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FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH
STUDY OF TITLE I PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research study used a critical perspective to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools and to foster awareness among Title I parents about individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in school sponsored activities. The study looked specifically at Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement at a public elementary school. The theoretical framework of critical theory provided the lens for which this study was guided. Semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and monthly meetings were used to learn Title I parents' perspectives about their participation in parental involvement activities and to support their decision in raising their own awareness about their existing roles at the school.

Several findings emerged from this study which explored Title I parents' perceptions about their involvement and also their awareness of individual and social factors hindering their involvement. The four findings that emerged from parents' interviews and group discussions include: 1) parents' desire to understand the Title I program at their school; 2) parents' desire for increased personal communication between home and school; 3) parents' perceptions of involvement; and 4) parents' identified barriers to involvement. Additional findings include: parents' role in planning a Title I program; parents' active participation with homework; parents' involvement in non-school sponsored activities; and how an unwelcoming atmosphere at the school affects parent participation. Based on these findings, implications for practice and recommendations for future research are discussed in the following fields: elementary education and adult education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose of this research study. It begins by presenting background information about parental involvement issues in the public school system and those parents marginalized within it. Next, is an overview of perceptions of parental involvement by parents, educators and school systems, an overview of program planning models which may increase parental involvement, the purpose of the study, significance of the study and the research questions guiding the study. Finally, it concludes with a definition of terms, assumptions, and limitations of the study.

Background to the Problem

As the educational system within the United States began to change and evolve during the nineteenth century, the issue of parents becoming involved within the education of their children was also impacted. Parents, educators, and schools all began to understand the need for and the positive outcomes associated with parental involvement as it related to student achievement and success in the classroom. Many studies have been completed highlighting the relationship between parental involvement and positive academic outcomes (Feuerstein, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999); however, most of these studies report only about involvement of the middle and upper-class parents. Unfortunately, the voices of

the lower and working-class parents about parental involvement issues often are unheard within the educational literature.

Since the American educational system is currently based upon a White, middle to upper-class socioeconomic status (SES) and value system, parents marginalized within our society are also often marginalized within the school system. An assumption by the school system is being made that all parents, regardless of culture, SES, and value systems, should be able to participate within parental involvement activities at the school like parents from the dominant group (Daniel-White, 2002; Griffith, 1998).

Unfortunately, without the same knowledge or resources as their middle- to upper-class peers, parents from lower and working-class backgrounds do not have the same advantages to navigate effectively within the educational system. Parents of all cultures, socioeconomic statuses and value systems must be included equally within the involvement of their children's education to have a positive affect on their education. School systems must adapt to meet the needs of the non-dominant group of parents if they want them to be involved.

Unfortunately, schools within the United States are built upon a middle-class system of beliefs and values present within the larger, dominant society. Not surprisingly, educators within school systems often support its ideals because they are familiar and comfortable operating within such a system. In relation to parental involvement, Lareau (1987) acknowledges: "Generally, the evidence demonstrates that the level of parental involvement is linked to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yields in American society" (p. 81). Therefore, parents familiar with the middle-class value system and who operate within its

system daily are more likely to support its system by participating in school-related educational activities. Also, middle and upper-class parents view education as a shared process, whereby they feel comfortable taking part in decision making processes at the school and questioning any element of the school system they deem necessary (Lareau, 1987). Middle and upper-class parents have more flexibility and resources to accommodate educator and school requests for participation thus gaining the acknowledgement of the school system as being concerned parents (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Conversely, Lareau & Shumar (1996) report how lower and working-class parents often have constraints, such as work, income, transportation, child care, and educational levels which interfere with their participation in school-related activities of their children. Unfortunately, these constraints were often viewed by educators and schools as an unwillingness of these parents to participate in parental involvement activities when in reality, it suggests a misunderstanding of the marginalized parents needs for participation. Fine (1993) states: "Parental involvement is an issue of power, and power is not equally distributed across social groups. But because power relations are rooted in the larger inequalities of American society, they are sometimes not noticed" (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Supporting the notion that middle-class and upper-class parents are more involved in parental involvement activities because of their familiarity with the school's middle class value system is a study conducted by Feuerstein's (2000). In this study, parents of lower and working classes participated less frequently than parents in middle and higher classes. This decreased participation of lower and working class parents may be

attributed to their dissimilar values, beliefs, and practices from the school system. Additionally, Feuerstein's (2000) study illustrates how often times parents of low-SES have a different value system than those held by the school and do not feel comfortable involving themselves completely in their children's education. Unless school systems become more aware of the needs of those parents being marginalized within its system by understanding their needs, little accomplishment will be made in fostering their participation within parental involvement activities.

Many working-class and lower-class parents do not believe that it is their place to interfere with the school. A dominant explanation for this non-interference of these parents may be related to their or their parents' negative experiences with the school system. Cullingford & Morrison (1999) report:

Many schools are dealing with children of parents who are themselves the children of parents, who are themselves the children of parents whose experience of school, whose experience of life has been nothing but depression and failure and there is an expectation of failure and there is an expectation of schools not being sympathetic, of teachers just wanting to label you as a troublemaker or whatever. (p. 260)

When parents have been faced with challenges in their daily lives as well as within the educational realm, it may be difficult for them to place themselves in a situation where they feel they may ultimately fail again. Instead, it is much safer for lower and working-class parents to allow the schools to educate their children without having much say in the matter.

Lareau (1987) acknowledges that these parents view education as "...a discrete process that takes place on the school grounds, under the direction of a teacher" (p. 79). These parents viewed educators as professionals who were capable of educating their children without any of their involvement. Besides, as mentioned previously, if school systems wanted marginalized parents to be more involved, they would have acknowledged their constraints of work, income, transportation, child care, and educational levels, which may be hindering their involvement and provide solutions to such constraints to allow these parents to participate in parental involvement activities.

Perceptions of Parental Involvement

Presently, the literature on parental involvement focuses primarily on reporting deterrents to parental involvement based upon perceptions held by the school system and educators, not the perceptions of parents (Daniel-White, 2002; Lewis & Forman, 2002). The limited literature focusing on parents' own perceptions of their involvement to explain why they are unable to participate often contradicts with reasons stated by educators and the school system and is solely presented to correlate parental involvement with positive test scores (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Feuerstein, 2000; Izzo et al., 1999). The need to understand why lower- and working-class parents, those from different cultures, and value systems are not being involved needs to be explored and studied from these parents' perspectives, not those of educators and the school system. Unfortunately, those are the views that are prevalent in the literature and will be presented now to understand the structuring of our school system based upon the dominant society.

Educator perceptions about parent involvement tend to conform to those perceptions held by the school system. Many educators discourage parents being actively involved with in-school activities. In a research study completed by Lewis & Forman (2002) teachers in the Metro school reported:

Teachers were not discouraging all forms of parental involvement (e.g., they were not discouraging parent involvement in school activities at home) but were trying to assert control over their classrooms and had come to see parents as a challenge to that. (p. 5)

Also, some teachers feel threatened by the presence of parents in their classrooms and will try to avoid such activities if at all possible (Lewis & Forman, 2002). Lewis & Forman (2002) document how teachers of a primarily middle-class district with a high percentage of Caucasian population feel unappreciated and constantly struggle over power within the educational system. Teachers in this district viewed parents as problems and avoided parental involvement activities in their classrooms as much as possible.

Additionally, educators viewed differing cultural and belief systems among marginalized parents negatively. These parents reported that few accommodations were made by the school system to support their limited English proficiency, thus sending them negative messages about their own cultures (Pena, 2000). With parents experiencing such perceptions about the values of their own families, it's no wonder they do not want to become more involved in their children's education, both at school and at home. As teachers come to understand the parents of the students in their classrooms, they are more likely to make a better effort to understand their cultural differences, SES,

and value systems so they can appropriately involve parents in activities instead of discouraging involvement (Pena, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

The literature exploring marginalized parents' own perceptions about parent involvement is limited. Not surprisingly, this literature about parent perceptions presents a different perspective than reported within the school system and educators' perspectives. A majority of parents state that they do not become involved because of difficulties they encounter based on social class factors including, but not limited to the following: cultural differences and beliefs, SES, and the educational system as based on middle-class values (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Daniel-White, 2002; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Cultural differences have been identified as hindering participation in parental involvement activities. For example, Daniel-White (2002) reported how parents in Costa Rica were discouraged from teaching their children how to read because "...they [teachers] felt parents could not get it right" (p. 46). Additionally, other Latino parents did not believe it was their responsibility to educate their children academically; it was the school's duty (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). In contrast, the American school system advocates parental involvement including teaching children academic basics, such as number and letter recognition, before they enter school. Also, parents' academic responsibilities continue once children begin school as parents are expected to participate in helping their children complete nightly homework assignments. Unfortunately, parents of different cultures may be hindered when completing homework activities with their children because they can't fully comprehend English, or do not understand the material being taught, or being involved with homework isn't part of their culture (Pena,

2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). School systems need to raise their own awareness of the different cultural beliefs surrounding parental involvement so they can better understand how to involve these parents within our country's educational system.

In addition, parents of differing classes and value systems from the school may not feel comfortable participating in their children's education (Feuerstein, 2000). These parents sometimes feel unwelcome in the classroom and at school governance functions because they are perceived as inferior to parents who are from a middle-to upper-class socioeconomic system (Lewis & Forman, 2002). Also, since parents may have had negative experiences with educators and administrators in the past, these parents may be less likely to be involved at the school (Lewis & Forman, 2002). Furthermore, these negative feelings held by the parents may interfere with their own participation in parental involvement activities.

Additionally, parents of children receiving Title I services are another group often marginalized within the school system. Title I is a federally funded program within state school districts that offer supplemental support and remediation for students in the basic skill areas of reading and math. Often times, the students receiving Title I services are from lower- and working-class backgrounds, different cultures and values systems, thus making them marginalized within the school system. Studies have supported that a large percentage of schools receiving federal funds for Title I services have a high number of students receiving free or reduced lunches (Sunderman & Mickelsen, 2000). This is important to note since this study will be focusing on parents of Title I students.

In summary, while a certain amount of literature does exist stating the differences in perceptions on parental involvement among the school system, educators and parents;

interestingly, little research has been conducted to better understand the differences in perceptions on parental involvement among marginalized, Title I parents. Title I parents often fall within the marginalized category because they are usually not in the dominant group of the school system in relation to their socioeconomic status, value system, and cultural beliefs or practices.

This overview of literature clearly portrays that there are differences in the perceptions of educators and parents. Unfortunately, the perceptions of educators are accepted as the norm within the educational field because the school system is regarded as the dominant power structure. Not only is it time to give Title I parents, marginalized because of their SES, cultures and beliefs, and value systems, more opportunity and authority to voice their perceptions about what may enhance or hinder their own participation, but also to actively involve them in exploring their own perceptions and understanding how they can positively increase their participation in school-related activities. Such involvement would ensure the voices of these marginalized parents are heard and acted upon within their own district to create a more inclusive parental involvement plan.

Program Planning for Increased Parental Involvement

This section of the chapter includes an overview of the classical, naturalistic, and critical models of program planning. These models were reviewed for the purpose of formulating a model or combination of program planning models which may increase parental involvement of Title I parents within school-related activities.

Classical Planning Model

Ralph W. Tyler's (1949) classical viewpoint of program planning is based upon the tenets of behaviorist theory and therefore contains many of its beliefs. The questions that are answered within this model deal with understanding the educational objectives of the organization: what experiences will allow learners to meet these objectives; how will these experiences be organized; and how can we assess whether or not these objectives have been met (Tyler, 1949). These questions are followed in a linear plan that was designed by the program planner and was based on the needs of the organization.

The learners within the program are not consulted about their needs during this process; instead the needs or objectives of the sponsoring organization are the only needs that are important throughout the planning stage of this process. Additionally, the organization and the program planner devise the learning experiences they believe are needed to direct their learners to attain the pre-determined set of objectives. The program planner is believed to possess expert knowledge of the program planning process and thus his or her learning is assumed to be transmitted unto the learner. Once the program is completed, the learning objectives will be evaluated by measuring whether or not the learning objectives have been met.

Naturalistic Planning Model

Cyril O. Houle's (1972) naturalistic viewpoint of program planning centers around the basic assumption that before any program planning can begin, the planner must recognize and understand the context in which the plan is to be implemented. This situation-specific type of program planning allows the learners' needs to guide the learning process after the organization's needs have been identified. This process does

not follow a linear set of prescribed steps thus allowing the educational activities to change as different learner needs are realized.

The program planner in this planning model is able to utilize his past experiences and intuition to sort through the information gathered about the sponsoring organization and learners' needs in order to create a program and activities conducive to meeting the needs of both parties. Throughout the program, decision points are used to revisit objectives identified before the program began to ensure that they are being met. If they are not, the program planner can use this information to change the direction of the program's activities to ensure both the needs of the organization and the learners are being met. Evaluations are employed to assess if the needs are being met during the decision points and also, after the program has been implemented and concluded to assess their experiences in the program and whether or not they were useful to the learners

Critical Planning Model

John Forester's (1989) critical viewpoint of program planning focuses on acquiring a democratic program which allows marginalized voices to be heard throughout the planning, implementation, and conclusion of the planning process. This model often places the program planner in the precarious position of balancing the needs of the sponsoring organization with the needs of the learners in this program. According to Forester, in order for this balance to occur, the program planner must investigate and understand who has the power before planning can begin and thus utilize this knowledge to plan accordingly. For instance, if the program planner understands the different needs of the stakeholders and the power they have within the organization, he can use this information to perhaps gain the proper resources or information to enhance the program.

