discuss and share lived experiences. Also, the researcher believed that because of this past and present experience with the school's families and relationships formed, fear of reprimand or negative consequences would not become an issue.

For this study, it was the researcher's responsibility to establish an environment that felt safe and sincere with each participant for each interview. Often a phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher may give the participant time to take a few moments to focus on the experience – awareness and impact – before beginning the interview process.

### **Limitations**

According to Seidman (2006), "interviewers work with the material, select from it, interpret, describe, and analyze it" (p. 113). According to Ferrarotti (1981), Kvale (1996), and Mishler (1986), though they may be disciplined and dedicated to keeping the interviews as the participants' meaning-making process, interviewers are also a part of that process (as cited in Seidman, 2006). With this, there are no absolutes in the world of interviewing. As cited in Seidman (2006), relatively little research has been done on the effects of following one procedure over others (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985; Hyman et al., 1954; Kahn & Cannell, 1960; Mishler, 1986; Richardson, Dohrenwend, & Klein,

1965). The governing principle in designing interviewing projects might well be to strive for a rational process that is both repeatable and documentable (Seidman, 2006). With this interviewing process, this principle was central to the research to ensure transcriptions and the interview process as a whole, communicating participants' thoughts, ideas, and perceptions with fidelity.

### **Delimitations**

The three-part interview structure incorporates features that heighten the validity. It places participant comments in context. It encourages interviewing each participant over the course of 1-3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say (Seidman, 2006). Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others (Seidman, 2006). According to Johnson (2001), the goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience; therefore, if the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, it has gone a long way toward validity.

### **Summary**

At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language. Heron (1981) pointed out that the classic model of human inquiry is two people talking and asking questions of each other.

Heron (1981) claimed,

The use of language, itself, . . . contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry; and since language is the primary tool whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition. (p. 26)

According to Seidman (2006), interviewing, then, is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience.

Reason (1981) further asserted,

The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts, and souls and by so doing give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition. The challenge is to develop a human science that can more fully serve this aim. The question, then, is not "Is story telling science?" but "Can science learn to tell good stories?" (p. 50)

For the purpose of this phenomenological study, the researcher interviewed selected participants in an effort to encourage and support deep reflection in three separate settings which supported the researcher's goal to uncover perceptions regarding parent involvement in a way that lets them tell their story through life experiences.

## Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the question, “What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experiences of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school?” This study used a qualitative, phenomenological method that mirrors the three-part interview process as used and interpreted by researcher Seidman (2006) to uncover perceptions of parent involvement as they relate to each participant and ultimately to uncover themes that connect the lived experiences together. The researcher has chosen to shift from using third-person point of view as the creator and researcher as in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 and will move to a first-person point of view to capture the stories and narrative aspect of the interview process shared between the researcher and participants. In this chapter, I will discuss results of my research with each participant.

### Overview

According to Seidman (2006),

There is an inherent paradox at the heart of the issue of what topics researchers choose to study. On the one hand, they must choose topics that engage their interest, their passion, and sustain their motivation for the labor-intensive work that interviewing research is. That usually means in some way or another they must be close to their topics. (p. 32)

The concept of parent involvement and what it means to the families in this rural community upon which the study was conducted is very important to me as the principal of the elementary school. With such a discrepancy between the majority of the teachers’ race and ethnic backgrounds who work at the school and that of the students and their families, I found it to be important to bring to light the underlying meanings, structures,

essences, and lived experiences of those we serve. The majority (90%) of the certified faculty at the school are White and do not live in the poverty-stricken circumstance that so many of our students are residing in daily. The interviews conducted with five families allowed me the opportunity to gain insight as to how to move forward in sharing this information with my faculty. For this qualitative study seeking to uncover rich, perceptual data from bicultural parents, purposeful criterion sampling was used to ensure participants were from varied races, ethnicities, and similar socioeconomic backgrounds – each characteristic as a criterion of importance. Their voices and perceptions are the core of this research.

### **Data Collection Process**

**Seidman’s in-depth interview structure.** According to Seidman (2006), “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (p. 10). Blumer (1969) reminds us that with in-depth interviewing research, “the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience” (p. 2). In the first interview, the interviewer’s task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him/herself in light of the topic up to the present time (Seidman, 2006). The first interview conducted with each participant for this study began with the following prompt: Talk about your experience in light of parent involvement up to the present time. What were some life experiences with parent involvement as a child, teenager, and now as a parent? This question was meant to establish the context of the participants’ experience with their perception of parent involvement. With each participant, I revisited the questions throughout our interview to keep a focus on past experiences with parent involvement up to the present time.

With Seidman's (2006) structure of in-depth interviewing, the purpose of the second interview was to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience(s) in the topic area of the study. The second interview conducted with each participant began with the following prompt: Talk about your relationships with this school or any other schools administrators, teachers, and experiences with parent involvement at the school. Tell me a story that directly relates to your experience with parent involvement. Feel free to share stories about your experience in schools as a parent. This question allowed the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs (Seidman, 2006). I did repeat these questions throughout the interview process as a way of keeping our conversation focused on the present lived experiences.

For the third interview, I asked each participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience as it related to parent involvement. As stated by Seidman (2006), "The question of 'meaning' is not one of satisfaction or reward, although such issues may play a part in the participants' thinking. Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 18). The third interview began with the following prompt: Given what you have said about your life before you became a parent and given what you have said about your role as a parent at the school now as it relates to parent involvement, how do you understand parent involvement in your life? What sense does it make to you? What do you see in the future with regard to parent involvement for you and your child? As with the other interviews, these questions were revisited multiple times throughout the interview process so that our focus remained in *sense-making* and *future regards* with parent involvement.

To begin each new interview, each participant was given the opportunity to revisit

their own transcribed interview created using both our ESL Director as well as the online transcription program rev.com. As we began each of the three interviews, the participants were asked if they felt their words were reflective of their thoughts and if any changes needed to be made before data analysis and before beginning a new interview. It is important to note that none of the participants reread their transcript in its entirety each time it was presented. All participants agreed that the transcription was reflective of their thoughts and approved moving forward.

**Moustakas's heuristic design.** This study used the six phases of Moustakas's (1994) heuristic inquiry design as a way of guiding the research, collecting the data and ensuring validity throughout the process. This design allowed me to consistently return to each interview multiple times so that I explicated a correct and accurate *essence* or *phenomenon* from each participant's interview. Moustakas wrote, "I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience" (p. 11). Upon completion of each interview, I adhered to Moustakas's design components of initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, and explication and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis to guide the data analysis. This process gave me the opportunity to enter the data analysis with an open mind and eager to learn from my own experience. After each interview, I reviewed the recording and wrote down any initial words and/or phrases that seemed pertinent to the study's focus so that once I had the transcribed version in hand, I could compare my notes. I worked intently to keep the interviews conversational in nature so the participants did not feel threatened in any way, nor did they worry moving forward. I also made it a point to review my purpose for the

interviews and restate to each family that there were no wrong answers as a means of establishing trust and transparency.

As stated in Moustakas (1994),

Patton (1980) presents three basic interviewing approaches that are employed in collecting qualitative data appropriate for heuristic research: (1) The informal conversational interview that relies on a spontaneous generation of questions and conversations in which the co-researcher participates in a natural, unfolding dialogue with the primary investigator. (2) The general interview guide that outlines a set of issues or topics to be explored that might be shared with co-researchers as the interview unfolds, thus focusing on common information to be sought from all co-researchers. (3) The standardized open-ended interview that consists of carefully worded questions that all research participants will be asked. (p. 47)

According to Moustakas (1994), “Of the three methods, the conversational interview or dialogue is most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning” (p. 47). For each of the five participants interviewed, I approached the process so it was conversational in nature and worked to allow a dialogue to evolve each time.

**Van Kaam’s framework of data analysis.** Upon culmination of the interviews, I then began van Kaam’s (1959, 1966) framework for data analysis of each transcribed interview. Upon conclusion of the entire interview process, I used the entire interview transcription for listing and preliminary groupings (horizontalization) and then determined the invariant constituents by reduction and elimination for those statements that did not meet the requirements for further analysis. I then clustered and labeled specific

transcribed material from each interview to develop specific themes of the experiences noted by each participant with sticky notes. These sticky notes were organized into a two-column chart so I could see the pattern of responses as they related to the emerging themes. I highlighted specific words and phrases that were repeated and noted them on the sticky notes. I will call the emerging themes that are focused and grounded from my three core themes (*meanings, structures, and essences*) the subthemes.

### **Participant Descriptions**

With our first interview, each participant was given the opportunity to discuss their childhood experiences focusing specifically on “past experiences with regard to parent involvement.” This conversation gave me insight into his/her background environment, conditions, and relationships without feeling the need to ask imposing or personal questions concerning factors such as socioeconomic status, parenting styles, and educational experiences – both positive and negative. All of the participants came from a low-income, working-class family or an extremely poor situation; and many spoke of the term “survival” as their mode of living circumstances. Furthermore, each participant’s background shaped their present perceptions of parent involvement and how they view their role in moving forward. I will use a pseudonym for each participant to ensure confidentiality.

**Ella.** Ella, a young, married Hispanic female grew up in Mexico before her family decided to move to the United States. Growing up with nine brothers and sisters, she remembers very little about her parents’ involvement of any kind at the school. Several of her responses about specific details she remembered from her past began or ended with “I think” and “I guess.” When asked about whether or not her parents went to the school for specific activities and events, she commented, “I doubt it” (Ella, personal

communication, June 7, 2016). These responses speak powerfully to me as the researcher when establishing Ella's context from which she perceives parent involvement even as a child. Her lack of awareness of her own childhood experiences with parent involvement reveals that her family's standard of living took priority. She mentioned repeatedly that her dad worked and her mom did all the cooking and cleaning for the family. She revealed to me also, "He [dad] just worked to pay bills. We didn't have it too good" (Ella, personal communication, June 7, 2016).

Currently, Ella is married to the father of her three children who works in the local community as a laborer for a local farmer. She is a stay-at-home mom and is not looking to find employment in the near future. All of my interviews with Ella were at the school upon her request.

**Thelma.** Thelma is a middle-aged, African-American/American-Indian mother of three children who have attended our school. The father of her children passed away last year in the middle of the school year leaving her to raise the children as a single mother. She currently works for a local church to help make ends meet.

Growing up, Thelma describes her situation as "learning how to survive" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). Her father worked a labor job at a paper mill, and her mother worked as a laborer as well at a chicken plant. Both parents worked to support the six children at home. She very candidly spoke about her "alcoholic" father for whom she has "no resentment" (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016). She had very little to discuss about her own parents and their involvement with her education which helped to shape her perception of parent involvement with her own children. All of my interviews with Thelma were at the church across town where she works in a part-time clerical position.