Most likely, the objectives and the needs of the stakeholders will change throughout the process so the program planner must ensure that all voices are being heard, especially those of the marginalized learners. This process can be very political at times so the program planner must anticipate any problems that may occur and identify who should be consulted in helping solve these problems. Additionally, because this process is political, the program planner must also recognize his own power within this process and ensure that he is utilizing his power to support the learners' needs.

Planning for Parental Involvement

The most effective model of program planning that would allow Title I parents to work together and implement a program for increased parental involvement would incorporate the elements of several critical theorists. Forester's (1989) model supports many of the critical theorists' assumptions within the adult education field, such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Michael Apple. First and foremost, the program planner within this critical model must understand how planning a program is both a political and social act. This involves the planner recognizing the varying power structures, goals, and objectives of the participants and including them in the planning process in order for the program to be successful.

Second, and critically important, the program planner within this model must understand the importance of raising awareness of the power or influence of the dominant school system as described by Freire's (1970). Additionally, the concept of raising awareness among parents about the dominant school system and its power and how it may affect parental involvement should also be a part of the implemented program. By raising awareness about these unfair practices, the researcher is allowing the voices of the

Title I parents to be heard and acted upon to create a more conducive environment in the school for parental involvement to occur. Apple (2000) and Giroux (2001) also support this challenging of the unequal power structure operating between the school system and the parents for increased inclusion of those marginalized within the system.

Hart (1990) offers a model of program planning that uses participant reflection of experiences, in this case Title I parents, to guide the development of a successful program. Again, this model has the potential to encourage parents to reflect and discuss their own experiences with the school system and consider how it may or may not be affecting their own participation. This reflection process may also lead to raising awareness among the participants about the existing power of the school system and its influence upon their own parental involvement.

In summary, while this section of the chapter provided an overview of the classical, naturalistic, and critical models of program planning along with a brief description of how using elements of the critical models when planning a program may enhance parental involvement, it is discussed in much greater depth in the next chapter. Additionally, the discussion about the critical models introduced some basic assumptions found among critical theorists in adult education; however, a broader discussion follows below as the theoretical framework for this study is introduced.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is the theoretical framework that informed this study. It exposed the existing dominant power structure of the school system; and second, assisted in the

raising of awareness among marginalized, Title I parents within this school system. An overview of the tenets of critical theory in relation to these elements is discussed below.

According to the Frankfurt School, critical theory is defined as: "...emancipating people from the positivist 'domination of thought' through their own understandings and actions" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 130). Brookfield (2005) identifies three core assumptions of critical theory:

- 1) Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies in which economic inequity, racism, and class discrimination are empirical realities.
- 2) The way this state of affairs is reproduced and seems to be normal, natural, and inevitable (thereby heading off potential challenges to the system) is through the dissemination of dominant ideology.
- 3) Critical theory attempts to understand [and challenge] this state of affairs as a necessary prelude to changing it. (viii)

Two important terms often used when discussing critical theory are ideology and hegemony. As used within the critical theory literature, Brookfield (2005) defines ideology as: "...the system of beliefs, values and practices that reflects and reproduces existing social structures, systems, and relations" (p. 68); and hegemony as "...the process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us" (p. 93). Gramsci (1985) believes that hegemony is an educational phenomenon because every aspect of school, its beliefs, practices, and values all get transferred to students and parents within its system in numerous ways. The differentiating factor between ideology and hegemony is that ideological practices are still viewed as dominant

power structures and understood as such by society, while hegemonic practices are so embedded in a person's daily life that society accepts these practices as the norm, unaware of their oppressive nature.

This study attempted to encourage Title I parents to examine beliefs, values, and practices about the public school system and to possibly, explore their options about actions they may want to take to increase their own participation. As in this case, Merriam & Caffarella (1999) offer: "The 'system' in a critical theory analysis is an institution (such as government or education) that functions to reproduce the status quo, in particular the existing social class structure" (p. 351). By critically analyzing how parents perceive the public school system, the researcher hoped to raise awareness among parents about the school's dominant power structure and facilitate group discussions with parents who may be involved in incorporating a more effective parental involvement policy within the district.

Parents may have already been aware of the dominant power structure within the school system, however, the researcher uncovered and explored what parents thought and felt about how the system was operating. In other words, the researcher was involved in understanding how Title I parents truly felt about parental involvement at the school in relation to the school system's beliefs, values, and practices. Ways in which parents can take action to increase their own involvement within the school by allowing it to be more inclusive of the above mentioned social factors were also investigated within the study.

Freire (1970) asserts the importance of raising awareness among participants if they are to become essential players in changing the dominant institution. It can be described as: "The process in which people, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects,

achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-historical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 27). In this case, through awareness raising efforts, marginalized parents in a public elementary school within this study were made aware of the dominant ideology residing within their school system and how it positively or negatively affected their own participation based upon their own examination of their beliefs and the exploration of other parents’ beliefs within group sessions.

Critical theorists such as Apple (2000) and Giroux (2001) have been reporting on the unequal power structure existing in today’s educational system, and what needs to be done to make the school system more inclusive of those marginalized within its hierarchy. An injustice identified within today’s school system, which further marginalizes the non-dominant group, is the hidden curriculum of the school. Giroux (2001) defines the hidden curriculum as “...those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (p. 47). The hidden curriculum is present within the school system to transmit dominant ideologies onto students and parents within the system until those practices and beliefs ultimately become hegemonic in nature. How does someone begin to attack this hidden curriculum when it is so embedded within our school culture? Critical theorist, Freire (1970) believes the answer may be found by helping raise the awareness of those being marginalized in such a way as to allow them to become aware of their own oppression and take action to challenge and hopefully change their position in society. Parents within the school system may be aware of some ways the school may be hindering their involvement,

however, the researcher believes that their knowledge may be scarce and they may benefit from an exploration into its nature and simultaneously affect their own parental involvement.

Critical theory was a suitable framework for this action research study because it enabled me to first, examine the power structures present in the elementary school system; second, uncover how this dominant ideology affects Title I parents' perceptions and participation in relation to parental involvement, with a particular focus on the social class factors influencing and deterring involvement; third, to raise awareness of Title I parents about the school systems beliefs, practices, and value systems in relation to their own; and fourth, to challenge and work with parents to devise a plan to increase parental involvement in a public, elementary school.

Statement of Problem

Today's parents of public, elementary school students face a school system engulfed in beliefs, practices and values reinforcing its own existing power structure; unfortunately, the parental involvement practices of these schools also follow this dominant ideology. This is advantageous for those parents who are members of the dominant society and whose beliefs, practices, and values fall within this realm. Parents from the middle and upper classes are more likely to be involved in school-related activities with their children because they are familiar with how the school system operates and they are comfortable participating within this particular framework. However, parents operating within a system of beliefs, practices and values of lower and working classes are less likely to become involved with school-related activities because

of various individual or social deterrents hindering their involvement. Without making those parents marginalized within the system aware of the deterrents hindering their own involvement, their participation in school-related activities may continue to be non-existent. Ultimately, the parents not in the dominant class need to be given the opportunity to explore their own perceptions of parental involvement and what factors are influencing or deterring their own participation. Additionally, these parents need to be supported and offered a chance to raise their own awareness about these issues and possibly take action to become more involved and change the system to meet their own needs. By offering support and increasing their knowledge about parental involvement, hopefully these parents become active participants in school-related activities with their children and continue to challenge the system to be more inclusive of their beliefs, practices and value systems within the school system.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was twofold: a) to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools; and b) to foster awareness among Title I parents about the individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in public schools. This study examined how participants explored their own meaning of parental involvement, raised awareness about factors influencing their participation, and discussed what actions, if any, participants decided to take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement.

This study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) How do participants describe their perceptions of parental involvement?

- 2) How do awareness raising efforts impact parental involvement?
- 3) What action(s), if any, do participants take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement and possibly increase their own involvement?

Overview of Design and Methodology

This study was a qualitative, critical action research study. This qualitative study followed a descriptive design since the researcher explores descriptions about parental involvement perceptions of Title I parents. Patton (2002) recognizes: "Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (p. 39). In this particular study, the phenomenon of interest was the parents' perceptions of parental involvement and how the school system affected these perceptions, either negatively or positively. The researcher focused her attention on exploring Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement to foster parent participation within a particular school. The study examined how deliberate efforts to raise awareness affected how participants explored their own meaning of parental involvement and discussed what actions, if any, participants decided to take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement.

The research design chosen for this study was critical action research. Its underlying assumptions include: issues of power, active participation, giving voice to participants, raising awareness of those involved, and linking theory and research to practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002; Patton, 2002). This study followed the four phases of action research as described by Lewin (1952): plan, act,

observe, and reflect (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Since the phases of this critical action research study followed a spiraling pattern, critical reflection of the participants was used extensively to guide the direction of this study. For example, after the initial interviews were completed and the participants expressed areas of concern with parental involvement issues, the Title I parents decided, or planned, which issues to discuss and reflect upon during their first group session. As their awareness about these issues continued to develop, the parents decided to enter into the next phase, acting, to increase their own participation within school-related activities at the school. The phase of observation was also a continuous process throughout the study as the researcher continued to monitor and observe group discussions and interactions during the entire study. Also, as stated previously, the reflection phase was used to guide and change the direction of the study as needed. Essential to using this four-phase critical action research methodology was for the participants to understand that they may each be at different phases and points of awareness throughout the study; however, regardless of these differences, they are still able to individually explore issues of power, their participation, and possible opportunities for action.

By approaching this study from a critical perspective, the researcher attempted to intentionally raise awareness among Title I parents about how the school system operates within a middle-class value system which supports the dominant culture of society. Merriam & Caffarella (1999) state: "One of the major tasks of critical analysis is to uncover and expose these power relationships wherein the domination of one's groups' interests results in the oppression of other groups" (p.347). It was the researcher's

intention to bring forth action from the parents to foster their own involvement, if the participants were willing to do so.

The participants were purposefully selected for this study. The researcher contacted parents of Title I students in grades kindergarten through fourth by school correspondences and phone calls within a rural elementary school. Participants were selected for this study based upon their willingness to participate and explore their own meanings associated with parental involvement. Specific criteria for inclusion within this study was twofold: a) participants must be Title I parents of children in grades kindergarten through fourth; and b) participants must be limited to involvement in two or less after-school activities at the school. Additionally, since the participants' school district includes a high number of low-income and Spanish speaking students, parents of low-socioeconomic status and those possessing various cultural beliefs and value systems than the middle-classes were preferred to participate.

The process of data collection began by using semi-structured interviews of thirteen Title I parents. Once these parents were interviewed, data collection continued within two group discussions of approximately three to four participants. Within the group discussions, participants: 1) continued exploring their own meanings of parental involvement; 2) participated in a guided group discussion by the researcher designed to raise awareness about the parental involvement policy at the school; 3) described how their own perceptions of parental involvement have been impacted through awareness raising efforts of the researcher and participant discussions; 4) deliberated the possibility of taking actions to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement; and 5) decided to possibly increase their own involvement.

All semi-structured interviews and group sessions were tape recorded and transcribed with permission from the participants. Additionally, all participant transcriptions were verified by participants for accuracy. The researcher also used fieldnotes and a journal to record any observations of the participants during the interview sessions and group discussions.

Finally, the constant comparative method of data analysis was used to analyze the data. This process involved the researcher constantly sifting through data, trying to find the developing themes emerging within the data (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stringer, 2004). This qualitative analysis followed an inductive approach to finding emerging patterns, categories, and themes within the data (Patton, 2002). The data was also reviewed by my fellow doctoral cohort members and my advisor to allow for a non-biased review of my data collection methods, coding systems, and data analysis.

Significance of Study

This study was important within the field of education because it increased the knowledge base about perceptions of parental involvement for lower-class and working-class parents often marginalized within the dominant school system. More often than not, their perceptions about parental involvement differed from those views held by middle-class parents and the dominant school system; therefore, it was important to include those parents to describe their own perceptions about parental involvement. This gave Title I parents a voice about parental involvement issues within the school system and hopefully increased their own participation in school-related activities with their

children. Additionally, parents decided whether or not they would challenge the school system's perceptions of parental involvement which were based upon the society's dominant ideology, to become more inclusive of their own beliefs, practices, and values. This was significant to the study because it enabled parents to explore and discuss parental involvement issues with other Title I parents while using critical reflection to raise their own awareness about individual and societal deterrents to their participation in such school-related activities.

In relation to the adult education field, this study helped inform the literature about inclusion efforts among marginalized groups by giving them a voice about their own perceptions about participation, and to talk about the dominant school system and how those dominant perceptions affected their own participation. Additionally, the adult education field benefitted from this study's exploration of raising awareness among its participants and how they acted upon their knowledge to challenge the dominant system, in this case, the school system to increase their own parental involvement in school activities. While this study may not have changed the current parental involvement views and policies held by the school system, it allowed Title I parents to give a voice to their own perceptions about parental involvement and also presented them with an opportunity to make a decision to increase their own participation in the school and to take action to challenge the school's traditional assumptions of parental involvement.

Parental involvement issues are clearly an important element within the fields of elementary and secondary education. The literature pertaining to parental involvement of middle-class parents and the positive affects their participation has upon the academic success of their children has been well documented (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997;

Feuerstein, 2000; Izzo et al., 1999). However, this literature contains limited qualitative studies exploring lower and working-class parents' perceptions of parental involvement therefore, this study contributed to this literature base by including Title I parents' perceptions of their parental involvement and their perceptions of factors deterring their own participation.

As this study unfolded, parents discussed and acted upon individual and social deterrents affecting their participation. Not only did this positively affect their own participation but it also encouraged the school system to become more aware about these deterrents and their effects upon marginalized parents. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110) requires public schools to involve parents with the planning and decision-making processes at schools. Unfortunately, parents from the dominant group who share the same beliefs, practices, and values of the school are the ones most often invited to enact these specific tasks. This study encouraged schools to take a closer look at their own policies and actions for the purpose of promoting involvement of all parents, regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, or value system, to strengthen their own educational system.

Personally, this study allowed parents of my Title I students to explore their own meanings of parental involvement and raise awareness through discussion about deterrents affecting their own participation in school-related activities. Their increased involvement strengthened the relationship between the parents and the school system, both which ultimately want the children to receive the best education they possibly can. Hopefully, lasting relationships were made by reinforcing this bond and giving parents the opportunity to meet and discuss these issues with other Title I parents, which

positively reinforce and support these parents. Additionally, parents benefitted from this involvement because their resources and cultural capital increased as they continued to hold the school accountable for involving all parents, regardless of cultural, SES, or value systems, in the education of their children.

Definition of Terms

Action Research: Lewin, (1952) describes this qualitative, research method as "... a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.162). In this study, action research explored the belief systems of parents about participation issues in relation to the school system's beliefs about parental involvement and raise consciousness among the participants to challenge the school system's dominant power structure about parental involvement issues.

Critical Lens: This was the lens I used to examine and interpret the information of this study. This critical lens was informed through the assumptions within the critical theoretical framework and focused on exposing the existing dominant power structure of the school system and it also served as the basis for raising consciousness among marginalized parents within this school system.

Marginalized Parents: In the context of this study, this term was used to describe those parents operating outside the dominant power structure of the school system based upon their differing cultural beliefs, socioeconomic status and value systems. Title I parents involved in this study were identified as being marginalized.

Parent: "...the adult with the responsibility for the financial and emotional care and support of the school-aged child" (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, ¶ 3).

Parental Involvement: This refers to the active involvement of parents in academic and social school-related activities of their children.

School System: In this study, the school system was comprised of the school's administration, its employees, and the school's educational programs.

Title I: Title I is a federally funded program within state school districts which offer supplemental support and remediation for students in the basic skill areas of reading and mathematics.

Assumptions of the Study

1. School systems are structured to meet the needs of people within the dominant society (i.e. white, middle-to upper-class socioeconomic status and value system).
2. Parents not within the dominant power structure feel that their perceptions about parental involvement are not validated and therefore they do not feel their views are incorporated within the school's parental involvement policy.
3. Awareness raising efforts will expose the dominant power structure of the school system and give parents the opportunity to challenge the parental involvement practices within the district.
4. Title I parents will provide valuable insight about parental involvement issues and how they may be more conducive to participation.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study examined Title I parents' perceptions about parental involvement within one particular elementary school during a specific time period.

2. The researcher's positionality as a teacher within the school district may have affected parents' responses during this study.
3. There may have been a stigma associated with participation in group discussions by Title I parents because the anonymity of their children's academic difficulties were exposed to other parents in the group.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this study, I explored marginalized parents' perceptions of parental involvement in relation to the school system's perceptions of parental involvement to foster parent participation within a particular school. The study examined how awareness raising efforts affected how participants explored their own meaning of parental involvement and what actions, if any, participants decided to take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement.

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of literature surrounding four areas that inform this study. The first section includes a historical overview of American schools and parental involvement roles. The second section reviews literature pertaining to parental involvement. Included are perceptions of parents, educators, and school systems. The third section provides a discussion of three program planning models, classical, naturalistic, and critical, which help inform this study. Included is a description of how these models may be successfully implemented to support parental involvement of Title I parents in a particular rural school. Finally, critical theory, which provides the theoretical framework for this study is reviewed.

Historical Overview of American Schools and Parental Involvement Roles

This section of the literature review reports the historical development of the American school system from colonial times to the present. Additionally, the political

and economic factors influencing the evolution of our nation's educational system are reported. This section also addresses the roles these historical incidents have played in shaping parental involvement roles within the American school system.

When trying to understand how parental involvement has evolved throughout the centuries in the public school system, it is essential first to provide an overview of the historical background of the American schools and the roles that parents played in these schools. Parents have been the central force behind educating their children in their cultural beliefs, values, and practices from the beginning of time. They have always been the first nurturers and educators of their children, guiding them throughout their early lives to make the right decisions and hoping their teachings will positively impact their children's futures. Knowing this, it isn't surprising that the literature pertaining to parental involvement includes many references to the effect parents have on their children both in their home environment as well as within the school system. This overview provides a background of how parental involvement roles in relation to schooling have historically evolved in this country. It also includes examples of how parents' participation varied among varying socioeconomic statuses, cultural beliefs and practices and value systems. Additionally, historically, the review explores the following questions: what was the main objective of the educational system; who was deemed eligible to receive an education and why; what types of education did these students receive; who provided the instruction to the students; how was the curriculum formulated; why did the institutions change their educational system over time; and how did parents participate in their children's education. These questions are addressed in this segment of the chapter.

American Schools in the 1600's and 1700's

The American schools of the North and South were very different during colonial times. Depending upon their geographical location, the differences in education within the colonial schools of the North and South centered on the socioeconomic structures of the regions, the North favoring rural farmlands, while the South supported a plantation economy (Sharpe, 2002). During this time period, many children of rural farmers of the North found their education surrounding farming as they worked within the fields (Cremin, 1970). Town schools for the Northern children were scarce throughout the region as most children received their education from their own families. In addition, passing on the family's cultural beliefs, practices and value systems was a primary element of this educational system.

Southern children of landowners received much of their education from private tutors who were hired to give these children a proper education based on upper-middle to upper-class values and cultural beliefs and practices. Also, families at home reinforced these teachings. Perry (1989) notes that because of the scattering of children across the South due to the vast amounts of land used for plantations, it was very difficult for schools to locate themselves in convenient places for children to attend. Naturally, slaves, indentured servants, and farm laborers of these large plantations were denied an education since landowners thought "Education and learning for such individuals might have inevitably led to the disruption of the socioeconomic class system which could disassociate workers from the land and the life others had chosen for them" (Sharpe, 2002, p.259). Obviously, educational opportunities for children of the South maintained the existing class structure among its citizens.

The educational system in the North and South during this colonial time period consisted of many types of town schools, which were undistinguishable in relation to being private schools or public schools. Both private and public colonial schools received support from private and government sources in the form of taxes, land grants, bequests, donations, etc. (Carper, 2001). Also, religion strongly influenced American schools during this time period. Schools fostered through religious affiliations often did not receive the same types of support as did the private and public schools; instead these schools relied upon fees charged for rich students' attendance while poor students often received free education or paid much smaller fees. Throughout these religiously affiliated schools, Christian beliefs and ethics were instilled in children as the main purpose of the American educational system (Sharpes, 2002). Parents were involved in ensuring these Christian beliefs and ethics were reinforced at home to support the school system.

American schools during the 1600's through the 1700's did not advocate the need for all children to receive an education, nor did these schools garner enough support from the government to support such inclusive efforts. In fact, it wasn't until the 19th century that the first universal, tax supported schools came into existence in the Northern states (Reese, 2000). A discussion of the American school system in the 19th century and parental involvement roles within these schools now follows.

American School in the 1800's

After the American Revolution, capitalism became the focus within America. The citizens of colonial America recognized the importance of creating and maintaining a literate society and the "...demand came for a more educated white citizenry to preserve

the Republic” (Reese, 2000, ¶ 6). By the middle of the 1800’s, reformers urged middle- and upper-class parents to send their children to public schools and embrace its standardized curriculum and age-graded classrooms (Reese, 2000). Horace Mann, Massachusetts’ Secretary of the State Board of Education 1837-1848, became an advocate for the creation of universalized, public schools (Carper, 2001; Power, 1996; Reese, 2000). He encouraged teaching students of all socioeconomic classes together to instill the moral values of the nation and reinforce those values through education (Sharpes, 2002). Carper (2001) clarifies Mann’s ideas by stating: “Common schools...would create a moral, disciplined, and unified population prepared to participate in U.S. political, social, and economic life” (¶ 7).

While the public school movement expanded in the Northern and Middle States, the Southern States still clung to their private educational system. Many in the South believed that the public school system was adequate for the poorer classes of the North; however, they believed such an education was not suitable for their own middle- and upper-class children, nor was education needed for the slaves, indentured servants, and farm laborers within their communities. Southerners’ motivation consisted of maintaining their present economic system and class distinctions. However, both Northerners’ and Southerners’ roles of parental involvement in the 19th century followed three basic underlying theoretical viewpoints about how children should be educated.

These three theories were based upon:

- 1) Strict guidance by the parents and obedience by the child;
- 2) Children as basically good (influenced by views of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel);

- 3) John Locke's assumption that viewed children as influenced by environment. (Berger, 1991, pp. 211-212)

The initial approach to parental involvement roles led to the organization of parenting education classes held by middle-class mothers of the Protestant-Calvinist religion (Brim, 1965). The classes focused on providing parents with information and techniques to be used for disciplining their children during the early 1800's in Portland, Maine (Berger, 1991). Obviously during this time period, religion became the underlying foundation for parents teaching their children the mores and values of their own societies. While this Protestant-Calvinist approach seemed appropriate at the time, others believed in Froebel's (1782-1852) assumptions that children were basically good and needed positive reinforcement if they were to remain "good" children (Sharpes, 2002).

In reference to Froebel, Sharpes (2002) noted that he based his own theoretical assumptions about children upon the works of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, both of whom advocated the importance of mothers in teaching children right from wrong. Similarly, Rousseau (1779) writes that mothers should "Cultivate, water the young plant before it dies. Its fruits will one day be your delights...Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education" (p.38). Pestalozzi (1807) also cites mothers as being most responsible for educating her children "As the mother is the first to nourish her child's body, so should she, by God's order, be the first to nourish his mind" (p. 26).

Froebel has been credited with spawning the kindergarten movement throughout the United States (Jeynes, 2006). Advocates from Germany brought his kindergarten system of education to the United States and shared Froebel's beliefs through education, such as "...all ideas were already innate in children and needed only to be coaxed out

through instruction and activities” (Sharpes, 2002, pp. 433-434). Through this kindergarten movement, Froebel’s ideas encouraged the formal educational system to begin educating children from a very young age (Jeynes, 2006). Parents during this time were encouraged to support the values and practices of the school system through positive reinforcement for the purpose of emulating the ideals of society. While this view proposed educating children from an individual standpoint, the third theory focused on how environmental factors affect the education of students and parental involvement roles within the school.

The final theoretical viewpoint relating to parental roles for educating children in the 19th century was John Locke’s assumptions on how the environment affected children. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke states: “The mind is like a blank slate (“tabula rasa,” literally a blank tablet) which the world writes on through the senses” (Sharpes, 2002, p.234). Locke believes that children gain knowledge about the world by experiencing it (Power, 1996). For children to have access to important information, they must be taught and guided by their parents and teachers to engage in learning filled with vital learning experiences. After all, if children are to become proper citizens, they must be presented with learning experiences from their environment rich in the values of their society. Parental roles about education once again focused on emulating the cultural beliefs and values of the larger society. Parents reinforced societal mores and norms upon their children, as the schools used their education to create and guide students to become good American citizens.

In addition to the three underlying theoretical viewpoints about parental roles for educating children in the 19th century, women, especially from the white, middle-classes,

began to band together and form various groups for the purpose of supporting the educational system within the United States. Berger (1991) lists some of these groups: the American Association of University Women (AAUW) (1882); the Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA) (1897); and the National Association of Colored Women (1897). While all these groups were created to enhance women's child rearing practices, they also maintained a passion for supporting their children within the educational system, by using love and encouragement. By the end of this century, however, attitudes and beliefs about how parents were told to raise their children began to change to more disciplined models, reminiscent of earlier days.

American School in the 1900's to Present

The American school system within the 20th century underwent dramatic reform based largely upon the industrialization of our nation. As immigration continued, more children were being forced out of labor and into schools. Schools now began to emulate corporations by producing workers who shared similar values of the corporations and also, workers capable of performing the tasks required of them to support the economic system of our society (Reese, 2000).

Discipline and punishment became the new trend in parent education in the early 20th century. Children were viewed as being responsible for their own actions and thus in need of strict rules to reinforce the regulations set forth within the educational system (Berger, 1991). Children who strayed from school rules or rules placed upon them within their own society, were punished for their actions and told such action was for their own good and the good of the society. The children during this time were being molded to become good citizens who valued freedom and the education they were receiving. Any

such deviation within the rules was dealt with promptly and swiftly by parents seeking to guide their children along the right path established for them by society.