**Juan.** Juan spent his childhood in Guatemala with his parents and four siblings. As a child, Juan remembers his father working farmlands and his mother staying at home to cook and clean for the family. Juan recalls life being “hard” and his parents “doing their best” as a young boy (personal communication, July 14, 2016). As a father himself now, he works with other Hispanic men on a local farm while his wife stays home to manage the household. My interviews with Juan were all at the family’s home due to his demanding and oftentimes unpredictable work schedule.

Important to note with our interview process, Juan repeatedly asked the interpreter if this interview would “affect anything” (personal communication, July 14, 2016). He was very conversational throughout the process but often expressed his concern and worry about any ill-intentions that might come toward his children due to his responses. This was communicated to the interpreter upon which she let me know concluding the interviews. Upon entering each new interview, I reassured Juan that all of our interviews were confidential and would affect absolutely nothing for his children at our school.

**Fannie.** Fannie is an elderly, African-American grandmother raising multiple children in our rural community; all of them as either current students in our elementary school or the community’s middle school. She is a native of our community and described her childhood as “growing up on a farm” (personal communication, July 13, 2016). Fannie came from a family with six siblings and describes her childhood with, “We worked on the farm and went to school until we got grown and got old enough to leave” (personal communication, July 13, 2016).

Fannie is married to their children’s grandfather and has been for 30+ years. She works at the local church over the summer to help children with reading skills and ensure a daycare facility for many lower-income families in our community. Other than this

employment, she stays at home with her husband and “struggles to make ends meet” (Fannie, personal communication, July 14, 2016). All of my interviews with Fannie were at the school and scheduled after her summer employment hours in our community.

**Simon.** Simon is a young, African-American father of four children. He grew up with his mother and father in the household; but shortly after Simon turned seven, his father passed away. With two sisters and Simon to raise, his mother was forced to enter the workforce and become a single working mother of three children. “It was hard, but my mom had high expectations just like my dad did, so we all helped out around the house” (Simon, personal communication, July 5, 2016). At the present time, Simon works two jobs while his wife works as a teacher’s assistant. Due to his multiple work schedules that include both day and night shifts, Simon mentioned frequently his inability to attend many school functions and events.

All of the interviews with Simon were held at the school. It is important to note that having the opportunity to interview Simon did become a challenge. Oftentimes, Simon would have to cancel due to work issues arising. His inability to adhere to a scheduled event gave me great perspective about how hard it would be for him to attend scheduled events held at school.

### **Core Themes**

One goal of the researcher in marking what is of interest in the interview transcripts is to reduce and then shape the material into a form in which it can be shared or displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

With regard to data and organizational purposes, Seidman (2006) stated,

A conventional way of presenting and analyzing interview data than crafting profiles is to organize excerpts from the transcripts into categories. The

researcher then searches for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes. (p. 125)

From the data collection process, I organized the subthemes that emerged from the interviews using my own research question core themes of *meanings*, *structures*, and *essences* in an effort to bring focus to the varied themes that emerged. I defined each word as it is defined in Merriam-Webster's dictionary: "*meaning* – the thing one intends to convey especially by language"; "*structures* – something arranged in a definite pattern of organization"; and *essences* – "the basic nature of a thing: the quality or qualities that make a thing what it is." Using these definitions helped me consistently organize each participant's thoughts in the interviews so that subthemes emerged naturally.

**Themes surrounding "*meaning*."** Themes that repeatedly emerged from my interviews with regard to parent involvement for *meaning* as stated in the research question were the ideas of attendance and/or actually being present at the school as well as helping out at home in some way. There were specific responses from the participants that revealed their experience and understanding of parent involvement as it relates to *meaning* and the idea of attendance and home support. Throughout the perceptions of each participant, the support with their child's learning at home prevailed as a priority for parent involvement. This was true about their past experiences growing up as well as their current and future hopes and aspirations with regard to experiences as a parent or primary caregiver.

**Ella.** When asked about her current experiences with parent involvement, Ella revealed, "Well, I go to their parent-teacher conferences" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). When reflecting on her past experiences, Ella described herself as a young girl

who grew up with parents who were “not involved” (personal communication, June 7, 2016).

Ella stated,

They were not being involved. I guess they were too busy. My dad worked but my mom, she didn't. My parents didn't really focus on me, like, in school. They had too many kids. My dad worked 'cause he had to support ten kids. If I needed some help, she [mother] couldn't help me, 'cause she didn't even finish school, so she didn't know . . . . It really wasn't a priority for them to go to the school.

They were too busy. (personal communication, June 7, 2016)

When speaking of her past experiences, overall Ella had little familiarity to draw from to help her define her own *meaning* of parent involvement. When probed to discuss other present experiences with her own parent involvement, she commented, “I just talk to the teacher at parent-teacher conferences” (Ella, personal communication, June 7, 2016). At a later interview, I asked Ella to again state for me what she understands about what parent involvement means in her life – focusing on her past or the present. She stated, “It means you find out how your kids are doing in school. How they're doing and what are they learning so you can help them” (Ella, personal communication, June 11, 2016).

Very simply stated, Ella has made *meaning* of parent involvement as helping her children at home. Furthermore, Ella was able to explain a positive experience with parent involvement as “Well, I, I work with my kids on what they need to do. Like if, if they're doing bad in reading or math, I'll try to work with them at home” (personal communication, June 7, 2016). At a later interview, Ella (personal communication, June 11, 2016) explained very bluntly,

I try my best to get more involved with the kids, you know, education. Like, with

their teachers, talking to them about what they're learning and what do I need to help them with at the house like what do I need to work with them? I was working with him [son] and he did good at the end of the year, he got better. I think it was because I got involved with him, you know, help him at home.

Ella explicitly stated that her involvement was helping her son at home with his reading. She went on to take some credit for his success due to her support at home.

Most of Ella's responses were very short and had little detail or description when asked about her experiences with parent involvement – either positive or negative. Based on Ella's stated responses and others that I will share connected to the core themes, she repeatedly made *meaning* of parent involvement as either being at a conference or helping them at home. Furthermore, her awareness of her parents' involvement with her own education growing up as a child was almost nonexistent. At times, it seemed very difficult for Ella to discuss the *meaning* of parent involvement with her own perception in mind. However, with my constant probing, I was able to get her to explain her thinking so I could capture how she made *meaning* of parent involvement enough to include in my data analysis.

**Thelma.** Thelma is a middle-aged, African-American/American-Indian female parent with a lot to offer on her perceptions and ideas concerning the concept of parent involvement. With regard to the *meaning* of parent involvement, Thelma (personal communication, June 7, 2016) stated, "My mom worked, my dad worked, and so they didn't have much involvement, but we still knew our role as a child." She went on to say, "They never went to the school. They asked me about school, but because they had to work . . . we basically knew what to do" (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016). She bridged this lack of involvement as a child to her own experiences in light of

parent involvement up until the present time by stating,

I've learned from my mom and dad because they had to work, but I am a working parent. I worked second and third, I worked all shifts, but I went to college also, but the thing was I, I refused, I said as a person I would be involved in my children's life. If they had a conference or anything they had I was there. I would take off work. I would save all my vacation, even I would work sick in order to take off so I could be involved. (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016)

What I found most notable with Thelma's response was her *meaning*-making as attending a function (conference) or some event at the school. Again, as Ella stated in her interview, her attendance at the school for a specific purpose, such as a conference, is the perception of parent involvement as it relates to the research question and theme surrounding *meaning*. In the same interview, Thelma stated very pointedly, "I learned that when I'm coming to the parent-teacher conference that's my involvement" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). She continued with her *meaning* of parent involvement as experiences that included helping out with homework or other school-related conversation that she may have had with her children. For example, when asked about communicating a positive experience with parent involvement, Thelma stated, "I would always ask my children what did they learn and what did they get from it. And the thing was every day they would come home and tell me what they learned" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). She added, "Part of my involvement was asking my daughter about her day. I can tell when she got off the bus if she had a bad day" (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016). At a later interview prompting Thelma to expand on specific experiences and relationships within the school, she stated,

When the parent involved, they [teachers] get more involved with the students

because they see that the effort that you put in and that child put effort too because you put effort in them and um, they were more concerned about making sure their homework is done and if they had any problem I couldn't understand the homework I would call them, and they would just walk me through it.

(personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Again, with this interview having the participant focus specifically on experiences and relationships with teachers and administrators, Thelma stated, "I would ask my daughter how was your day" (personal communication, August 4, 2016), which is consistent with her *meaning* of parent involvement as support or conversations at home.

**Juan.** Juan, a middle-aged Hispanic male, was very suspicious of my intentions at our very first interview even with the interpreter (who also works at our school) assuring him that there would be no negative consequences directed toward his children regardless of his answers to our interview questions. She assured him twice during the first interview that he had nothing to worry about and these data were simply to help the researcher understand parent perceptions of involvement with regard to their own experiences, both past and present. Our interviews were interpreted in Spanish for Juan to ensure he felt comfortable with his understanding of the questions.

When prompted to discuss his past experience as a child focusing on his own parents' involvement with school, Juan asked the simple question, "What do you mean?" (personal communication, July 14, 2016). However simple this response may seem, it spoke volumes to me as the researcher. This answer revealed that the term "parent involvement" was either a term he simply was not familiar with due to the language barrier, or he genuinely had no concept of his parents being involved at school in any way – almost as if the two were completely separate from each other which may have

made the question confusing for him. I went on to explain what I meant for him, without shaping his thoughts, by asking,

For example, do you remember any experiences with your parents and teachers, your parents and the school, or any time when your parents talked about school or helped you in any way with school or even a time when you attended any activities of any kind through the school?

Juan responded by stating, “They would ask the teachers how we behaved at school at their meetings. They went in order to know how we had behaved and how we were doing in classes” (personal communication, July 14, 2016). He went on to say, “My parents say ‘you have to do your homework because that is the reason you go to school.’ They were involved by making sure we did our homework” (Juan, personal communication, July 14, 2016). Juan candidly stated,

I look at parent participation and involvement as my responsibility in making sure my children understand what they have to do well and they must take advantage of the situation they have because my family could not afford for me to go past sixth grade. (personal communication, July 14, 2016)

When specifically thinking about Juan’s *meaning* of parent involvement, he consistently talked about helping his children with homework, ensuring they understand what to do at school and even simply having conversations with his children about why school is important for them. He also stated, “All I can do is support them so they can do their best in school” (Juan, personal communication, July 14, 2016).