High schools during this century began to track students based on ability from results garnered through standardized achievement assessments (Chapman, 1988; Horn, 1989; Krug, 1964; Krug, 1972; & Raftery, 1992). These secondary schools began to create vocational classes for students not meeting particular standards and deemed unworthy of a true, academic education (Reese, 2000). Elementary schools began focusing on teaching the basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic to enhance academic success.

Once the Russians launched Sputnik in the late 1950's, the United States felt that its students were outperformed by their Russian counterparts and began to push for a stronger emphasis on academics (Berger, 1991; Reese, 2000). While concern still existed about minority students, the focus shifted towards assimilating them within the educational system. Minorities were held accountable to meet the same high academic standards as the middle-class, white students, regardless of their culture, SES, or value system. Unfortunately, such unrealistic goals further divided the groups, and caused many students and parents to become frustrated with the educational system.

Answering the call of frustration over the current educational system, President Lyndon Johnson demanded that schools focus their attention on the economically disadvantaged students in their systems. President Johnson and others believed that education could be used to eradicate poverty and close the educational gap between disadvantaged students and their advantaged peers by passing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Vinovskis, 1999). Under the ESEA, the

federally funded Title I program provided aid specifically targeted at economically disadvantaged students within the public school system. Title I provided supplementary resources, such as teachers, educational materials, and computers, to districts which had low-income students attending their schools (Sunderman & Mickelsen, 2000).

The middle of the 20th century brought with it another change in parent education roles and practices which tended to focus on the psychological well-being of children, and included the establishment of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in 1953 (Berger, 1991). Erikson (1960) stated that parents needed to nurture their children from a very early age if they were to develop into competent, psychologically healthy adults. More parent education programs were established during this time to support child-rearing practices focused on providing their children with the support they needed to become successful in society, by adapting to its ideological system of beliefs.

Another federally funded program implemented by President Johnson, the Head Start program, was started as a summer program in 1965. The intention of this program was to assist 4-year old children overcome the effects of poverty (Zigler & Styfco, 1994). Furthermore, this program was to give children from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds an educational foundation compensating for their insufficient home education and social skills (Sissel, 1997). It was hoped that children attending this program would increase their social and academic development through their involvement in the program.

The Head Start program was soon expanded from a summer program and families with low incomes were provided the opportunity to enroll their three-to five-year-old children in this program for a full day throughout the year. It was believed that children's enrollment in the Head Start program would increase their academic and social skills to

children of the same age from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (White, 1981). The federal government believed that the Head Start program would successfully intervene in the development of the children so they would not begin kindergarten below the academic and social standards of their peers from higher social classes. Additionally, Head Start programs incorporated parental involvement as a means to support parents within the lower classes with raising their children, both socially and academically. The Head Start program developed five objectives. They include:

- 1) Enhance children's growth and development;
- 2) Strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children;
- 3) Provide children with educational, health, and nutritional services;
- 4) Link children and families to needed community services;
- 5) Ensure well-managed programs that involve parents in decision making. (Zill, Resnick, McKey, Clark, Connell, Swartz, O'Brien, & D'Elio, 1998)

These five objectives continue to serve as the foundational elements for the Head Start program today.

Unfortunately, the federally funded Title I and Head Start programs were not the answers to completely closing the achievement gap between economically and socially advantaged and disadvantaged students, as a result, additional avenues (e.g. vouchers, home schooling) were taken to try to improve the American educational system.

Vouchers and home schooling became popular avenues for those disgruntled with the school system (Carper, 2001). School vouchers were monetary resources enabling parents to choose an alternative educational system for their children, (i.e. private schools, Catholic schools). Additionally, the practice of allowing parents to provide

education to their children at home, home schooling, allowed parents to ensure their own cultures, beliefs, and practices were being incorporated within their children's education since parents decided upon the curriculum and how it was being taught to their children.

As the 1970's and 1980's unfolded, federally funded programs requiring parental involvement began sprouting within the educational system: Parent and Child Centers, Home Start, Parent Child Development Centers, Title I, and Follow Through (Berger, 1991). Also, parents were included as committee members responsible for creating Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) for their special needs children, a process still in existence today in the American school system. As the 20th century came to a close, schools continued to adhere to the policy of providing students with a solid education. More emphasis was placed upon parents' roles in fostering this education. Parental involvement roles began to take form as schools understood the importance of effectively incorporating families into educating their children. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) note that schools and parents began to use home-school collaboration methods which allow communication between schools and parents to flow more freely and openly as both parties strive for improved educational benefits for their children. Parents' roles became more aggressive as they initiated programs and became involved in governance activities within their children's districts.

Such parental involvement trends continued into the 21st century as parents actively participate in their children's education. Today, the use of technology allows parents to have access to their children's assignments, grades, and teachers effortlessly, as well as to keep them informed about what is happening within the school system. Unfortunately, not much is being done to improve parental involvement for those parents

marginalized within the educational system. These parents often have different cultures and beliefs, socioeconomic statuses, and value systems that may negatively impact their involvement within the school system. Educators and administrators rarely make an effort to reach these parents to make them feel welcome within the school system (Olivios, 2004). Without making a concerted effort to understand the deterrents and barriers holding these parents back from being involved, their participation may be lost within the system.

As more and more parents become disenchanted with today's educational system, they continue to seek alternative ways to teach their children. With so many parents negatively impacted by what the school system has to offer their children, their involvement within this system has diminished. What identified factors contribute to this lack of involvement? Is there something educators and schools systems can do to increase parental involvement within schools? These questions are addressed in the next section of this chapter as the literature informing parental involvement is explored.

Parental Involvement Literature

This section contains qualitative and quantitative research studies relating to parental involvement in elementary schools. These studies focus on the perceptions school systems, educators, and parents hold about parental involvement, both in school and at home. Additionally, this section presents research studies highlighting certain social factors identified as deterrents to parental involvement, namely: cultural differences and beliefs, socioeconomic statuses, and value systems.

For the purpose of this study, parents are defined as the primary caregiver responsible for the financial and emotional well-being of the child (Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Additionally, for this study, parental involvement is defined as: "... parent-child interactions on school-related or other learning activities" (Sheldon, 2002, p. 302). The National PTA (2000) defines parental involvement as: "the participation of parents in every facet of children's education and development from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influences in children's lives" (p.8).

Joyce L. Epstein (1995) and Epstein, in Sanders and Epstein (2000) identifies six types of parental involvement within her research; they are: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision making; and collaborating with the community. Epstein's six categories of parental involvement include, what she believes, are all the pertinent elements for successful parental involvement to be implemented and sustained within a school system (Epstein & Clark, 2004; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004).

Perceptions about parental involvement differ among school systems, educators, and parents. The literature reviewed for this study was categorized within these particular groups: school perceptions of parental involvement (Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith, 1998; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Olivios, 2004; Pena, 2000; Sheldon, 2002; Tett, 1999, 2001); educator perceptions of parental involvement (Griffith, 1998; Izzo et al., 1999; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Pena, 2000; Sheldon, 2002; Tett, 2001); and parent perceptions of parental involvement (Barton, et al., 2004; Daniel-White, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Olivios, 2004; Sheldon, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Tett, 1999, 2001). While each of

these groups offers significant insight into differences among perceptions among the school system, educators, and parents, the focus of this study is on the often overlooked perceptions of parental involvement from the parents' own perspectives. These perceptions held by the parents need to be explored in greater depth to understand what factors are deterring parent participation in school-related activities. Unfortunately, the majority of studies completed thus far have been quantitative and therefore do not include in-depth interviews or discussions to gather the appropriate information from the parents about their own parental involvement practices or what is deterring their participation in these activities. Therefore, a qualitative methodological approach is suitable to explore these perceptions of parents. A qualitative approach offers them an opportunity to understand these perceptions and to make a decision whether or not to challenge the system and its dominant practices, which may be deterring their involvement.

As previously mentioned, the majority of studies reviewed about parental involvement issues utilized a quantitative methodological approach. Two of these quantitative studies reviewed employed questions taken from the Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) as the assessment tool (Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith, 1998). Griffith (1998) and Sheldon (2002) used questions rated on a Likert scale to calculate average responses in both of the studies (4pt. and 5pt. item scoring respectively). The remaining studies used various self-designed scoring assessments whose validity and reliability may not be as accurate as those findings scored using the NELS: 88 and Likert scale. All of the studies were designed to identify a sample population representative of the population; however, some inconsistencies seemed to have occurred. For instance, the African American population

within Sheldon and Griffith's study is under-represented while the Caucasian sampling within these studies is over-represented. Also, Feurestein and Griffith based their assumptions on survey responses of over 20,000 people while Izzo et al. (1999) tried to do the same with 1205 respondents and Blanton-Balthazar (1997) and Sheldon (2002) only surveyed 615 and 195 people respectively. Such disparity between the number of people included in each study speaks to whether or not the results can be transferred to the larger population as intended by the researchers. In addition, since these quantitative studies have large participant samples, the researchers were unable to thoroughly explore and discuss perceptions held about parental involvement practices with its participants. Such information can be obtained by conducting a qualitative study, which would have a small number of participants who can be interviewed extensively about their perceptions about parental involvement and factors deterring their own participation.

Finally, after reviewing quantitative and qualitative research studies collectively, findings may emerge that show the varying perceptions of parent involvement held among the school system, educators, and parents. Additionally, the limited number of studies pertaining to parent perceptions about parental involvement will be reviewed. This review will also address deterrents to parental involvement as they relate to these social class factors: cultural differences and beliefs, socioeconomic status (SES), and adaptation to an educational system based on middle-class values.

School Systems' Perceptions of Parental Involvement

As implied earlier, the studies reviewing the perceptions of the school system were based upon an educational system adhering to middle-class values. School systems believe they know what constitutes appropriate educational standards and do not intend to

change their value systems to meet the needs of lower income families (Griffith, 1998). Supporting this statement, Izzo et al. (1999) found that lower and working class parents are alienated within schools because of their cultural and educational differences. While both studies do acknowledge a difference between parents operating in a lower SES and those from middle to upper-class SES, neither study examines parents' own perceptions about these issues and what can be done to close the gap between them. Also, as is the case in most of studies reviewed, the school systems' and middle-class parents' culture, socioeconomic status and value system seems to be the standard and the studies are written to showcase this as such, thus reinforcing the dominant ideologies within our society. Unfortunately, the voices of the marginalized parents are those that remain unheard throughout the majority of the literature.

The middle and high-SES parents' familiarity with the middle-class value system within the school enabled them to participate more actively in such activities since they were already accustomed to the beliefs and practices of this class system. Often parents of low SES have a different value system than those held by the school and do not feel comfortable involving themselves completely in their children's education (Feuerstein, 2000).

The data from Feuerstein's (2000) research study showed that middle and high-SES parents were more involved with their children's education both with at-school and at-home parental involvement activities. In addition, Feuerstein reports that those parents who are familiar with the school system are most influential on decision makers at the school and are more satisfied with the education their children are receiving. Teachers and the school system operating within this middle-class value system may harbor

negative feelings about parent involvement of low-SES parents and unwittingly transmit these prejudices to parents. In support, Griffith (1998) does not believe schools view the social and cultural resources equally among parents within the lower and working classes. Lower and working-class parents need to adapt to the values of the dominant school system if they are to be viewed positively by the school system. Additionally, most literature reviewed from the schools system's perspective supports the need for parents from the lower and working classes to adapt to the middle-class value systems already at the school (Daniel-White, 2002; Griffith, 1998; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Educators' Perceptions of Parental Involvement

Educators from middle socioeconomic statuses may be comfortable operating within a system in which they were schooled, the dominant cultural, socioeconomic, and value systems of the school. However, because these educators may be comfortable within the system, they believe that for students to be successful, these parents must conform to the middle-class value system already in place at the school (Griffith, 1998). Griffith (1998) also adds that educators believe parents from middle and high SES classes follow the same value systems of the school, as a result they are more successful supporting their children academically and socially. Additionally, those parents are invited into the school more often; however lower and working class parents are not viewed the same way. In fact, educators don't believe they possess the appropriate knowledge and skills needed to have their children succeed. Unfortunately because of this belief, teachers do not seek lower and working class parents for active participation within the school. (Griffith, 1998). Without the schools accommodating parents with low

SES and/or cultural differences, the schools are simply imposing their own culture and value system upon these parents and marginalizing them even further (Daniel-White, 2002). As school systems continue to silently transmit class and culture issues within its hidden curriculum, the dominant society continues to remain powerful and reinforces its own beliefs, practices, and values. Giroux (2001) states:

The imprint of the dominant society and culture is inscribed in a whole range of school practices, i.e. the official language, school rules, classroom social relations, the selection and presentation of school knowledge, and the exclusion of specific cultural capital. (p. 66)

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) believe that cultural capital, resources gained through social and cultural resources, permeate school systems and those parents within networks following these belief systems. Similarly, Lareau (1987) acknowledges how “Schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula; children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements” (p. 74). These students and parents, within the dominant culture in relation to socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs, and value systems, are able to effectively operate within this system and network accordingly to support them in their social and academic endeavors. Students and parents not possessing cultural capital often find that they are unable to network with others outside their own group, thus missing valuable resources and opportunities for successful navigation within the school system. Therefore, school systems feel the need to encourage parents not operating within the dominant system to adapt to their dominant system of beliefs and values by ensuring

parents that this is the appropriate course to take in order to become successful within the system.

While school systems and educators assume this assimilation of beliefs and values by lower and working class parents will enhance parental involvement, it may in fact deter their participation (Loughlin, 2005). Most marginalized parents do not feel that they can adequately accomplish this task, nor should they. Instead the schools must address parents' needs and offer support for them to become more actively involved educationally with their children (Griffith, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pena, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Studies previously conducted suggest that schools and teachers need to understand and adapt to the various cultures, economic statuses, and value systems of students and parents if they expect parental involvement to become an integral part of their educational system (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Pena, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement

In particular, parents in the study completed by Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) expressed that parents limited their involvement in school activities because they believe their roles as parents did not include such academic involvement. These parents felt that participation in school activities relating to the education of their children was not their responsibility; it was the school's responsibility to provide academic education. Unfortunately, teachers and school systems seemed unaware of such existing conflicts and therefore, may have inadvertently believed that the lack of parental involvement was due to disinterested parents. If schools and teachers want to ensure parental involvement

then they must begin to acknowledge and change their current practices so that parents do feel as if they are needed to enhance the educational system.

Lewis and Forman's (2002) study differed from the other studies because it included a comparison of parental involvement within an economically disadvantaged district, Metro, to a middle-class district, Forestview. Metro was comprised mostly of minority students, while Forestview's population was primarily Caucasian. In addition, Lewis and Forman's study indicated that the parents of the Metro students participated more often than the parents of the Forestview students. This more frequent parental involvement at Metro was attributed to the school systems and teachers' beliefs in welcoming parents into their school and classrooms whenever parents wanted to visit and/or meet. Parents spoke often about always feeling welcome at the school and teachers worked with parents' schedules to accommodate meetings and special activities where parental involvement was needed.

In contrast, the teachers at Forestview did not make themselves readily available to meet parents; nor would they conference with parents unless a scheduled time was made prior to the meeting. Parents perceived such tactics as unwelcoming, thereby feeling that schools and teachers hindered the parental involvement process at that school. Also, teachers in this district did not want parents involved with in-school activities because they felt as though parents were trying to gain control over their classrooms and teachers did not want to struggle for power that was perceived as already theirs.

Parents in the research study conducted by Feuerstein (2000) indicated that the most influential variable affecting parental involvement is the amount of contact a school

makes with its parents. The more contact initiated by the school system, the more likely parents are to contact school personnel and become involved in their children's education. Cuckle (1996) also supports communication between the school system and parents as an effective tool in encouraging parental support for school-related activities (Tett, 2001). Unfortunately, when parents speak a language other than English, the divide between home and school becomes even greater. Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) suggest that because of this language barrier, "Parents feel intimidated by teachers and teachers may give up trying to reach and engage parents across the cultural divide" (¶ 2). Administrators also allowed their positions of power to have a negative impact on Spanish speaking-parents' involvement. Olivios (2004) reports in his study that administrators "...completely excluded the Latino parent majority from any significant decisions that affected their school" (p. 28). School systems must involve parents from all cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and value systems if they want to encourage parental involvement of all parents for the purpose of sustaining a successful school experience for all students and their parents.

In summary, the parental involvement literature reviewed showcased how school systems unfairly operate within a framework favoring the ideology of the dominant society. The majority of studies reviewed demonstrate how educators' and school systems' perceptions about culture, SES and value systems are viewed as dominant. The literature also showed how these dominant perceptions must be followed by all parents for schools to successfully operate. Therefore, those parents situated within the dominant system are operating within a system which works for them and their social systems are being reinforced within our society and school system; however, those parents who are

operating outside this dominant system often have their needs overlooked thus making it difficult for them to conform to such standards. Also, school systems expect these marginalized parents to adapt to these dominant standards but in reality, it is the school system that should be adapting to meet the need of these parents.

The next section of this review provides an overview of three different types of program planning models which may aid school systems in implementing a plan to increase parental involvement for all parents regardless of cultural differences, socioeconomic status, or value systems. Additionally, a specific model is presented and discussed as it pertains to increasing parental involvement among Title I parents.

Program Planning for Increased Parental Involvement

This discussion explores program planning models conducive to increasing parental involvement of Title I parents within school-related activities. Prior to this discussion is an overview of the classical, naturalistic, and critical models of program planning as explained by Ralph Tyler, Cyril Houle, and John Forester respectively. Following this section is a discussion for the models that might accommodate the interests of Title I parents and the researcher to implement a program within the school system to increase parent participation in school-related activities within the district. Finally, this discussion ends by addressing the political issues the researcher expects to encounter while planning this program with the parents and the ways these issues may be dealt with in practice.

Classical Planning Model: Ralph W. Tyler

The classical viewpoint of program planning, as expressed by Ralph W. Tyler (1949), is based on the behaviorist theory and thus contains many of its prescribed elements. Tyler's (1949) rationale identifies four basic questions which must be addressed during the program planning process; they are:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p.1)

These questions contain major principles for the planning process, which are often discussed as a sequential process. To begin with, the program planner identifies the objectives that the organization, institution, or individual program planner wishes to obtain through the training process. Learners' needs are not primary, and are often not taken into account when the educational purposes are set. Next, the program planner identifies the learning experiences to be utilized to attain the stated goals while then organizing these experiences into effective instruction. The epistemology of this model posits that expert knowledge exists which is passed from teacher (planner) to student (adult learner), with little recognition that learning can transcend from student to teacher. This expert knowledge privileges the planner, allowing him to choose which scientific knowledge that is embedded in a historical context is to be transmitted to the learner. Finally, Tyler (1949) believes the behavioral objectives are evaluated through an objective, reliable, and valid measure if they are to be properly assessed. The evaluation

results can then be used to ascertain if the program's objectives have been met, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

The previously identified questions guiding Tyler's (1949) framework for program planning are significant for planning a program to foster Title I parental involvement in an elementary school. While limited, several positive elements of this model in relation to parent participation include: purpose, content, and measurable objectives.

The program planner under the classical model identifies the purpose of the program; however, the purpose of increasing Title I parent participation may also be a shared objective between the school and parents. While the program is initially developed by the program planner based on the school system's needs, the Title I parents within the elementary school may not participate in the program if they did not agree that the purpose of increasing their parental involvement was an appropriate objective for the program being planned.

Additionally, these objectives may lead the program planner and the Title I parents to agree on certain aspects of the content of the program which centers on increasing parental involvement. While the program planner decides upon the learning experiences and instruction used for increasing Title I participation, parents may choose to include their own content or experiences through questions and discussions posed to the instructor. This subtle inclusion of Title I parents' own knowledge and experiences may allow them to include their own content and assert their own power within the program.

Finally, the classical model of program planning does incorporate evaluating the stated objectives through a reliable and valid measure proposed by the planner. However, Title I parents may find alternate ways to assess whether or not their own learning objectives are being met within the program. For example, while the program planner is responsible for formally assessing if the predetermined behavioral objectives of the program are being met, the parents may use their group sessions to discuss these objectives set by the planner, and decide whether or not they are valuable to them as learners. Then, Title I parents may decide not to continue their participation in the program if their needs are not being met, or they may pressure the program planner into adjusting or including learning objectives they deem important for their continued involvement in the program. Therefore, while Title I parents do not determine the overall behavioral objectives or assessments for the planned program, their participation may influence the inclusion of their own learning objectives in the program and how they are measured.

Naturalistic Planning Model: Cyril O. Houle

The naturalistic viewpoint emphasizes “the planner’s ability to make judgments in a specific context and to justify them” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p.18). According to Houle’s (1972) basic assumptions of program planning, before any planning can begin, the planner must recognize the context in which the plan is to be implemented because this model is situation specific. By applying intuition and practical knowledge gained through experience, the program planner can begin to understand the sponsoring organizations’ and participants’ situation and thus begin to sort through information accordingly. Within the naturalistic model, the educational design of the program does

not follow a linear design and subject specialists may be used to help program planners analyze content which will ultimately lead to enhanced learning by participants through educational activities.

Another important part of Houle's (1972) model as it relates to the naturalistic viewpoint includes the elements needed to accomplish a successful program. By using decision points, a planner can begin to work out a rational plan where components can be revisited throughout the planning process as needed. Before the planning process begins, an organization must identify that a need exists to create an educational activity to address this problem. This need may have been identified through a needs assessment given by the organization such as an interview or a questionnaire. Once the need has proven to be feasible and practical, certain objectives or topics are formulated to address the needs revealed.

Finally, the appropriate learning format is designed to meet the objectives identified by the organization while at the same time focusing on the adult learner's needs. An essential element of the plan is that learning must be relevant to participants outside of the learning activity and Houle (1972) recognizes that adult participants need their learning linked to their adult life experiences for it to be truly beneficial to them. Once the plan has been implemented, evaluations are completed by the participants throughout their experience to assess if the appropriate objectives are being met. If not, the program planner can revise the program to meet the needs of the organization or learners. Evaluations are also incorporated at the conclusion of the program to measure the program's effectiveness and usefulness for future programs.

The naturalistic program planning model as described by Houle (1972) includes significant elements for planning a program to foster Title I parental involvement within an elementary school. For this model to be effective in increasing parent participation, the program planner must recognize the following elements: the context of the program, the program's focus on the learner, and the program design as non-sequential.

While initially planning a program for Title I parents, the program planner must understand the context of the implemented plan which includes the school system and its parents. For this reason, each program planned is specific to the particular situation for which it is being developed and cannot be emulated from previously planned programs. The naturalistic planning model states the need for the planner to understand both entities within context when planning a program if she is to effectively meet the needs of the sponsoring school and its parents.

Additionally, while the school system is funding this particular program, the program planner needs to be cognizant of the Title I parents needs to increase their own participation in the program. This can be accomplished by having the program planner address the needs identified by the parents within the program by including their personal experiences and knowledge during discussions to further guide the program. In addition, factors deterring participation may be identified through discussions with the parents; therefore, the program planner may understand how to modify the program to include these needs.

Also, since the naturalistic program planning model does not follow a list of prescribed steps, decision points can be used throughout the program to guide instruction and learning. For example, if the Title I parents within this program decide their needs

are not being met, the program planner could restructure the program to be more inclusive of these needs, thus increasing parent participation. Furthermore, the program planner may rely on her own intuition to change the content and learning experiences within the program to accommodate the parents' needs based upon parents' experiences and knowledge base.

Critical Planning Model: John Forester

The critical planning model as described by Forester (1989) contains the assumption that planning is a political activity. According to this critical planning viewpoint, the ultimate goal of the planner is to strive for a democratic process that allows social welfare and justice to prevail for the marginalized voices that are often ignored while planning programs. To accomplish this feat, the planner must be aware and work within the institutional constraints placed upon her by the funding organization while being cognizant of the existing power structure and its effect upon the participants. According to Forester, it is the planner's responsibility to know who has the power before the planning process begins. By understanding such power relations, the planner can better assess the political context of the planning process and anticipate any problems that may arise.

As stated by Forester (1989), two problems that may arise during the planning process are: misinformation given to the planner by others involved and working with incomplete information and/or poorly defined problems. It is in the planner's best interest to know who possesses the valuable information needed for the planning process and to be able to use her networking skills to access the needed planning resources. Since goals and objectives change and evolve throughout this planning process (usually

different goals are held by different stakeholders), it is vital that the planner uses her networking skills to gain access to information that will help her and the participants solve the problems at hand. Acquiring such networking “connections” is a critical component for the successful implementation of any planned program. A planner must also know her audience. Since the planner is privileged according to this model, she too possesses the power over others involved in this planning process. The planner chooses what information gets reported and who receives or doesn’t receive that information. However, planners should bring the voices of those who are usually not heard to the planning table instead of allowing their own expectations and/or biases to get in the way of the planning process. After all, the underlying purpose of Forester’s (1989) critical viewpoint is to make the planning process more democratic in nature and to ensure social justice to its participants.

The critical planning model as described by Forester (1989) is significant for planning a program to foster Title I parental involvement in an elementary school. The noteworthy elements of this model include: political issues, power issues, and raising awareness among those marginalized.

This model offers Title I parents the framework for the program planner to address the political issues of planning a program while keeping the needs of the parents at the forefront of the program. For example, the program planner needs to understand the political agenda of the school system sponsoring the program and how this may affect the learning and participation of Title I parents in the program. The program planner must have an awareness about the school’s obligation to increase parental involvement to meet the No Child Left Behind guidelines; however, the focus and purpose of the

program should be to increase Title I parent participation to meet the needs of the parents and their children. By realizing the school's political agenda for implementing the program, the program planner is able to satisfy the school's needs as well as the parents' needs by increasing participation in school related activities.