Furthering our conversations, Juan was asked specifically about his relationships with teachers and school administrators and how he perceived those relationships with his own children in school. He explained,

I have relationships with the teachers but not the school administrators. I communicate with the teachers to be involved. I make sure my child comes to school every day, pays attention, behaves, and I keep in contact with teachers about their work and homework. (Juan, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

As the researcher, I again see the pattern of helping and supporting at home as Juan's *meaning* of parent involvement.

**Fannie.** Fannie is the primary caregiver of children at the school rather than the actual biological parent as are the other participants. She is an elderly African-American grandmother and aunt to several children who have come through the school over the years. Fannie's childhood experiences with parent involvement led her to describe parent involvement as "making sure you got all your homework done. We knew better than to get in trouble at school" (personal communication, July 13, 2016). I prompted her to speak specifically about any opportunities her parents had to be involved with her school as a child and she stated,

They just came to talk to the principal to see if we were behaving. There weren't conferences like we have now. Every time the school does something here, or has any kind of program, or any kind of anything, I come. (Fannie, personal communication, July 13, 2016)

When I asked Fannie if she would consider her parents involved with her education, she indicated, "Yeah. Because they made sure you got your homework done" (personal communication, July 13, 2016). Again, the theme of helping with homework and attending school functions finds its way into Fannie's responses when asked about the *meaning* of involvement as it relates to her own experiences. At a later interview, she stated "Back then, I don't think they had parent-teacher conferences" (Fannie, personal

communication, July 13, 2016). This was a response to my asking her to reflect on her past experiences with parent involvement as a child. Through this reply, it is evident that Fannie does include parent teacher conferences as a form of parent involvement even though it was one she does not recall as a child. Once again, the notion of attendance to school-related functions is a perceived *meaning* of parent involvement as well as parents helping at home to ensure homework is completed.

**Simon.** Simon is a young, African-American male who is a father to two students who have gone through our school over the years. He began our conversation by opening up about his past experiences with what he perceived as parent involvement by stating,

My father played a major part with the role of parent involvement because I stayed at home with him until I started school. He was out on sick leave and when I started school, he would help me with whatever I had. He died when I was seven, so then my sisters would help me with my homework. My mom would go to all the parent teacher conferences and make sure I'm where I need to be. (Simon, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Without any specific prompting to speak about parent involvement as helping with homework or even participating in parent-teacher conferences, Simon immediately went to these ideas. His *meaning* of what parent involvement means to him was simply stated within the first 45 seconds of our very first interview.

Simon continued our conversation with a connection to his current experiences with parent involvement as, "Sometimes I'm not able to make parent teacher conferences because I'm always on call. I've got a second job. I have to rely on my wife" (personal communication, July 5, 2016). The notion of being present at the school seemed to be a real *meaning* of parent involvement for Simon as a school boy and even now as an adult

with children. In another interview, he again articulated his *meaning* by stating,

My daughter was the poster child for wanting parent involvement. You got to come to it [event]. You got to come to it. I mean you guys always have things up here at the school, as far as after school programs. (Simon, personal communication, July 28, 2016)

Simon spoke about his perception of parent involvement with his present experiences as, “If you show your child that you care, and ask how’s everything going in school and check behind them . . . You have to show interest” (personal communication, July 28, 2016). This idea of parent involvement is different than showing a presence at the school but is consistent with other participant responses throughout our interviews because it does reference the idea of helping at home with homework or some form of conversation with a child about their day or school in general.

### **Summary for *Meaning***

Each participant’s *meaning* of parent involvement revealed strong similarities with emerging themes of attendance and/or presence to school events and functions as well as conversations and support at home concerning their day at school and homework to be completed. As stated in the definition of *meaning* defined using Merriam Webster’s Dictionary version, each participant conveyed their understanding of what parent involvement means with being present at the school at some school-sponsored or school-initiated event or by supporting their child with help at home. This is important to note due to the nature of the event perceived as involvement: school or teacher initiated. This understanding of *meaning* leads the discussion to each parents’ perception of structure as it relates to parent involvement for them.

**Themes surrounding “structures.”** Within the theme of *structure*, I found many

connections with the *meaning*-making that participants made throughout our interviews. With structure defined as “a pattern of organization,” the participants’ idea of parent involvement as an event at the school or some form of meeting at the school was recurring. I see this as a connection with their *meaning* of parent involvement in addition to their idea of the parent involvement *structure*. Due to the similarity of these two core themes and the statements already stated by each participant, I will not restate them in this core theme section. However, there were some specific subthemes revealed that related directly to how the participants made sense of the *structure* of parent involvement with their own experiences – with past, present, and future as the focus of our conversation.

With our first interview focusing more on the participants’ past experiences as well as experiences leading up to their present familiarity with parent involvement, the subthemes of role and communication developed. Moreover, when participants were asked to think about present experiences in our second interview and future opportunities and sense-making of parent involvement in our third interview, these two subthemes emerged repeatedly. I organized this section so each participant and his/her perceptions with regard to role and communication are separated.

**Ella and role.** When speaking about her childhood experiences with parent involvement, I asked Ella to explain more about what she remembered about her parents being involved with her schooling and education due to the lack of information she was providing at the beginning of the interview. At first, she was very short with her answers; but with consistent prompting, I was able to capture the following indication of her past experiences:

Ella: He [Father] just worked to pay bills. They were leavin’ it up to the teachers.

Definitely. They say, if you go to school, the teacher will help you.

Researcher: Okay. Talk more about that.

Ella: They didn't really help me. They depended on the teacher. There were ten of us – I had nine siblings. My dad just worked to support us kids and pay bills. My mom did all the cookin' and cleanin'. We didn't have conversations about school. It really wasn't a priority for them.

Researcher: And that is because they were busy with work and home?

Ella: Yes. The teachers were the kind of know-all-be-all. My parents couldn't help me. They left it up to the teachers to help us. (personal communication, June 7, 2016)

From this conversation, the subtheme of role materialized. Ella revealed that with her perceived *structure* of parent involvement related to her past experiences, her teachers played a very distinct role – the giver of education – and her parents played a very distinct role – the providers of domestic needs such as food and housing. Explicitly stated multiple times, Ella perceives the *structure* of parent involvement as the role of the teacher versus the role of the parent. With the above statements, “They depended on the teacher; They were leavin’ it up to the teachers; The teachers were the kind of know-all-be-all,” it becomes clear that Ella’s perceived role of the teacher in her past had the responsibility of her education while the perceived role of her parents with regard to past experiences carried the responsibility of taking care of the home. This is how she remembers and perceives parent involvement as a child and the specific roles attached to school and home.

When reflecting on her present experiences as a parent of two children at the school, Ella provides evidence of her perceived role related to parent involvement. She

consistently describes the role of the teacher is to inform her of anything she may need to know to help at home with either behavior or academics. Ella commented, “Once they [teachers] explain the information to me, I will work with my kids on what they need to do. Like, if they’re doing bad in reading or math, I’ll try to work with them at home – help them” (personal communication, June 7, 2016). This captures Ella’s perception of her role as the parent and the role of the teacher. She is always willing and ready to help the teacher once they have provided her with the information she needs to support either with homework or with setting behavior expectations. Also embedded in this response is the notion that she perceives the role of the teacher as the one who must inform her of what she needs to do at home pertaining to his/her education.

**Ella and communication.** Regarding the subtheme of communication, Ella stated in our beginning interview (and as mentioned in the above section for *meaning*) that parent involvement means “You find out how your kids are doing in school; how they’re doing and what are they are learning so you can help them” (personal communication, June 7, 2016). When I probed her more with a follow-up to tell me more, she stated, “Well, the teachers let me know how they are doing. They send notes or call me if my child is doing bad” (Ella, personal communication, June 7, 2016). She also specifically stated, with regard to her son, “The teachers explain to me what the kids are doing in school and if my sons are doing bad, they’ll let me know what’s going on” (Ella, personal communication, June 7, 2016). Clearly, Ella is waiting for the teacher to initiate any conversation about her child’s experiences in school.

With this initial interview, Ella’s perception of communication and its *structure* is teacher-driven, in that she makes it clear that she communicates with teachers once they have communicated with her how her child is doing in school. Furthermore, she

articulated, “I try to get more involved with my kids than my parents did. I’ll talk to the teacher if I have any questions or if they are doing bad in school. I’ll ask them, you know, what’s going on?” (Ella, personal communication, June 7, 2016). At first, I found this to be contradictory to the above conversation; however, there is a clear piece of this response that is directly related to Ella’s perceived communication structure: I’ll talk to the teacher if I have any questions or if they are doing bad in school. Before Ella initiates conversation with a teacher, she must first be informed by the teacher how her child is doing. Again, her perception of communication and its *structure* is teacher-driven.

Conversely, with our third interview, Ella provided a slightly different perception regarding her future hopes with parent involvement. The following conversation captures her thoughts and reflection.

Me: What do you see with the future with regard to parent involvement for you and your children?

Ella: To be more involved. Like, maybe try to get more involved in school. Talk to their teachers and ask them how I can help my kids at home so they can be better in school. (personal communication, June 21, 2016)

This reflection provides a different perspective on the *structure* and its relationship to our subtheme of communication and furthermore whose role it is to initiate the communication. This statement is interesting considering that our focus for this interview was on future hopes and aspirations with regard to parent involvement. It is evident that Ella would like to become an initiator of communication and make it a part of her role as the parent.

Ella’s perception of parent involvement with regard to *structure* is that currently her role is to help however she can and in the future to work to speak with teachers about

how she can help her child. Furthermore, she currently perceives the *structure* of communication as teacher-driven and teacher-initiated.

**Thelma and role.** Thelma was exceptionally candid with our interviews about her perception of parent involvement. She spoke with passion and a strong deliberate nature about her understanding and perception of parent involvement that became very evident when I analyzed her interview data and began looking for patterns within the theme of *structure*. Much of our discussion throughout the entire interview process focused significantly on the subthemes of role and communication. These specific themes came up in our conversations about her past experiences as well as her present experiences and even her hopes for the future with regard to parent involvement, her sense-making of the concept, and her children's education moving forward.

When asked to specifically speak about her past experiences in light of parent involvement, Thelma talked about growing up with a mother and father who worked incessantly to pay bills and described,

As a young child, my mom worked, my dad worked, and so they didn't have much involvement. But we still knew our role as a child, how to come to school, be respectful, listen, learn, pay attention, always have respect. They didn't have any involvement because their rule was you go to school to learn. (personal communication, June 7, 2016)

Embedded within her perceived *structure* of parent involvement as Thelma has lived it, it becomes evident that her parents' role and her role as a child were clearly defined. She added,

In school, you listened to 'em [teacher], you obeyed 'em because you know if you got that phone call home, you was gonna get it. I can speak for my sisters and

brother, but every other child you can tell they didn't have that structure 'cause they would cut up, play, disrespect, so you can tell they didn't have the involvement at home. (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016)

This account from Thelma was powerful data for me as a researcher to include in my analysis. There is a clear distinction between her parents' role and her role as the child relating to her childhood experiences. Their role was that of the disciplinarian; they set expectations for Thelma to follow and her role as the child was to adhere respectfully. This account also led to a direct connection between her experience of home *structure* and the theme of role with her perception of parent involvement. She further stated, "Your [a child] job is to go to school. The teacher was basically the know-all of our education" (Thelma, personal communication, June 7, 2016). Again, a clearly defined perceived role for the teacher and the student within the theme of *structure* is stated.

Thinking about her present experiences with parent involvement, Thelma explained, "I'm doing my job as a parent and helping the teacher out when they come home, 'cause you can't teach a whole lot when you got to stop for one disruptive child. And it does start at home" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). This is a direct connection with her perceived *structure* of parent involvement and how she views her role as a parent. As with her past experiences discussed previously, Thelma views her role within the *structure* of parent involvement as one that ensures obedience from the child. This is a priority for Thelma's perceived *structure* with regard to the subtheme of role to ensure learning can occur at school. Again, the responsibility of the parent is to discipline so the teacher can teach. Within this same conversation, Thelma stated, "Your [the teacher] job is to teach them" (personal communication, June 7, 2016). Additionally, when prompted to explain more about how she currently perceives her own involvement,

Thelma stated,

I make sure I'm there at everything that come from school. If I can be there, I'm there. I might be a little late, but I'm gonna be there. I'm gonna be in everything.

The expectation is that you will get your education and you will go to school and you will do what the teacher says. (personal communication, June 7, 2016)

Again, this statement reflects Thelma's view of her role as a parent and the role of the child as well as the role of the teacher. Her role as the parent is to be in attendance at functions and events at the school. The role of the student is to follow whatever expectations have been set by the parent and the teacher, while the role of the teacher is to give directions and expectations for the student. This statement further reveals Thelma's perceived *structure* and dynamic of parent involvement regarding role.

**Thelma and communication.** Furthermore, Thelma consistently stated in her interviews the importance of communication with her children about their day as her role in parent involvement. Communication with the children was frequently mentioned as a form of parent involvement for Thelma. When asked directly to talk about how she works to be involved presently, Thelma stated the following responses: "I ask my daughter how was your day"; "Everyday they would come home and tell me what they learned"; and "I can tell when he [son] got off the bus if he had a bad day and I would ask him how his day was" (personal communication, June 7 and August 4, 2016). Each of these statements connects with Thelma's perceived *structure* of parent involvement related to communication as parent-driven. Thelma does not wait for the teacher to contact her. She is the initiator of conversation related to her child's day at school which she perceives as a form of parent involvement. Below is another response from Thelma with regard to specific experiences she remembers as a parent:

Me: Can you tell me about any specific experiences you have had with our school that were either positive or negative in nature? Any specific teacher, situation, or moment that you remember?

Thelma: The positive experience is that I know they learned something when they can come home and tell me what they learned. But when a child come home and can't tell you what they day was about without you asking, 'cause they supposed to be excited about school, "Guess what I learned today", but when they come home and don't tell you that they haven't learned anything that made an impact on them for that day, 'cause that day impact their future.

Me. And so for you this was a positive experience you had or something you felt was lacking?

Thelma: Mines always come home and tell me about their day, so that was a plus. And that's how I know that was a teacher that had the heart; it wasn't even about the paycheck. It was about the child, the children, really teaching them. (personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Rooted within her response, the perceived *structure* of both role and communication emerge. Again, it is the parent's role to initiate conversation with the child concerning his/her day at school.

The subthemes of communication and role within the core theme of *structure* were consistent across my conversations with Thelma. As a working, single-parent, these two themes were critical to Thelma's involvement with her children's education.

**Juan and role.** Within the core theme of *structure* as it relates to parent involvement for Juan, the data revealed both role and communication as important factors of his perception with regard to involvement. Juan provided some unmistakable data

pertaining to his role as the parent and the role of the teacher and student.

Similar to the other participants, Juan spoke about his past experiences with parent involvement as “Growing up, when the teachers would send home homework to do, I had to do it. My parents would say, you have to do your homework. They were involved in making sure I did my homework” (personal communication, July 14, 2016). He also explained, “If we misbehaved, they [the teacher] would contact the parent. The teacher would do this for our good” (Juan, personal communication, July 18, 2016). This statement was in response to my question, “Describe an experience you had as a child with your own parents and their involvement with your teachers or the school.” From his response, I found a direct relationship with his assertion regarding “do this for our good” and his understanding of the *structure* and a teacher’s role in contacting parents about behaviors as needed. It was a teacher’s role to communicate expectations for behavior and academics as deemed necessary. Moreover, it was the role of the parent to follow through with the expectation set by the teacher.

Juan discussed more about his view of parent involvement that directly related to his perceptions relating to the *structure* by stating,

It is part of their [my parents] responsibility to educate us along with the school, even more so because it benefited us. Our dad would tell us that you not only went to school because you wanted to go and accomplish a goal, but you go and learn something for your future. What’s important to me is they do their duty well and they are doing good in their grades and reach a new level. (personal communication, July 18, 2016).

With his reflection, I found that Juan views his role as a dual role: He and the school should be working together. The *structure* of parent involvement for Juan is deeply

rooted in the school's role as the educator and the parent's role as the one who ensures the child gets there and does their job as the student.

Furthermore, he made the powerful analogy,

It's my responsibility as a parent to send my child to school and not just leave him behind. When you plant something, you cannot just leave it; you have to go back and tend to it and take care of it so that you can have a good harvest. It's the same with children – you not only make sure they go to school, you have to go beyond to make sure that they do well and they meet all of the expectations of the school so that the kids can grow up and be responsible citizens. (Juan, personal communication, July 18, 2016)

The connection Juan makes with planting his harvest and working with the schools to take care of his children's educational needs as a dual role is very compelling. The other participants in the study have alluded to the collaborative nature that must take place for children between schools and home, but Juan articulates it in a way that captures what he believes as the *structure* and the specific roles each participant has in educating a child.

**Juan and communication.** Juan also spoke candidly about his communication with the school and its teachers. Juan perceives the *structure* of communication as teacher-driven. When asked about his experiences with parent involvement here at our school, he mentioned,

Teachers will call over the phone and we speak about their academic achievement and progress. Sometimes the teachers call when they are concerned about something and when they feel there are things I need to know in order to help them do better or act better in the classroom. (Juan, personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Juan went on to state, “I make sure my children come to school every day, pay attention, behave and communicate with teachers in order to know how they are doing in school even though it is very difficult and frustrating when you cannot communicate” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). This statement references the language barrier that exists between him and the teachers who do not speak Spanish. Although we do have several interpreters at the school, Juan expresses the difficulty in communicating with such a language barrier. Juan did define the *structure* of communication as one that depends on the teacher to initiate the conversation concerning academics and/or behavior. He was clearly the receiver of information instead of the originator of conversation with teachers at the school.

With regard to his future aspirations for parent involvement and how it makes sense to him, Juan articulated that moving forward, he will continue to “talk to them [his children] about doing well in school, doing their homework and doing the right thing” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). When thinking about Juan’s perception of parent involvement, our conversations within all three interviews allowed me to discern the subthemes of role and communication as imperative within the core theme of structure. Again, Juan discerns the *structure* of parent involvement as a dual role between the teacher and parent with the communication responsibility directly related to what information the teachers provide for him concerning his children.

**Fannie and role.** With our initial interview, Fannie was asked to describe her past experiences with parent involvement as a child as she made sense of it. I encouraged her to discuss what she remembered with her parents’ involvement with her schooling. Fannie responded with, “I don’t remember my parents being involved with anything *at* (italicized for emphasis) the school. I don’t even think they had parent teacher

conferences back then” (personal communication, July 13, 2016). From the very beginning and without any form of prompting, Fannie initiated her perception of parent involvement as something *at* the school and even made a direct connection to conferences with the parents and teachers. She later stated, “All we did was went to school and come home. We knew better than to get in trouble at school because we knew what would happen when we got home” (Fannie, personal communication, August 18, 2016). This reflection links with Fannie’s *structure* of parent involvement with the subtheme of role. She is speaking about her role as a child and her parents’ role in her education as being that of a disciplinarian for the teacher. She explained,

My mamma raised us up like I’m raising my grandchildren up. Go to school, come home, do your homework and then play. I always have the food ready when they get home. I make sure they do homework and eat. (Fannie, personal communication, August 18, 2016)

She has a clear role of providing for her grandchildren at home with food and homework support. I asked Fannie to speak more about this kind of involvement and how that made sense to her as a primary caregiver by asking the question, “Your perception of how you handle involvement is very interesting. Can you tell me more about how this works for your family?” She replied with, “I have them on a routine. I run a routine like that because that’s how I was raised up. I also come to the school for activities and programs” (Fannie, personal communication, August 18, 2016). She emphasized, “Whatever they tell me I need to do is what I try to do to keep all my grandchildren straight. They are there to teach them and I’m trying to raise them up right” (Fannie, personal communication, August 18, 2016). Again, Fannie made a strong association between her role as the primary caregiver and the role of teachers and the school to be

effective. She has a clear division of roles stated in her responses. The role of the teacher is to teach and the role of the parent or primary caregiver is to “raise them.”

**Fannie and communication.** Fannie explained a story in one of our interviews about a specific experience she had with the school revealing to me that communication is very important in her perception of parent involvement with the school. She described, Mario had took his telephone to school and they [the school] had took it from him. Mr. Galley [the principal] (*pseudonym*) called me and told me he couldn’t get it back until I came up to the school. Mr. Galley told me I’m a better parent because anytime they call me, they know I’ll come. I know children tell stories these days. You got to check behind children now. (Fannie, personal communication, August 24, 2016)

She mentioned in a later interview which focused on her hopes for the future with regard to parent involvement that “Teachers will continue to let me know what I need to do to help these grandchildren. I always make sure I do my part at home and try to raise them up to be smart” (Fannie, personal communication, August 24, 2016). Again, Fannie has created a connection between her role with regard to parent involvement as well as how she values communication as being an integral part of parent involvement for her children’s educational progress. With her response, I am also clear that Fannie perceives the *structure* of communication as being teacher-driven. She is waiting for the teacher to inform her of any academic or behavior concerns before she communicates with the teacher. Both subthemes of role and communication are important dynamics of Fannie’s perception of *structure* as it relates to parent involvement.