Additionally, the program planner needs to be aware of the power possessed by the school and the parents within the program. The program planner must balance the power of the school system between the power of the Title I parents to implement a successful program which may increase parental involvement at the school. This may be accomplished by having the program planner use her networking skills to access information and resources for parents to use to explore factors hindering their involvement in school-related activities. Also, this may allow parents to raise their own awareness about the causes deterring their participation. This awareness may enable parents to understand and question both their role and the school's role in deterring their participation. Possibly, this awareness may allow Title I parents to find ways to increase their own involvement in school-related activities. A more comprehensive discussion on an effective critical program planning model which may increase Title I parents participation is now discussed.

An Effective Program: Utilizing Critical Program Planning Models

The model of program planning which best addresses the process of how parents and the researcher can work together to plan and implement a monthly program for parents of Title I children in an elementary school system would include elements of Forester's (1989) critical model and also be supported by several critical theorists assumptions. The reasons sustaining why the critical models of program planning may

effectively garner participation of the Title I parents within the program while meeting the needs of the parents and the school system now follows.

As discussed in the previous section, Forester's (1989) critical model of program planning encompasses many valuable components allowing it to be used effectively to plan a monthly program for parents. Although Forester did not design his model to be used within an educational setting, it supports many critical theorist assumptions within the adult education field, such as Paulo Freire, Stephen Brookfield, Henry Giroux, and Michael Apple. For example, Forester (1989) recognizes education as a political and ideological practice and that it is the responsibility of the program planner to be aware of how these power structures influences the program being developed. Additionally, he advocates assessing the varying goals and objectives of the different stakeholders within the program and determining how each is affected by the dominant ideology present in the school system. By completing these actions, Forester (1989) is able to recognize the political and social constraints of the program and identify ways these barriers may interfere with raising awareness of parents within the program.

Raising awareness or consciousness is not a new facet within critical models of education; in fact, it emerges quite frequently as a powerful tool within the works of Freire (1970). By applying Freire's (1970) consciousness raising beliefs to the present program being designed for parents, the parents may gain a greater awareness of the oppressive nature of the school system's hierarchy. Additionally, critical theorists such as Apple (2000) and Giroux (2001) report the unequal power structure existing in today's educational system, and explain what needs to be done to make the school system more inclusive of those marginalized within its hierarchy. The program planner has a

responsibility to develop an educational program that negotiates the interests and power relations between the group in power and those possibly marginalized to form a suitable program for all participants (Cervero & Wilson, 1994).

From a critical program planning viewpoint, the instructor must dialogue with the participants to find out their needs not simply act as an expert and provide knowledge to the parents without discussion (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). Through the process of dialoguing, the instructor may gain enough understanding of parent needs and wants to begin the process of designing sessions focused for parents. Further dialogue may garner enough participation from parents for a few monthly programs on topics solely selected by her or the school system, but for the program to be continually successful, the instructor must become a facilitator of the program and center on the spoken needs of the parents. This model advocates the process of using dialogue to determine these needs within the program.

The question still remains: How can we use a critical model of program planning to address the process of how parents and instructors can work together to plan and implement a monthly program within the school system? As a starting point, the instructor needs to come to know her participants, the parents and the funding institution, the school system, as well as the power each group possesses. Forester (1989) states: "If planners understand how relations of power shape the planning process, they can improve the quality of their analyses and empower citizen and community action" (p.27). Once again, understanding who has the power and comprehending how power controls the program planning process, are two of the most important aspects of developing an effective program. In this scenario, the school system is deemed the most powerful agent

in planning this monthly program, and the instructor must be able to anticipate power struggles, misinformation, and conflicts between the two entities as planning progresses.

Since the school system is the funding agent within this particular program, the instructor needs to choose a topic for her first program that the school considers important and appropriate. For example, if the instructor is working for the school system, she will still remain privileged by being able to control the power of the group through her representation of the dominant institution; therefore, it is imperative for the instructor in this situation to acknowledge an awareness of such power relations when implementing such a program (Hart, 1990). The instructor realizes that she probably will not receive a large number of participants because of the selected topic, but understands she has the power to change the topics to meet the parents' needs once they begin attending the programs and trusting her. It is essential for the instructor to garner the trust needed from the marginalized group by sharing the same concerns about the existing power structures of the school system (Hart, 1990). This can put the instructor in a precarious situation: on one hand, the instructor is gaining the trust and expanding the networking system among its parent participants, on the other hand, the instructor is openly challenging the hegemony of the school system. For this particular program, this model would advocate giving the parents more control over their learning by having the instructor become more of a facilitator in the process. The possible decision to challenge the current dominant school system will derive from the parents' own learning experiences.

Critical to continuing this program will be maintaining a problem-based method of learning centered upon the parents' own experiences. This learning process will

accommodate the parents' concerns within the educational system, which may include but not be limited to issues about: race, class, values, curriculum concerns, and power. Relevant to this type of learning is the concept of reflection which according to Freire (1970) and Brookfield (2005) must include problem posing and discussion among the group members if it is to be an effective tool in bringing about change. Hart's (1990) model also encourages "...using personal experience as the original source to be reflected upon" (p. 60). While it is impossible to imagine what type of change may occur from this reflection process or whether or not the parents in this program will form the relationships needed for this to occur openly, it is still an essential element within the critical planning model.

There are limitations to Forester's model of program planning in the development of the aforementioned monthly program for several reasons. First, this model does not state clear goals at the beginning of the program because the needs of the learners emerge throughout the program. Second, issues of power between the school system and the parents may never be negotiated properly to fully meet the needs of those being marginalized in the program. Third, the critical program planning model works better in theory than in practice since it does not provide a tangible set of directions for implementation in practice or a real-world setting (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). However, despite these limitations, the critical program planning would be the most appropriate model to follow in developing a program to foster parental involvement among Title I parents in an elementary school as highlighted in this discussion. The next section of this discussion focuses on the political issues a program planner may encounter when planning this specific program and ways these issues can be dealt with in practice.

The Politics of Program Planning

While planning a program for low-income parents of Title I parents within a school system, undoubtedly the issue of politics will arise. Sork & Caffarella (1989) agree on the importance of understanding the school's "...history, tradition, philosophical orientation, policies, and operating procedures that affect how planning proceeds" (p. 235). Critical theorists, Apple (2000) and Giroux (2001) may translate this as having the planner or instructor possess an understanding of the school's hegemonic practices and its hidden curriculum so she can plan accordingly. Understanding what the school system perceives as being the "important knowledge" or "official knowledge" which is to be transmitted to its members of society, allows planners and instructors to determine those groups being marginalized within the educational system (Apple, 2000). In this case, with this understanding, the instructor can be a powerful agent in raising awareness about these unfair practices and make the program more inclusive of the marginalized parents.

Critical theorists using this model would argue that the program planner should confront the administration and present ways that parents believe the system needs to change to become more inclusive and supportive of their own needs. This model encourages making the administration aware of how their dominant practices are hurting the marginalized parents within the school system. This program may provide an opportunity for the non-dominant, Title I parents within the school system to meet and discuss issues affecting their lives and the education of their children. Also, the critical program planning model encourages a program which allows parents to openly engage in dialogue with school administrators and school board members every few months to

address their concerns and become updated on the progress made to resolve issues previously presented.

Another political issue that may arise while planning this program revolves around funding; who's going to pay for this program and what results are expected from it? Most likely, since it is a school-sponsored program, monies will be come from a school fund. Unfortunately, this may result in the school wanting to see some type of results measured through a means they have determined to be appropriate. When dealing with critical planning models, it is almost impossible to measure any type of learning because the program is not planned in a linear fashion; instead it is constantly changing to meet the needs of the learners (Forester, 1989). However to compensate, the critical program planning model would suggest incorporating monthly evaluations into the program. The purpose of these evaluations would be to ensure that the needs of the parents are being met as well as to show the school system the validity of the program. While this may ease the assessment concerns of the school system, it may not be enough to ensure funding will be made available for the continuation of the program.

The instructor may have to concede to the school system by incorporating mini-lectures or work-sessions into the program that address topics the school acknowledges as being important to the education of their students. Such topics might include: study skills, self-esteem issues, test taking tips, PSSA information, note taking, bullying, and homework issues. It is important for the instructor to acknowledge the power the school system does have upon the program in the form of financial support, as well as to be open with the parents about the need to incorporate such lectures and work-sessions into the program if they really want the program to be continued. Possibly, the parents will be

positively responsive to the school system's needs because they may not want to jeopardize the program's funding or their own learning needs. Maintaining funding for the program may prove to be the most political aspect of this process. Without funding there won't be a program and unless the program is meeting the needs of the adult learners, there won't be a need for the program or funding.

The instructor needs to assure that this balance between the school system and the parents remains intact. Forester (1989) admits that planners (or in this case instructors) need to "...work to counteract the political noise and flak coming from the very structure of the organizations they work within: the flak intimidating outsiders, the noise confusing insiders, the peremptory, bureaucratic" (p. 23). As the instructor of this program operates to ensure the needs of both the school system and the parents are being met, the benefits extended to the parents are far more important. Through discussion and dialogue, the instructor encourages Title I parents to challenge the dominant school system by becoming aware of their oppressive position in the system and having them find their own ways to combat those injustices. Also, this program gives parents an opportunity to use their own life experiences to solve problems, individually and/or collectively. Finally, this program allows parents to assume a much greater responsibility for improving the educational system of their children and provide them with the information and confidence to challenge the school system if they believe its practices are unfair to them or their children.

In summary, this section provided an overview of the classical, naturalistic and critical planning models used within the field of adult education. Additionally, an explanation and description of how the critical model of program planning could be used

to implement a program for Title I parents in a particular school district. Finally, this section concluded by addressing political issues that the program planner may encounter while planning this program and how these issues may be dealt with. In the following section of this paper, the theoretical framework for this study is discussed

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is the theoretical framework that influenced this study in two ways: first, it exposed the existing dominant power structure of the school system; and second, it served as the basis for raising awareness among marginalized parents within this school system. A presentation of the literature regarding the tenets of critical theory relating to these two areas is now discussed.

Critical Theory in Education

Critical theory has come to embody a vast array of differing views and assumptions over the years. No longer is it valid to simply approach critical analysis from Marx's (1976) ideas and assumptions of capitalism; however, many strands of critical theory do build upon a Marxist point of reference to fit their needs. Many theorists also cite Neo-Marxist (Sharpes, 2002) theory when challenging the school system's role in continuing the practice of producing the same type of students in the classroom. This reproduction theory favors enforcing the beliefs, practices, and values of the dominant class within the school system to produce students capable of continuing these social systems in society. Within the Neo-Marxist tradition, Sharpes (2002) states: "...teachers become unwilling victims of state power and accomplices in the exercise of power used to maintain social inequalities" (p.422); therefore, the educators reinforce these dominant

beliefs, practices, and values among students and parents within the classroom as well as during after-school hours.

In relation to the reproduction theory, Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of cultural reproduction, as it relates to the educational system, states that the dominant society subtly uses school systems to produce and distribute its ideologies onto unsuspecting oppressed classes. By doing this, the dominant groups of society implicitly determine what a good educational system looks like and how it should operate to achieve a quality education as determined in accordance to its own beliefs, practices, and value systems. Giroux (2001) summarizes Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of cultural reproduction in schools as:

Rather than being directly linked to power of an economic elite, schools are seen as part of a larger universe of symbolic institutions, that rather than impose docility and oppression, reproduce existing power relations subtly via the production and redistribution of a dominant culture that tacitly conforms what it means to be educated. (p. 87)

Bourdieu (1977) further describes his theory of cultural reproduction through the educational system by using the terms cultural capital and habitus. Everybody possesses cultural capital (i.e. linguistic and cultural competence) transferred to them based upon their own upbringing; however, this capital has different values based upon the different class systems in our society. The dominant class mostly determines the worth of cultural capital and they place higher values upon the capital within their own class system, than that of non-dominant systems. Similarly, Lareau & Horvat (1999) suggest "...cultural capital includes parents' large vocabularies, sense of entitlement to interact with teachers

as equals, time, transportation, and child care arrangements to attend school events during the day” (p.42). Furthermore, each person develops their own habitus, the way one internalizes knowledge, beliefs, language, etc. in relation to their own class, which allows them to view society from a specific perspective. Unfortunately, if this habitus does not reflect the dominant society’s perspective, a major gap exists between the two group’s systems, often leading to sustained marginalization of the non-dominant group of parents.

Within the educational realm, cultural capital and habitus directly impact how marginalized parents remain connected or become disconnected from the school system. For example, knowing the right people (i.e. those possessing favorable cultural capital as determined by the dominant group) can have an effect on whether or not parents are informed of important issues within their children’s school. Middle-class parents generally form social networks based on their class and approach administrative problems collectively (Lareau, 1987). Working-class and lower-class parents are usually not included in middle-class social networks thus making their capital less desirable. They are not privy to information about schools offered within the dominant circles, nor are they able to collectively resolve administration problems since the majority of the working and lower-class parents’ social networks are primarily comprised of family members (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Without access to these social networks, marginalized parents are often unaware of the hidden curriculum currently existing within our schools. Giroux (2001) defines the hidden curriculum as: “Those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (p. 47).