**Simon and role.** When reflecting on past experiences and considering how these experiences shaped his perception of parent involvement as child, Simon discussed,

Throughout my school years, especially when I was young, my mom played a major role just keeping me on task. If I had a bad grade, she would always get to the bottom of it. She made it very clear. (personal communication, July 5, 2016).

He continued his reflection with,

Me knowing at an early age, having structure and knowing what was expected of me, I knew what to do when I got home. Me growing up and after my dad died, Mom, being a single parent, it was like I would let her down if I didn't do what I was supposed to do. (Simon, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Simon openly talks about the *structure* his single-parent mom set up for him as a young child and directly correlates this with his own role when speaking about his mom's involvement. This *structure* at home was his mom's way to ensure her son completed his responsibilities for school – such as homework and even his behavior at school. He remarked, “My mom gave her [teacher] the okay to take me out and paddle if I wasn't paying attention in class. I knew back then, don't do it because I will get another butt-whooping at home” (Simon, personal communication, July 5, 2016). Yet again, Simon spoke of the role he was to carry as a young child and the expectations from his mother. His responsibility was to behave at school with consequences to follow if he did not – from both school and home. This *structure* from home expectations and responsibilities quickly carried over into his mother's expectations of Simon's role as a student once his father died and she became a single mother.

When I prompted Simon to speak more about his current experiences as a father and his perception of parent involvement, he discussed what appears to be his perceived role.

Me: Are there any specific experiences you have had to shape your perception of

parent involvement and how you see it structured now as a parent?

Simon: Well, I'm not able to make parent teacher conferences like I said. I have to rely on my wife. But if you actually show a child that you care, I think that is positive. With me working constantly, if I was to never say anything about how's everything going in school and didn't check in behind them on that, it might make a child feel like you don't care.

Me: So do you feel that is your form of parent involvement with your current experiences?

Simon: Yea, you have to show interest in whatever it is a kid likes. Even though I don't see myself as being the same as my daughter with her likes – like in chorus and drama club – I still need to talk to them about it and show interest in it so that way she continues to do the thing she likes. I think it builds up her self-esteem, too. (personal communication, July 28, 2016)

With this discussion, Simon revealed his role as the working father who cannot attend many functions at the school. He asserted his role is to talk to his child about his/her interests and day at school. Plainly stated, he does acknowledge that he has a role, even as a working father who is absent to most school functions.

**Simon and communication.** Shifting to Simon's perceptions regarding specific experiences he remembers either as a child or as a parent with a positive or negative affect on his involvement, he stated, "Sometimes I'm not able to make parent teacher conferences and things like that because I'm always on call. But I rely on my wife and she usually handles business by talking to them [teachers]" (personal communication, August 16, 2016). He went on to mention,

I would like to attend all the assemblies and everything you have here. But I

depend on my wife. If I need to come here, I will. I just rely on the teachers to communicate with me and my wife what's going on. (Simon, personal communication, August 16, 2016)

With regard to the core theme of *structure*, Simon finds value in the communication between schools and families and relies most heavily on his wife due to his own work schedule. Embedded in this specific quote from Simon, the theme of role emerges as well as communication. He finds the *structure* of communication as teacher-driven; he is dependent upon the teachers to communicate to him and his wife what is happening at school with regard to behavior and academics. Simon finds his role as one that will intervene if needed, by saying, "If I need to come here, I will." Furthermore, he clearly finds the primary role of communication between the school and home as his wife's role – again, due to his work schedule.

### **Summary for *Structure***

The core theme of *structure* reveals that within it, the significance of the role each person or entity, such as the school, plays an important factor in defining and explaining each participant's perception of parent involvement. This subtheme of role is heavily addressed by each participant in their past childhood experiences and openly exposes itself in his/her present views of parent involvement. Multiple times throughout the interviews, the participants candidly stated their role as the parent and the teacher's role as the educator. It is evident in the data that role is a substantial component when unveiling perceptual data for the study's participants.

In addition, a vital factor of *structure* is the understanding of communication. The interviews presented numerous references to the responsibility of teachers and parents communicating about grades, homework, and other academic or behavioral

information. With *structure* defined in this study as “something arranged in a definite pattern of organization,” it is each participant’s perception that communication is fundamental for parent involvement as it is established as a pattern within the organization of the concept of study. The idea of teacher-driven communication is inherent in my research data. Families are waiting for teachers to initiate conversations regarding behavior and academics so they can then support as needed. In general, their role in parent involvement is based on how they respond to school-initiated communication.

**Themes surrounding “essence.”** Defining *essence* as “the basic nature of a thing: the quality or qualities that make a thing what it is” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary), I found many overlapping connections between this core theme and the other two core themes: *meanings* and *structures*. For me, this relationship added validity to each participant’s perceptions of parent involvement. When reflecting on the *meaning* of a concept and describing the structural aspects of a concept, naturally the *essence* revealed itself. The subthemes of attendance, presence at the school, helping with homework, following the expectations of a specific role, and communication with parents concerning academics and behavior are all essential components that created each participant’s perceptions of parent involvement related to their experiences and even with future aspirations.

Due to the nature of the word *essence*, I found it to be our third and final interview that would truly capture this from each participant due to the nature of the questions. With the many overlaps in the data collection process for this specific theme, I believe the questions related to sense-making and future reflections provided a more in-depth conversation surrounding perceived *essence* from each participant. For this study,

the research question asked the question, “What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school?” With the culminating third interview for each participant, I directly asked them to describe their perception of parent involvement and how they made sense of it presently and for the future. I feel the final interview helped shape each participant’s perceived essence of parent involvement by solidifying the data collected from previous interviews as well as providing the platform for each parent to describe how they make sense of parent involvement.

**Ella.** In an effort to discuss how Ella makes sense of parent involvement with her own children, the following conversational data were collected from our third interview.

Me: Talk to me about how you make sense of parent involvement in relation to your own children and what you feel is at the heart of your parent involvement. As a stay-at-home Hispanic mother in our rural community, what sense are you making of the term parent involvement presently?

Ella: Well, I find out how my kids are doing and I try to help them at home the best I can. And when I cannot help, their older brother helps. I try to be involved so they can do better in school. That is what makes sense to me. I am helping them when teachers tell me how to help.

Me: Okay. So, talk with me about why parent involvement is important to you. Or do you feel it is important?

Ella: Yes, I do feel it is important because if parents don’t get involved, kids will not focus in school and try to do the best. It’s important for me to help the teachers as I can.

Me: And Ms. Ella, what are your hopes for your children and involvement with

the school?

Ella: To be better and help in what I can. I want to help my kids and help them to be smart. (personal communication, June 21, 2016)

Ella's perceived *essence* of parent involvement embraces the notion that her involvement is defined as helping her children at home to support the school's effort. In her perspective, she and the school have two separate roles, yet both are important to the success of her children. The basic element that comprises her perception of parent involvement and its essence is her role in helping her children the best she can and, stated repeatedly, only after prompted by the teacher.

**Thelma.** Thelma was asked to describe how she makes sense of parent involvement presently with her own children and how this has shaped what she believes to be most important for her involvement with her children's education. She stated,

I see that most important for me in my child's involvement is that my children always know I am there for them when they are hurtin' and the teachers always know I'm there. Big or small, you know, you [teachers] may not think it's something but I may think it's something just call me if you have any problem, if you have just a simple problem just say I'll call you mom and you see the difference. (Thelma, personal communication, August 12, 2016)

For Thelma, the *essence*, or basic elements, of parent involvement was "being there": For her children's teachers, this was a sense of support related to discipline and academic concerns; while for her children, the phrase "being there" describes an emotional responsibility.

When asked directly to discuss her future aspirations and hopes related to parent involvement as an African-American single parent in our rural community, Thelma

strongly asserted,

Oh, I will have to stay on him. I will have to really watch his mannerisms, his level of respect, the crowd he keeps, and his level of doing homework. I will continue to be involved with him and always stay on him as his mom. (personal communication, August 12, 2016)

Yet again, Thelma conveys her role as one that will keep her children on track with home support as needed. Her perceived *essence* is similar to Ella's, in that she consistently embraces the spirit of parent involvement as what she does for her child at home in an effort to support the school.

**Juan.** With regard to the *essence* of Juan's experiences and perception related to parent involvement, it is clear he feels strongly about his responsibility to make the connection between the home and school. Below is the captured conversation to illustrate his perceived *essence* of parent involvement.

Me: Describe for me what you believe is at the heart of parent involvement; what sense does it make to you as a working, Hispanic father in our rural community?

Juan: The heart of my involvement is to instill in my kids how important going to school is and getting their education. I want them to be successful and always listen to the teacher. I encourage them to do their best and know they must go to school. What I do is hard and I want them to do good in school and be more.

Me: Okay. How would you describe the most important basic parts of parent involvement related to your present experiences and future hopes for your children? What must it include?

Juan: I make sure my kids come to school and behave. The teachers make sure they are learning and together we work to help them become somebody.

(personal communication, July 21, 2016)

This part of our interview again takes us back to Juan's perceived role with regard to his child's education. He does see it as a relationship with the school with his role being the disciplinarian and father who ensures his children are present each day, while the teacher's role is to teach them. He finds importance in instilling the value of education for his children. Overall, this part of our final interview illustrates his perceived *essence* of parent involvement for his family.

Juan does mention a very important verb in his response that I wanted to pull from my data analysis. His perceived *essence* of parent involvement not only includes his responsibility of sending his children to school, but also to instill an understanding of how important education is for the child. He gives himself this expectation which I believe is a very powerful statement. Most responses from all participant interviews have been focused on specific tasks and other school-related responsibilities for the parent and teacher; however, this word represents a more emotional connection with parent involvement. It captures the *essence* of his perception.

**Fannie.** With our third and final interview, Fannie provided me with some great insight into her perceived *essence* of parent involvement as an African-American grandmother and aunt to six children who have come through our school over the years. The following excerpt is from the interview focusing on her thoughts relating to parent involvement with regard to the future and how this concept makes sense to her presently.

Me: Talk to me from the perspective of an African American grandmother and aunt raising six children in our rural community about how you understand parent involvement for you and your family? What sense does it make to you now and for the future?

Fannie: My grandkids are all my babies. I look after them and make sure I come to the school when y'all need me. If anybody needs me, they know to call me and I'll be here. I make sure they are fed and I send 'em on to school. I'm involved with everything that go on at this school. I come to eat with them and if y'all have something here, any kind of program, or any kind of anything. I do all I can to make sure they do what they're supposed to do at the school. I have raised these and then I have four other great grandchildren. I have spent my whole life raisin' kids. (personal communication, August 24, 2016)

As the researcher and principal of the school, this truly captures Fannie's perceived *essence* with regard to parent involvement. She makes sense of the concept by providing food, attendance to functions and events, and ensuring the children are following the rules and protocols of the school. For Fannie, the essence of parent involvement is simply being a primary caregiver for the basic needs of home life as well as supporting the school in any way she can at home.

**Simon.** Our third interview allowed Simon to speak frankly about his sense-making of the concept of parent involvement and how he understands it to be for his family.

Me: So, Mr. Simon, as an African American working father in our rural community, talk with me about how you understand parent involvement and what sense it makes to you?

Simon: As far as my kids are concerned, I feel that it's not hard to talk with the teachers and surely with me being lax, it's not hard for the teachers to be able to talk with the parent. And you know, if I hear anything that's alarming, I don't fly off the handle and say that's not my child. That's not my child. My child doesn't

do this. As a parent, you have to listen and you try to reevaluate what you can do to talk with the kid and put, you know, your heads together and come up with a solution. That's what I think.

Me: Okay, so you make sense of parent involvement as how you react to what teachers are trying to communicate with you?

Simon: Yes. And you just talk to them, your kids, about why they got a bad grade or whatever the case may be. We talk it out and sometimes my wife will handle it or sometimes she wants me to handle it. But you know, if you [students] want to be on the "A" honor roll, it's something they have to apply to, and my whole thing is give it some effort.

Me: Great, so you see the heart or essence of your understanding to be that you are there for your kids and talk with them through any tough times. But in the end, they have to want it to do well in school? Is that what I'm hearing you say?

Simon: Yes. But you know, so many of our kids in the community have parents that did not have anything when they was coming through. So how they gonna, you know, have to raise a kid and give them the right things, give them the foundation? With that bad foundation, that house is gonna eventually fall over, you know, or have some kind of damage done to it. I don't know, other than just keep trying to reach the kid. Just point them in the right direction. (personal communication, August 16, 2016)

Our interview continued, but this extracted conversation within it was powerful for me. Simon discussed talking with children, motivating them to do their best, and even how important building a foundation was for his understanding of parent involvement as an African-American father. He gave an analogy for comparison to the

role of a parent with their responsibility to be involved to that of laying a foundation for a house. Embedded in his perceived essence and sense-making of parent involvement, Simon finds value in conversation with his children and simply pointing his children in the right direction for their future.

### **Summary for *Essence***

Collecting data to capture the *essence* of parent involvement for the participants was a challenge. Many of the transcribed information used for developing the perceived *meaning* and *structure* of parent involvement for each participant seemed to complement the notion of *essence*. I did not want to restate the information for the other core themes and wanted to find a deeper focus and connection with this core theme. Using the horizontalization method for phenomenological data analysis, I was able to discover what I believe to be the spirit, or *essence*, of each participant's understanding of the concept parent involvement. Our third interview was the most engaging opportunity for the participants to discuss their own sense-making and understanding. After working to disaggregate the data by reducing and eliminating data that were irrelevant to my research question, I realized that I needed to go back and reevaluate my participants' words in this third interview specifically using the horizontalization method again in an effort to discover their perceived *essence*.

### **Intimidation Represented**

Aside from the above-stated themes found in each participant's perceived perception of parent involvement, one other theme emerged in two interviews conducted that I found important and directly related to the research described in this study's literature review. Two participants discussed the perception that teachers can be intimidating with regard to their tone and mannerisms. The participants' responses are

different in experience but similar in content. This theme is important to note as well due to its relationship with the literature review discussed in Chapter 2.

**Thelma and intimidation.** Thelma described the decision to move her children from a private school to a public school when they were younger. I asked her to talk about an experience – either positive or negative – that would help illustrate her own perceptions with regard to parent involvement.

Thelma: I want my kids to have the best education. I want my son and daughter not to be fearful of the teacher because my daughter had a teacher who would scare her when she couldn't express what she was saying. Like, if we had a parent-teacher conference, the teacher had her scared. She wouldn't say anything.

Me: Tell me more about exactly what was happening in the parent-teacher conference to make your daughter scared of the teacher.

Thelma: Her teacher was scaring her. Using her voice, that tone, and her mannerisms, and body language.

Me: Okay. And so are you feeling that a teacher may come across as intimidating at a parent-teacher conference with how they say things and how they are acting during a conference?

Thelma: Mm-hmm (affirmative). My child tell me that and I perceived it. In her tone and her body language. Body language says a lot.

Me: So your daughter was feeling this way in school in general or was this mostly at conferences?

Thelma: Both. You know your child and when you ever went to a parent-teacher conference and you know your child how they would act because that teacher intimidates 'em. Really scare 'em to the point they can't even express

themselves. And that's why I get involved. Because I'm like this, you're not gonna intimidate my child because you don't intimidate me. (personal communication, August 4, 2106)

It is apparent that Thelma has had a memorable experience with what she called intimidation from a teacher who shaped her perception and type of involvement. In the earlier section specific to *structure*, Thelma spoke about her role pertaining to communication as being parent-driven, and this conversation may allude to why she feels it is her responsibility to talk to her child about his/her day. She has had a negative experience with intimidation from a teacher directed at her child and this has made her want to be more involved the best way she can.

**Fannie and intimidation.** During our second interview focusing on a specific experience that has shaped her perception, Fannie discussed a time when one of her grandchildren was getting into trouble quite frequently, and she was being called to the school on a weekly basis. She described, "That teacher would call me and try to make me feel like I needed to do something . . . like I wasn't doing what I was supposed to do fast enough. She was trying to scare me" (Fannie, personal communication August 18, 2016). I prompted her to tell me more about this specific situation. She added, "That teacher was hell-bent on making me feel like it was my fault. But she didn't scare me. I was doing everything I could – and all my grandkids know I mean business" (Fannie, personal communication, August 18, 2016). This theme of intimidation was clear with Fannie's past experience at the school.

Other than this incident, Fannie had no other recollection of feeling scared or intimidated by a teacher. However, given that another participant described a similar experience directly related to the theme of intimidation, I felt it necessary to include it in

my data analysis.

### **Summary**

As the principal of the school upon which this study was conducted, I found it to be important to bring to light the underlying *meanings, structures, and essences* of lived experiences of the bicultural families we serve with regard to parent involvement. These lived experiences contribute to their overall perception of how they are supporting their child to be successful at school. The interviews conducted with the five parents allowed me the opportunity to gain tremendous awareness with any disconnect and/or connection between teachers' and parents' understanding of parent involvement.

Using Seidman's (2006) in-depth interview structure, I spoke with each parent three separate times with each interview having a slightly different focus. Through this process, I collected data with regard to each parent's *meaning, structure, and essence* of parent involvement. This interview process gave me the opportunity to ask spontaneous questions in an effort to gather specific, individualized lived experiences from each participant. I was able to see patterns with the responses and collect data more personal in nature, giving us the opportunity to discuss other important aspects of their perception of parent involvement.

## Chapter 5: Implications for Future Studies

According to the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (2006), parent involvement in education is central to student success in all facets of their experience with school. The article argues that no matter their income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2006). The question I posed as the researcher of this study, “What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school,” allowed me to discuss with families from various backgrounds of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic statuses what parent involvement actually means to them. As Patel and Stevens (2010) suggested, “In order to successfully promote parent involvement, we need a better understanding of factors that facilitate or impede cooperation or collaboration by parents and teachers” (p. 116). With this qualitative phenomenological study, I interviewed four parents and one primary caregiver with the purpose of understanding how each person perceives parent involvement and what sense it makes to them based on past and present experiences as well as what it means for their child’s future. An important factor in this study was that each of my participants interviewed identified as non-White (Hispanic or African American) and as working-class citizens of our rural community. This chapter explores the discussion of findings, the theoretical framework as it relates to the data presented in Chapter 4, the limitations of the study, and future implications.

The findings of this study reveal that there were many similarities with emerging themes when establishing the *meaning*, *structures*, and *essences* of perceived parent

involvement between participants. Attendance at functions and events held at the school as well as helping with homework assignments was a consistent point of reference when the participants discussed their understanding of what parent involvement means to them with regard to the core theme of *meaning*. In relation to the perceived core theme of the *structures* of parent involvement, the subthemes of role and communication emerged recurrently within our discussions. The families interviewed frequently discussed their role versus the teacher's role concerning parent involvement and what they believe parent involvement to be for their family. Further revealed was the subtheme of communication and its importance; even more, it became evident through my interviews with each participant that teacher-initiated communication is the driving force behind communication and parent involvement. This two-way *structure* of communication is often a reactive form of participation for parents and often driven by something the teacher has expressed initially pertaining to academics or behavioral concerns; however, each participant seemed content with their role in supporting their child with regard to the structure being mostly teacher-initiated conversations and communication format.

Finally, each participant was asked to discuss what parent involvement means to them when thinking about the past, present, and future aspirations for their own children in an effort to capture his/her perceived *essence*. This specific interview not only reiterated previous responses with regard to *meaning* and *structure*, but it also gave each participant the opportunity to synthesis their understanding. These data were unique to each participant, yet a similar pattern still emerged from the responses and truly exposes the disconnect in how our school measures and defines parent involvement with that of how our families measure and define parent involvement. This discrepancy leads me to the discussion of the findings.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

Strategies for improving parent involvement have become a focus of education policy at the local, state, and national levels; yet despite the national attention focused on parent involvement, a solution is still needed to translate federal policies into general practice at the school level (Desimone, 1999). Schools are increasingly being asked to serve diverse student populations and give special attention to improving the academic and social outcomes of racial-ethnic minority and low-income students; therefore, it is vital that we increase our understanding of how parent involvement best can be employed for all children (Epstein, 1992). Important to this study, the kinds of parent involvement that work best for low-income and bicultural families have yet to be determined empirically (Baker & Soden, 1997; Epstein & Lee, 1995).

Chapter 4 presented the analysis of data based on the interviews conducted with each parent or primary caregiver regarding their understanding of parent involvement. The nature of this phenomenological study allowed for specific and connecting themes to emerge from all five interviewees' statements as well as independent themes particular to select participants. Helping with homework, attending school conferences and events, and ensuring their child follows the school rules and behavior expectations were significant for the participants in this study when discussing perceptions of parent involvement. Furthermore, teacher-initiated communication concerning school academics and behavior and the role of the teacher versus the role of the parent were acknowledged as patterns across perceptions for the participants. Pervasively, these less-overt methods are not identified as parent involvement strategies noted by research nor are they recognized with high regard as parent involvement types by schools and teachers in our own communities. This is explored in more detail in the following section.