The hidden curriculum is present within the school system to transmit dominant ideologies onto students and parents within the system until those practices and beliefs ultimately become hegemonic in nature. Sharpes (2002) writes: “Giroux’s task is to criticize education for maintaining the rigidity of power structures that reinforce inequalities...” (p. 422). As school systems continue to silently transmit class and culture issues within its hidden curriculum, the dominant society continues to remain powerful and reinforce its own beliefs, practices, and values. Giroux (2001) states:

The imprint of the dominant society and culture is inscribed in a whole range of school practices, i.e., the official language, school rules, classroom social relations, the selection and presentation of school knowledge, the exclusion of specific cultural capital, etc. (p. 66)

Additionally, critical theorist Antonio Gramsci (1985) holds the assumption that schools rely on hegemony to ensure their domination over students and parents within the school system. Gramsci (1985) believes that hegemony is an educational phenomenon because every aspect of school, its beliefs, practices, and values all get transferred to students and parents within its system in numerous ways. For instance, schools decide the information its students will learn by providing a curriculum which contains information they deem important. Also, schools decide upon grading systems which clearly support dominant society’s assessment techniques. Additionally, schools’ parental involvement policies are geared to meet the needs of middle-class parents, ranging from when and where events are scheduled, to the types of parental involvement activities being organized. These practices can easily have negative effects on students whose parents are unable to participate actively in their children’s education. The

advantage given to students of parents who are able to actively participate reinforces the schools dominant practices, thus sustaining the system.

Critical theorists would argue the need for marginalized parents to explore these issues and perhaps offer suggestions on how to solve these problems and bring about change within society. How does someone begin to attack this hidden system when it is so embedded within our school culture? Giroux (2001) believes that educators need to play a crucial role in making this happen. Educators need to critically reflect upon and allow parents the opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge disseminated to students and the ways the school functions to maintain its existing power structure through its current practices. Also, educators need to bring to the forefront working-class ideologies which can be incorporated into the curriculum and presented to parents so they can become aware of the school system's agenda and how it affects their own subordinate roles within the educational system.

Educators may be unwilling to release their own power or they may be unaware of how much power they actually possess and how this power is negatively affecting subordinate groups within our society. As educators develop an awareness of the hidden curriculum and its affect on marginalized groups, they can begin to challenge and change the system to include a fair and inclusive education for all members of society, regardless of their class, socioeconomic status, or value system.

Awareness Raising

Paulo Freire (1970) was a Brazilian activist concerned with educating those marginalized in society to become conscious of their own oppression and to take action to challenge and possibly change their position in society. Raising awareness or

consciousness is a powerful tool Freire uses within his critical model of education.

“*Conscientização*, is the process of achieving a critical consciousness” (Freire, 1970, p. 17).

Educators and parents, marginalized due to their class status or culture, may learn and teach best using Freire’s (1970) method of problem posing, which allows participants to create awareness and solutions to real problems through dialogue. Freire (1974) states: “Dialogue awakens an awareness” (p. 113). Additionally, Freire (1970) contends that through the use of dialogue, traditional teacher-student roles are erased as new roles develop: “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also to teach” (p. 80).

Freire (1970) also recognizes how the banking method of education is inappropriately used when teaching adults. This method of education allows the instructor to lecture or provide information that they deem relevant to parents. There is no interaction during this type of program; instead parents simply receive the information from their instructor without discussion. The instructor, who is viewed as an expert in the knowledge being dispensed, expects the parents to accept the knowledge as absolute, and he doesn’t actively seek what information the parents may want to learn. Freire (1970) states:

The role of the educator is not to “fill” the educatee with “knowledge,” technical or otherwise. It is rather to attempt to move towards a new way of thinking in both educator and educatee, through the dialogical relationships between both. The flow is in both directions. (p. 112)

Many times, this banking method is used ineffectively when providing programs for parents of children within Title I programs. Brookfield (1986) recognizes this type of methodology as including "...assumptions that mirror the world view of certain behaviorist thinkers and that support the current institutional arrangements of employing agencies" (p. 234). These methods of instruction have been shown to be ineffective for increasing parental involvement.

Finding adult educators willing to operate outside of the hegemonic practices of the dominant school system may be difficult, but Gramsci (1971) believes organic intellectuals may prove to be those educators willing to do just that to bring about change within the oppressive school system.

According to Gramsci (1971) organic intellectuals are individuals who were once marginalized either by class or culture but have since become members of the dominant hegemony. In this scenario, organic intellectuals would have adapted to the white, middle-class ideals present in the school system; however, these individuals still have a trusting relationship with those still marginalized, namely the parents. Critical theorists may argue that by having this bond, organic intellectuals would be able to coordinate teaching and learning activities to facilitate parental involvement because the participants view them favorably. Once trust has been established, relevant discussions may follow highlighting the major impetus oppressing parents and suggesting ways in which to challenge this dominant situation.

The critical theorists highlighted within this review address concerns facing the educational system today. All theorists based their assumptions about the school system in relation to the oppressive nature on which it is founded and continues to thrive in

today's society. The dominant groups of our country have found a way to subtly transmit their own beliefs, practices, and values through public school systems in such a way as to present them as ideals for which parents, educators, and students should all be grateful. Unfortunately for the marginalized groups within our society, they may begin to view this ideology as the norm and internalize these social systems.

Summary

The historical background of the American school system provided pertinent information in understanding the deeply rooted ideologies of today's schools. Educators and the school system share the common beliefs that the present educational system based upon middle-class values is working and that parents who do not fit into its values need to assimilate into its system of beliefs. However, parents may argue with assimilating into an educational system whose beliefs, practices, and values may be radically different than their own; instead they would rather not participate in such school-sponsored activities.

Unfortunately, lack of parental involvement is a problem plaguing many schools across our nation. The studies reviewed in this chapter highlight some of the deterrents affecting participation but do not offer many suggestions on how to solve them. Researchers need to use a qualitative research methodology to facilitate marginalized parents' efforts to become more involved in school-related activities. Without parents' input and without educators and school systems changing their beliefs, practices, and values to meet parents' needs, lack of parental involvement will continue to be a problem within our nations' schools.

Additionally, this chapter reviewed the classical, naturalistic, and critical models of program planning. It highlighted how the critical model could be implemented within the school system to meet the needs of Title I parents in a particular school district and also the political issues which will need to be dealt with when incorporating such a model into the school system.

Furthermore, critical theory was presented in this chapter as the theoretical framework used to explore parent's perceptions about their involvement in school related activities. The connection between critical theory and the educational system was also examined in this chapter.

In conclusion, the lack of qualitative research studies exploring parents' own perceptions about parental involvement issues is unsettling. The literature revealed the perceptions about these issues from the dominant school system and educator viewpoints; however, the need exists to explore the reasons why marginalized parents are not participating in such activities from their own perspectives. Such exploration may increase marginalized parental involvement at the school. School systems must attempt to change the way marginalized parents are dealt with within the educational system and include them in formulating parental involvement activities and policies within our schools to increase parental involvement participation among marginalized parents.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was twofold: a) to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools; and b) to foster awareness among Title I parents about the individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in public schools. This study examined how parents explored their own meaning of parental involvement, raised their awareness about factors influencing their participation, and what actions, if any, participants took to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement.

This study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) How do participants describe their perceptions of parental involvement?
- 2) How do awareness-raising efforts impact parental involvement?
- 3) What action(s), if any, do participants take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement and possibly increase their own involvement?

This chapter begins by discussing the qualitative research paradigm within the context of this study. It also includes a discussion on action research followed by a description of critical action research. A section containing the researcher's background information is then presented. The ending sections within this chapter include the specific methodological elements of the study including participant selection procedures, data collection procedures and methods. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section

describing the data analysis procedures and the verification strategies used to ensure the quality of the research within this study.

Research Paradigm

This study followed a qualitative design since the researcher explored Title I parents' meanings of parental involvement in a public elementary school. A qualitative research design was chosen because the central focus of this study attempted to understand Title I parents' own perceptions of parental involvement while raising awareness about individual and social deterrents affecting their participation. Qualitative research is used to: "...study issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 2002, p. 14) in this case, Title I parents within a rural, elementary school. Merriam (2002) states that there are four key characteristics of qualitative research, and they were used throughout this study. First, this study lent itself to being a qualitative study because the focus of this study was to examine and to understand the meaning Title I parents constructed about their own parental involvement. Additionally, these parents raised their own awareness about the individual and societal factors that influenced parental involvement in public schools. Within the qualitative research paradigm, Merriam (2002) suggests: "researchers strive to understand the meanings people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (pp.4-5).

A second key characteristic of qualitative research is: "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam, 2002, p.5). The researcher in this study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews, two group discussion sessions, and three monthly meeting with the Title I parents to gain the

appropriate data to be analyzed. Also, various documents within the school system were reviewed by the researcher to gain a further understanding of parental involvement policies within the school.

Third, Merriam (2002) acknowledges that the qualitative research process is inductive in nature; therefore, the researcher constructed meaning from observations and data analysis of the participants to formulate themes and categories about parental involvement of the Title I parents within the study. Patton (2002) suggests: “Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (p. 453). This process allowed the researcher to examine the emerging data to create a more inclusive parental involvement environment for the parents in this study.

A fourth characteristic of qualitative research is that it includes thick, rich descriptions derived from interviews, group discussions, and monthly meetings within the study (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Throughout this study, it was essential for the researcher to access rich data from the participants to understand and to explore their meanings associated with parental involvement and also to examine how individual and social factors influenced their own involvement. Additionally, it was imperative that the parents used the group sessions to reflect upon these issues of parental involvement and they began to raise awareness about them. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) contend, “...qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). By using a qualitative research paradigm, the researcher accomplished this task by analyzing the data presented by the participants within this particular school setting.

The type of qualitative research most appropriate for this study was action research. Since this study was designed to explore the perceptions of Title I parents' participation in parental involvement activities and to foster awareness about the individual and societal factors that influenced parental involvement in public schools, action research, a specific type of qualitative research, was selected for this study. In the following section, the fundamental tenets of action research are discussed.

Action Research

Action research is described as being: "...a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.162). The key underlying elements of action research are: 1) the utilization of experiences of its participants to drive the study; 2) active engagement of the participants in the study to examine and solve problems with the researcher; and 3) the use of critical reflection to ensure its cyclical nature remains intact (Kemmis & Taggart, 2002; Patton, 2002). These foundational elements of action research were consistent with this study, which was to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools and also to foster awareness among Title I parents about the individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in public schools.

The person generally given credit for promoting action research a valuable research method was Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist and practitioner interested in solving sociological problems (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Hatch, 2002; Tomal, 2003). Lewin (1952), describes this research method as: "... a self-reflective spiral of cycles of

planning, acting, observing, and reflecting” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.162). Lewin used experiences within the qualitative paradigm to drive his studies, one of the first in the United States being concerned with community action programs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002). His four-step action research process advocated the need for participants to dialogue with the researcher about the experiences they were having and observing because their own reflection on this process allowed for the action research study to change to meet the needs of the participants more effectively. Without this reflective element, the participants would not have been able to explore their own ideas, actions, and experiences within the study, nor raise their own awareness about issues important to them. This reflection phase was an essential element in guiding the researcher and participants to investigate issues about parental involvement that were important to their own participation.

Lewin’s qualitative approach to action research involves using four phases: plan, act, observe, and reflect (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kincheloe, 1991). These phases are not meant to be followed in any prescribed order but instead should be seen as spiraling and overlapping depending upon the needs of the participants in the study. Also important to note is that participants may be at different stages of the process at different times of the study. Some participants may not reach any given phase in the process but yet make contributions to their own personal understanding of the issue being studied or perhaps offer support or insight into the process as a whole. Regardless of this spiraling process, this type of research process proves beneficial for participants through their own development.

The researcher explored Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement and also discussed individual and societal factors that may have influenced their parental involvement in this public school, through individual interviews and group discussions. Additionally, the participants and the researcher continued to raise awareness about the factors that hindered their involvement through group discussions and began to collaboratively *plan* an approach to increase parental participation at the public school.

The next phase of this study involved experiences participants had to *act* upon their ideas to increase their own involvement while raising awareness about factors hindering their involvement and how these factors may be overcome. For example, through group sessions, Title I parents decided that the current parental involvement policy at their school was unacceptable and should be challenged to be more inclusive of parents not within the middle and upper-class values and beliefs systems. As the researcher and participants *observed* each other's actions and discussions during this action research study, they were able to effectively note the progress of the study as it was taking place. For example, group discussions allowed participants to openly observe the researcher and other Title I parents' actions and discussions throughout the study. By allowing the participants and researcher to *reflect* throughout the action research process, the purpose of the study was continuously visited and revisited. For example, after group sessions, participants and the researcher reflected upon the information presented and decided to revisit any phases of the action research process, plan, act, observe, and reflect, as they continuously spiraled and overlapped throughout the study.

The specific type of action research used in this study was critical action research. Since the researcher intervened in the lives of Title I parents by raising awareness about

possible individual and societal factors influencing their own participation, critical action research was crucial to the study. A discussion of critical action research follows.

Critical Action Research

Critical action research was the specific type of action research used throughout this study. A critical action research study actively engages participants in reflecting upon their particular circumstances and changing their own behavior to challenge unjust situations. The basic assumptions guiding a critical action research study include: issues of power, active participation, giving voice to participants, raising consciousness of those involved and linking theory and research to practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Critical action research attempts to: “uncover and expose these power relationships wherein the domination of one’s groups’ interests results in the oppression of other groups” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 347). It was the intention of this researcher to provide participants with as much knowledge as possible about the dominant practices within the school system so they could decide whether or not to act upon their new awareness and change how parental involvement was organized within this school system.