**Role construction.** The participants in this study all made a connection with helping at home with homework and ensuring the school rules were followed and upheld as a part of their role with parent involvement. According to Berger (1981), in America's pioneer years, the parents' role in the educational process was accepted with the close relationship between education and the rearing of children. Slaughter and Epps (1987) asserted that parents are the child's first teachers and play an essential role in developing the child's course toward achievement and behavior. Also, in a meta-analysis of the effects of parent involvement on minority students' academic achievement, Jeynes (2005) presented evidence that parent involvement (communicating with the school, checking homework, encouraging outside reading, and participating in school activities) benefited African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos more so than Asian Americans (as cited in Lee & Bowen, 2006). Throughout my interviews, this supportive behavior of helping with homework and keeping firm with behavior expectations was repeatedly stated as a form of involvement. These methods are not quantitatively measurable approaches to parent involvement but are how the participants perceive and understand their role with involvement. This view of parent role versus teacher role is further discussed to relate it to the current study.

Parental role construction is defined as parent beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow those beliefs (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Role construction for involvement is influenced by parent beliefs about how children develop, what parents should do to rear their children effectively, and what parents should do at home to help children succeed in school. It is developed from parent experiences over time with individuals and groups related to schooling which oftentimes include the

parent's personal experiences with schooling, prior experience with involvement, and ongoing experiences with others related to the child's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Drummond and Stipek (2004) studied parents of African-American and Latino elementary students and reported that role construction motivated parent involvement practices. They observed that parent ideas about appropriate roles in children's education were subject to social influence: When teachers offered recommendations about parental help with learning in specific areas, parent beliefs about the importance of their help in those areas increased. In this study looking to uncover the *meaning, structure, and essence* of bicultural parents through their lived experiences, role construction emerged similarly for each participant from the in-depth interview data. The pattern within this development of role construction was very similar from each participant. Their perceived role with regard to parent involvement is to help with homework, attend conferences, and ensure their child is following classroom and school rules. They are also looking to support the school with whatever teachers will ask of them; they are willing to comply and follow the directions of the teacher with regard to feedback on how to best help their child in school.

Furthering role construction, Chavkin and Williams (1993) asserted that several studies have reported that low-income minority parents often have different beliefs about parental roles in school involvement and are less involved in school activities than higher-income, nonminority parents (as cited in Desimone, 1999). This became evident when our discussions shifted to the structural aspects of parent involvement. From our conversations, I noted a pattern of role construction with the understanding of communication and establishing and supporting school expectations. My participants clearly defined their role as supportive to whatever the school rules enforced as well as

the role of the teacher is to teach. In order for the teacher's role to be effective, the role of a parent must be active. According to Watson et al. (2012), how parents perceived their roles could be a function of how the school organization treated them. Swap (1993) suggested that despite high verbal support for parent involvement, parents continue to be kept at a distance in most schools and maintained that parents value education and would like to be more involved, but their involvement is limited by the sense that their roles are distinct from the schools in the study. This evidence was also reflected in my interviews with every participant for this study. Teacher-initiated communication by means of established conferences or phone calls to the home regarding concerns with behavior or academics was perceived as the teacher's role, whereas the parent's role was to listen and support with follow-up either by helping at home with school academic material or using disciplinarian methods. One Hispanic father did mention that there is a dual responsibility with his analogy to harvesting a garden; however, he later made a clear distinction between his role as the parent and the teacher's role to teach his children. Overall, the participants in this study viewed their roles as being distinct from the role of the school.

Also significant for this study, Barnard (2004) found that parent reports of their involvement at home including reading, cooking, discussing, and going on outings with children were not significantly associated with student academic attainment. This is extremely important with data from my interviews revealing a strong perception of parent involvement as conversations and discussions prompted by the parent about school in general. Two parents specifically stated that asking about his/her day was a form of parent involvement for them. Again, this is another form of parent involvement that is not measurable, nor is it cited in research as an effective construct of parent involvement.

**Cultural capital discrepancies.** Differences in cultural capital may reduce the ability of parents to obtain social capital from the school even when they are able to come to the school. According to Lareau (2001), “When the habitus of the individual meshes with the habitus of the broader culture, it is often invisible” (p. 84). In contrast, when the habitus of parents visiting the school differs from that of the broader culture (dominant White, middle-class), they may feel less comfortable or feel less able to tap the potential of the school’s social and material resources (Lareau, 2001). Reduced financial resources may limit families’ abilities to provide educational materials and opportunities and may influence parent educational expectations for their children (Lareau, 2001).

Reduced and limited ability to help at home was revealed through conversations with the two Hispanic parents. Both explained that oftentimes due to their inability to help their children with homework or other school related material, they rely on older siblings or other family members. Low educational attainment may limit parents’ abilities to help their children with homework and their familiarity with educational resources available in the community. Both Hispanic parents also stated their limited experience with education as a student; neither had wide-ranging experiences as a child with their own parents’ involvement.

To further this lack of cultural capital with limited resources outside of the school, educational activities noted in the research by Ritblatt et al. (2002) such as extracurricular activities and even volunteering at school were nowhere noted in the data collection interview process with any of the participants for this study. When reflecting on their perceptions of parent involvement, resources such as these were never mentioned or even alluded to as a form of parent involvement to support their child’s academic success.

The limited experiences of the participants in this study strongly connect with the

theoretical framework upon which the study was grounded. The subtheme of *essence* was captured within this phenomenon that emerged throughout the study. It became very evident that due to the limited cultural capital, the participants' *essence* of parent involvement was supported with the overlapping themes of *meaning* and *structure*. Each participant repeatedly described their own perception of parent involvement with the same language and vision as that of what was captured in their ideas about the *meaning* and *structure* of parent involvement. Due to the theoretical framework of cultural capital and its premise, it became very difficult to separate *essence* from the participants' *meaning* and *structure*.

**Work schedules and limited time.** According to Weitock (1991), a parent's work schedule may also affect their level of involvement. According to the Families and Work Institute (1994), approximately two thirds of working parents with children under 18 years of age say they do not have enough time to meet their children's needs. Their involvement is limited for reasons like busy schedules or the belief that teaching is the teacher's job (Trotman, 2001). Evident in the interviews, this is especially true for one African-American father, Simon, who discussed his relentless work schedule that gives him little opportunity to be at school events. A pattern that emerged from the interviews with questions regarding past experiences as a child was that their own parents were what they called "not involved" due to demanding work schedules and limited time.

**Home discussion support.** In recent literature published, African-American parents were rated lower in their overall parental involvement levels (Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005). According to Sheldon (2002), when African-American parents are rated higher in their levels of parent involvement in comparison to other ethnic groups, it is generally in the home-involvement domain (as cited in Graves & Wright, 2011). All

three African-American participants in this study connected their understanding and perception of parent involvement as some form of home communication or disciplinarian efforts to support the teachers and school. As stated in the above discussion with role construction and home communication, this form of parent involvement is most used by this study's participants who are all from bicultural backgrounds and are of low-income socioeconomic status.

There is a dichotomous relationship considering the research outlined in Chapter 2 reveals attendance to school functions and a presence at the school is related to the institutionalized, White middle-class definition of parent involvement; and contrastingly, the idea of having conversations about school and helping with homework may be more culturally driven and socioeconomically driven parent involvement techniques that are not often recognized by schools as forms of parent involvement. As noted in Chapter 2, Bakker and Denessen (2007) focused their attention on the "concept of parent involvement" and argued the term itself is "value-loaded" and with its focus on activities like parent-teacher conferences; it illustrates how schools honor certain types of middle-class family culture and discourse, leading us to an "ideal type" of parent involvement which almost by definition excludes other, mainly lower-class, parents who are missing the required social and cultural capital to comply with educators' vision of the ideal parent role (Bakker & Denessen, 2007). Based on the interviews with the five participants and their *meaning* of parent involvement, this ideation of involvement as a conference at school or having attendance to a function holds true even in their eyes; however, the notion of conversations and help at home has also found its way into their personal definition and *meaning* of parent involvement with every participant alluding to it throughout our discussions.

Regardless of the reasons parents do not visit the school, teachers may interpret their lack of involvement as a general lack of interest in their children's education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Results from Jeynes's (2005) series of meta-analyses have challenged the traditional image of parental involvement. The meta-analysis indicates that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle, such as maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children, and parental style. Upon this study's analysis, it is evident that attending functions at school is one form of overt parental involvement; however, the majority of perceived involvement types are subtle in nature and cannot truly be measured by means of the school data systems (Jeynes, 2005). The data from this study in Elle, North Carolina regarding bicultural perceptions of parent involvement parallel the meta-analysis conclusions. This is detrimental to our minority populations working to make a concerted effort to be involved the best way they know how because these teacher and school perceptions can change attitudes toward these populations in a negative manner.

### **Theoretical Framework Discussion**

This study found basis in two theories involving culture, capital, and race. Each is distinctive in its claim, yet they are interconnected as they both relate to the study's research with perceptions of parent involvement with varied backgrounds. These theories included Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and Olivos' (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction and Resistance in Parent Involvement.

#### **Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory**

One of Bourdieu's (1986) key positions on educational inequality is that students with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better in school than their otherwise-comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Cultural capital refers to cultural advantages that groups of people possess that benefit them within a particular social context (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept of cultural capital has been used to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of students coming from different social classes and their families' levels of engagement (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Furthermore and in combination with cultural capital, Bourdieu claimed that a person's habitus acknowledges the relational aspect of how cultural capital leads to advantages or disadvantages for children. Habitus is a system of dispositions that stem from social training and past experiences. It refers to how an individual's past experiences and opportunities create ways of being and knowing (Bourdieu, 1986). This is important to note for this specific study given that each participant in this study was asked to discuss their past experiences as a child concerning the concept of parent involvement. They were also asked to make sense of parent involvement given past and present experiences and also asked to express their future hopes and aspirations regarding parent involvement. All of the participants directly stated that as a child, they lived in either a poverty-stricken situation or one with a lower income status – whether it consisted of either working parents or that of a single-parent home. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of habitus also incorporates a sense of one's place which can be interpreted as how comfortable a family feels in a school setting. Therefore, habitus is linked to the accumulation of cultural capital over time and is embedded in social and historical ways of talking, acting, interacting, and recognizing one's belonging in particular settings – known as the field (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Given that each of the participants came from very similar past situations with experiences of poverty and limited to no parent involvement from their own childhood, their way of perceiving parent involvement with their children is indicative of the data presented. They feel their role, or place, with

involvement is to ensure domestic needs are handled, such as discipline and even dinner, while the teacher's role is to teach and ensure learning occurs.

Based on my conversations and each participant's construction of how they make sense of the term parent involvement, their past experiences play a tremendous part in their role as a parent today. All of the participants either stated there was no parent involvement or it was very limited due to work schedules and/or lack of knowledge. This connection with their own limited cultural capital could be viewed as a strong predictor as to why their current role with parent involvement is focused more on subtle and less of the dominant, institutionalized, White middle-class methods that are measured in more quantifiable ways. This concept of cultural capital can explain the type of relationships families have with schools, how comfortable families are in connecting with teachers, and how easily or effectively families apply the capital they possess (Laureau & Horvat, 1999). All of the participants in this study appeared to wait to be informed from the teacher if there were concerns or issues instead of initiating conversations about their own concerns. Repeatedly, they view their understanding of parent involvement as supporting whatever the school or teacher communicates to them as being important or necessary for success. This truly captured the *essence* of each participant in the study.

For the families in this study, it is apparent through our discussions that they are working-class members of the community who are on the lower end of the socioeconomic status due to unemployment or lower waged labor jobs. The cultural capital of these bicultural families is limited in that much of our discussions were about supporting methods at home and attending conferences and a few other events held at the school. A language barrier was a huge constraint for one Hispanic mom who relied heavily on her oldest child to translate. I believe the lack of discussion about parent-

initiated conversations and meetings held at the school speak volumes concerning how cultural capital plays a huge role in the development of their perceptions of parent involvement. Due to their backgrounds, both culturally and socioeconomically, these families are abiding by their understood role within their child's education that is inherent in our society. This discussion leads me to Olivos' (2010) Theory: Paradigm of Tension.

### **Olivos' Theory: Paradigm of Tension**

According to Olivos (2010), there is an ever-present struggle for power between bicultural communities and the schools that serve them within our public education system (p. 99). He argued there are conflicting interests and clashing assumptions on the part of the school system that prohibit the success of low-income bicultural students as well as the authentic population of their parents (Olivos, 2010). This framework, as discussed in Chapter 2, takes into account the socioeconomic and historical factors as a means of studying the relationship between bicultural parents and the institution of public education. It also argues that conflict figures significantly in how low-income bicultural parents relate to oppressive school policies and practices.

For each participant in this study, there was a pervasive pattern that emerged related to the notion of these oppressive school policies and practices tied with Olivos' (2010) theory. There was a lack of conversation about any parent involvement that may criticize or critique the school or teacher. The participants in this study viewed their role as one to support the school's policies and plan. Each had a statement referring to their meaning of parent involvement as helping at home or attending some conference or event at the school. Both of these actions are reactive to what the school has planned or created for families as part of their involvement. Even the discussions that the participants participated in with their children were to find out about their day in an effort to ensure

they are adhering to the school's policies and procedures.

Olivos' (2010) theory proposes that positive tension, which refers to those instances in which historically disempowered groups disrupt the dominant institutions to make way for alternative ways of thinking and living, is "the linking of social and civic action to that of education advocacy" (p. 105). It would require individuals to take critical actions in the task of unmasking the contradictions so they become apparent to the school community (Olivos, 2010). Olivos stated,

I propose this paradigm to challenge past research which as by and large been centered on identifying those factors within low-income bicultural families which preclude their children's academic and social success and which has been focused on identifying levels and scopes of involvement that in essence do nothing to change the school or the school system but rather work only to promote the idle attendance of parents at school functions. (p. 106)

The African-American and Hispanic families interviewed for this study are all operating with the same ideology that their responsibility and ultimately the essence of parent involvement lie within their ability to help at home, attend school-created conferences and events, react to school and teacher-initiated communication regarding academic or behavior concerns, and ensure their role as disciplinarian supports the teacher's job – which is to teach.

For two of the participants in the study, the conversation turned to experiences of intimidation. According to Olivos' (2010) Theory: A Paradigm of Tension, Contradiction, and Resistance, tension can be both positive and negative in nature. Both of these parents experienced a time when a teacher was using both verbal and nonverbal language to make them feel less knowledgeable and supportive in their own child's

schooling experience. According to Olivos, whether bicultural parents feel threatened, intimidated, or unwanted, the issue remains that these parents have not been inclined to visibly participate at their children's schools in large numbers. He mentioned, "In order to develop authentic relationships with bicultural parents, it is important to be aware of how particular groups perceive their interactions with the schools and with school personnel" (Olivos, 2010, p. 55). This story of intimidation was discussed by only two participants but, as indicated in empirical studies and research, does warrant conversation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Given that this study was conducted in a small, rural community in North Carolina with a small sample of five participants, one might consider this as a limitation to the study. Each of the participants was purposefully selected by the researcher (also the principal) and could be considered as a validity concern. Furthermore, the interviewer for the study was the researcher; therefore, the data may be viewed as constructed through the researcher's point of view with regard to theme development and data analysis.

For this study, the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. According to Creswell (1998), an investigator will use his or her own abilities and intuitions throughout most of the research effort which can be seen as a limitation to qualitative research and interview data collection. With the use of a phenomenological study using the interview process, the range of people and sites from which the sample is selected should be fair to the larger population (Seidman, 2006). For this study, five parents were interviewed without the idea of generalizability for all families with similar backgrounds in cultural and socioeconomic status to tell the story of their lived

experiences, thus creating perceptions pertaining to parent involvement. Although limited participants could be interpreted as a limitation to this study, the notion of generalizability was not a priority.

Last, the participants were reconstructing their own experiences from the past and present and even those hopes for the future with regard to parent involvement. Their stories must be taken at face value as the truth from which they have lived. There is the limitation with regard to honesty; however, I did work to alleviate this concern by interviewing each participant three separate times in an effort to triangulate their thoughts and reflections to find patterns and themes.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice and Research**

Watson et al. (2012) stated that effective parent involvement depends on various factors which include culture, socioeconomic status, and the personal experience of parents. As noted with Epstein (1992), it is therefore imperative that we increase our understanding of how parent involvement best can be employed for all children, especially for those at risk of educational failure. Research reveals that the kinds of parent involvement that work best for low-income and at-risk students have yet to be determined empirically or considered systematically by policymakers. If we listen closely to parents, their wishes, and hopes for the future, we find that there are lessons and suggestions that emanate from a deep sense of caring. Educators must be able to view such listening opportunities as an asset in order to be the best educators possible. This study allowed five families the chance to reflect and be open about how they perceive parent involvement given their specific situation. Through this perceptual data, it becomes glaringly apparent that there is a need for further conversation between parents and schools about *who* initiates *what* for meaningful involvement to occur; that is,

meaningful involvement for students, teachers, and parents.

Engaging parents in respectful, meaningful, reciprocal avenues of communication is a commitment to the civic-minded, democratic, community-centered principles our schools were, ideally, founded upon. Schools and educators who are willing to put aside assumptions and preconceptions about parenting and the abilities of children and their families based on race and class will go a long way toward moving education forward. Inclusive, culturally relevant models that accurately represent the perspective of parents will help in future expanding educator and policymaker perspectives about parents, children, and the educational process in useful ways which will allow everyone involved to more closely approximate an ideal partnership on behalf of children.

Olivos (2010) reminded us that “We must make a distinction between what constitutes ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ parent involvement in order to understand the tensions that are present in schools” (p. 104). He added,

Moreover, we must identify those practices within schools which function to preclude the academic success of children of color and the meaningful involvement of their parents and communities in order to begin to conceptualize the possibilities of having bicultural parents involved at the schools at levels that will transform the public school system to finally serve their children’s interest.  
(Olivos, 2010, p. 104)

This study shows the need for a more open, honest, and inclusive conversation with all families about what meaningful parent involvement means in an effort to support the whole child. With teachers and schools waiting on parents to become what they perceive as involved and parents working as hard as they can to be what they perceive as involved without open dialogue that is constructive and meant to move forward, this disconnect

will continue. We as educators must begin the conversation as part of our professional responsibility.

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Appendix A  
Phone Call for Selection

You are being asked to participate in the research study aimed to answer the research question: *What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural North Carolina school?* I am excited that you are interested in participating and look forward to speaking with you very soon. In an effort to prepare for our first interview, I would like to provide you with some information regarding the interview questions. We will begin the first interview with questions pertaining to your past experiences directly related to parent involvement. You will be asked to share stories, lived experiences and thoughts around the concept of parent involvement from your childhood, teen years up until the present time as a primary caregiver with a student attending our school.

Again, I look forward to our conversations and please feel free to call with any concerns or questions regarding the study.

Respectfully,

Kate Smith

Appendix B  
Interview Protocol

## Introduction

You have been selected to be a participant in this study regarding the concept of parent involvement. My goal is to speak with you and other willing participants to discuss thoughts and lived experiences pertaining to parent involvement perceptions. This study does not aim to evaluate your past or present strategies and experiences with parent involvement. Instead, I am trying to learn more about perceptions of parent involvement and their relationship to families with varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

## Interview Introductory Protocol

*To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only you and I will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned for this interview to last about one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I will use to guide our conversation, but this process will certainly not be limited to those questions. Today will mark the \_\_\_\_\_ interview of the three-part interview process.*

Appendix C

Consent Form for Participation

## Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Title of Study:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

- You are being asked to participate in a research study that will work to uncover perceptions of parent involvement with primary caregivers of varied race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the criteria for the study regarding race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status as stated on the questionnaire you provided. This study invites primary caregivers of all backgrounds to participate in the interview process in an effort to attain perceptual data.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

### Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to answer the research question: *What are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of parent involvement by bicultural families in a rural NC school?* Bicultural-families of non-White ethnicity.
- This research may be published as a doctoral dissertation in the ProQuest search engine for other researchers to use.

### Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:
  1. Participate in a three part interview process consisting of three separate interviews, each with a different focus as it relates to your experiences with parent involvement.
  2. Converse with the researcher for approximately 60 minutes regarding thoughts and lived experiences.
  3. Return for each of the three interviews over a 3 week timeline beginning in June and ending in July.
  4. Agree to meet at a location that both the researcher and participant feel at ease.

### Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. There may be unknown risks.

### Benefits of Being in the Study

- The researcher, also the principal of the school, will have a chance to hear firsthand accounts of stories that reflect both positive and/or negative experiences from your past and present that have developed perceptions from varied race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

- You will be afforded the opportunity to discuss thoughts and lived experiences related to parent involvement. There will be occasions in the interviews for you to tell your story regarding parent involvement without worry or fear of repercussion.

#### Confidentiality

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. All recorded and transcribed data will be erased/destroyed upon completion of the entire study. No information in any report published will be included to make it possible to identify any participant.

#### Payments

- There will be no payment or reimbursement for participating in this research study.

#### Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

#### Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Kate Smith, by email XXXXXX or by telephone at XXXXXX. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.
- If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them by completing a Participant Complaint Form, which can be found on the IRB website \_\_\_\_\_?

#### Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the researcher.

Subject's Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Subject's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_