Critical action researchers attempt to understand the significance of having participants actively involved in reflecting upon their particular circumstances and possibly changing their own behavior to address unfair situations. This critical action research required active participation of Title I parents to explore their own meanings of parental involvement issues and perhaps to become more involved in after school

activities of their children. The use of dialogue and reflection among participants was used to enhance this process. Researchers Carr & Kemmis (1986) state that the critical action research process will:

...engage [participants] in taking action on the basis of their critical and self-critical reflection, but it is prudent in the sense that it creates change at the rate at which it is justified by reflection and feasible for the participants in the process. (p. 205)

In this study, the researcher intervened in the lives of the participants by helping foster awareness about the possible individual and societal factors influencing their own participation in parental involvement activities at their children's school. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that critical reflection: "aims to contribute to social life through educating the consciousness of individual actors" (p. 93). This was accomplished by exploring the data collected from participants' interviews and also through group discussions about parental involvement issues and hidden power structures of the school system. Within the context of this study, critical action research was used to intentionally explore and uncover the power structure of the school system and how it affected parental involvement.

The researcher within this study was responsible to link the theoretical underpinnings of critical action research previously reviewed to practice. This was accomplished by actively involving the participants in this study to openly explore and discuss their own parental involvement practices and beliefs. Title I parents and the researcher engaged in a dialogue about these issues in group sessions then formulated a plan of action to increase their own involvement in school activities at the school.

Finally, the use of critical action research was suitable to explore and act upon issues of power found in the school system. Research suggests that critical action research is: "...a commitment to bring together broad social analysis – the self-reflective collective self-study of practices, the way in which language is used, organization and power in a local situation, and action to improve things" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002, p.560). Throughout this study, the researcher engaged participants in exploring and challenging parental involvement issues at the school.

Background of Researcher

My experience with parental involvement issues began in 1993 when I began my career as an elementary school teacher within the same community in which I grew-up and attended school. As I taught the next several years within self-contained kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, I began to notice the lack of participation of many parents during school-related activities. I must admit, I unfairly labeled those parents as being apathetic and uncaring about their own children's education. It wasn't until I earned my reading specialist degree and became a Title I teacher in the school district that I started to realize that the lack of participation may not be solely due to the parents' apathy after all, but instead such participation was strongly influenced by the school system's policies. Now that I am the Federal Programs Coordinator and oversee the Title I program at my school district, it is essential for me to understand the individual and social deterrents affecting parental participation in school-related activities for parents of Title I students so I can help parents become actively involved in increasing their participation.

It is also important to note the effect my own growth as a doctoral student within the Adult Education Program at the Pennsylvania State University has played a role in raising my own awareness of the dominant practices found within the public school system. While I did acknowledge that the school district may have somehow been responsible for the lack of participation, I did not fully realize the scope of its impact upon marginalized parents.

Traditionally, the students I work with within the Title I program are children of low or working-class socioeconomic parents who may not subscribe to the same cultural, economic or value systems that are prevalent within the school system. Unfortunately, because of various constraints placed upon them (i.e. work, language barrier, lack of transportation, lack of child care), parents of my Title I students are often unable to attend school-related activities during the day or evening. This lack of participation is ultimately viewed by the school system as parents not caring about their children's education and therefore, not being worthy of being involved in decision-making aspects within the school. I believe the school system's lack of understanding about the needs of Title I parents not operating within the dominant culture is having a negative impact on parental involvement participation within the school. Additionally, I believe that parental involvement should be incorporated into school systems to be inclusive of the needs of all parents, regardless of cultural beliefs and practices, socioeconomic systems, or value systems. Currently, the literature within the field particularly focuses on what school systems dictate appropriate parental involvement includes. Unfortunately, the voices of those marginalized, particularly parents of lower- and working-class students are unheard as the middle-class value system dominates the parental involvement decisions within the

school. I believe that this critical action research study fostered participation of parents within the school district by raising consciousness about the current parental involvement practices and policies within the school.

My own bias about how the school system in this particular district is hindering involvement of parents within the lower and working classes is evident and is the reason I've decided to use a critical lens throughout this study. The purpose of approaching this study from a critical viewpoint enabled me to present those, who I believed were being marginalized within the school system, an opportunity to become aware of the oppressive nature of parental involvement within the school and to provide them with options to take action against it if they so chose to do so. While it was my intention to assist Title I parents in becoming more involved in their children's school, their own participation and actions to change the parental involvement policies were ultimately their own choice.

Participant Selection Procedures

The participants in this study were chosen by contacting parents of Title I reading students in the grades kindergarten through fourth at a rural, elementary school in northeastern Pennsylvania. Originally, Title I parents in primary grades (K-2) were contacted to participate, however, the grade levels had to be expanded because participation was inadequate. Specific criteria for selection of these participants was twofold: a) parents must be Title I parents of children in grades kindergarten through fourth; and b) Title I parents must be limited to participation in two or less after-school activities at the school. The participants chosen for this study should have an interest in exploring their own level of participation at the school as well as, becoming involved in

forming a Title I parent group to examine such possibilities. Also, interested participants of low-socioeconomic status and those possessing various cultural beliefs and value systems than the middle-classes were encouraged to participate. Therefore, the specific selection criterion for participants was:

- 1) Have a child/children receiving Title I reading services in grades kindergarten through fourth;
- 2) Parental involvement of Title I parents in after-school activities should be two or less;
- 3) Parents should have an interest in exploring their own participation levels.

Before any research began, the researcher had to complete the Pennsylvania State University's IRB process (see Appendix A) and also receive permission from the school district whose parents were participants before the study moved forward. Additionally, the help of a Spanish teacher was needed to translate forms and letters and later in the study to provide interview translations for Spanish-speaking parents. After meeting the specific criteria, twenty five parents of Title I students were selected randomly from the Title I participation list for inclusion in this study. Letters, stating the intent of my research relating to parental involvement issues, were sent home to these parents in English and/or Spanish asking for volunteers (see Appendix B). Follow-up calls were placed to parents whose letters were not returned to garner additional participants. Privacy issues such as socioeconomic status and educational levels, were discussed within these letters and during phone conversations, as anonymity was assured to those who wished to participate, as well as assurance given that their participation would not negatively impact their children's Title I services within the school. Six Title I parents

agreed to participate after approximately seventy five letters requesting participation were sent home in grades kindergarten through second. At this time, the researcher decided to expand the participation criteria to include Title I parents in third and fourth grades also to meet participation goals between 12 -15 participants.

Also, the researcher used her connections within the community as a teacher, coach, and Parent Teacher Organization member to share information about the study being conducted and to solicit interested participants using the snowballing technique. Patton (2002) explains how this technique allows the researcher to gain valuable informants and participants for the study. This process works by asking people who are candidates for this study to recommend others who may have information and refer you to others who share similar knowledge on the topic being studied. By starting with a few individuals, this technique allowed the researcher to find additional participants needed to conduct this study. Finally, this process aided me in gaining a convenient, purposeful sampling of thirteen Title I parents of children in kindergarten through fourth grades. Cresswell (2002) states:

A purposeful sampling seeks to select participants for a variety of purposes.

These include: people who represent the diverse perspectives found in any social context (maximal variation sampling); particularly troublesome or enlightening cases (extreme case sampling); participants who are “typical” of people in a setting (typical sampling); and participants who have particular knowledge related to the issue studied (theory or concept sampling). (Stringer, 2004, p. 50)

This study used a typical sampling to help assure my participants emulated my Title I students in relation to socioeconomic status, cultural differences and beliefs, and

value systems. This variability included parents of Caucasian and Spanish cultures, lower and working-class economic and values systems. Also, I chose parents of both female and male Title I students proportionally related to those on the Title I roster, as well as equally disbursed among the grade levels.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods

This study was organized by using Lewin's (1952) four step process previously outlined above: plan, act, observe, and reflect. He describes each step of the process as 'moments' because each step "... 'looks back' to the previous moment for its justification, and 'looks forward' to the next moment for its realization" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 186). Lewin also identifies the ever changing nature of action research as the process continues to spiral back to each moment through the reflection process before advancing to the next stage of the model. While each of the steps in this process is often provided in a linear fashion, it is important to note that these stages will not occur in any particular order; instead the steps will spiral throughout the study as is often the case within action research studies.

The first phase of this critical action research process entailed having the researcher identify the problem and how the problem would be explored and studied. The purpose of this study was to foster parental involvement among Title I parents within a rural, public elementary school. The researcher began her study by immersing herself in an analysis of documents pertaining to the school's parental involvement policies (see Appendix C). Stringer (2004) notes that "At the school or district level, policy documents may include rules and regulations providing insight into institutionally

approved behaviors, activities, or procedures” (p.84). These documents included: No Child Left Behind Act, Student and Parent Elementary School Handbook, Policy for Parental Involvement for Title I students, Student, Parent, and Teacher Title I Compacts, and *Home and School Connection* newsletters. This unobtrusive data served as a beginning point for understanding the school district’s policies on parental involvement.

The second phase of this critical action research process involved methods used to collect data. The researcher began by scheduling one interview with each participant over a five-week period. This interview included semi-structured questions, a form of questioning which is frequently used in qualitative research designs (see Appendix D). Semi-structured interviews use a standardized interview format in conjunction with the opportunity for the researcher and participants to pursue other areas of interest within the interviews (Patton, 2002). All interviews were audio-taped to ensure accurate inclusion of the responses given by parents within this study. The researcher asked participants to respond to questions addressing their own perceptions about parental involvement in their school.

Rubin & Rubin (2005) assert the positive assets of using in-depth interviews to collect rich data and descriptions of phenomena being studied within a qualitative research study: “Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate...” (p. 3). As the researcher attempted to make meaning of parents’ perceptions of various parental involvement issues, data collected through these in-depth interviews was the core element of this study. The information gained from these first interviews was used to guide the first group discussion.

Additionally, all participants interviewed, were asked to participate in two group discussions. The purpose of having participants discuss issues together in these group sessions was to allow them to respond, comment, and question their previous responses or those of the others in the group to gain an understanding of the topic being discussed. These group sessions were approximately one hour to one and a half hours in length per session and included discussions on raising awareness among participants about unfair power structures in the school system and their own parental participation in school activities. Also, the group discussions enabled the participants to challenge and change existing policies and programs at the elementary school to increase their own involvement and improve communication between parents and the school system. The researcher's role was to guide this process and ensure the focus of the discussion remained on issues of parental involvement. In addition, she served as a representative of the Title I parents when she met with the principal to discuss issues participants deemed important and wanted changed.

The third phase of action research, observations, was incorporated in this study as the researcher collected field notes during interview sessions and during the group discussions. According to Ritchie & Lewis (2003):

Fieldnotes provide an opportunity to record what researchers see and hear outside of the immediate context of the interview, their thoughts about the dynamic they encounter, ideas for inclusion in later fieldwork and issues that may be relevant at the analytical stage. (p. 133)

Therefore, as each interview was completed, the researcher recorded in her researcher journal any information regarding the interview such as, but not limited to: setting,

relationship with participant, non-verbal cues, body language, and trust level (Hatch, 2002). This process permitted the researcher to write any observations she had while they were still fresh in her mind. Additional support for research journaling by Tomal (2003) states: “Although the interviewer is primarily concerned with getting verbal information from the respondents, valuable observations can be made while observing their behavior during their responses that might not be obtained through the use of questionnaires” (p. 35).

The fourth phase of this critical action research was to analyze and reflect upon the data that has been collected. Once the data was collected from the document analysis, interviews and observations, the researcher began to organize and categorize the information. However, “...in qualitative research, data analysis is simultaneous with data collection. That is, one begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, the first document accessed in the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 14).

This process involved the researcher constantly sifting through the data, trying to find the developing themes emerging within the data (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stringer, 2004). Also, participants played a major role in reflecting upon the group discussions and the parental involvement issues being discussed. It was the researcher’s belief that emerging themes developed around perceptions of parental involvement issues hindering participation and also about perceptions relating to the existing power structures at this school. However, the Title I parents ultimately decided upon which direction the study followed and which actions they wanted to take to challenge the parental involvement policies at the school district.

The data was then be coded by the researcher so information relating to emerging themes could be located efficiently (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Stringer, 2004). The coding systems the researcher used when analyzing this data included themes, sub-categories of these themes and various color-coding techniques to highlight the information. Once the data was coded, the researcher engaged the help of her fellow doctoral cohort members and her advisor to be part of a peer review of the data. This allowed for a non-biased review of the data collection methods, coding systems and data analysis.

The final stage of this action research study which occurs in every phase of this study, allowed participants to reflect upon their observations and actions within this study and decide what action(s) if any, they chose to take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement. This phase of the study was ongoing throughout the entire study as participants reflected within every stage of the process. The researcher facilitated the reflection process especially in the group discussions by raising awareness about individual and social deterrents hindering participation in school-related activities. Preferably, the researcher would have liked all the participants in the study to engage the school district in creating a more inclusive parental involvement policy to meet their own needs in relation to parental involvement issues. This wasn't accomplished because not all participants interviewed participated in the group discussions. The researcher was satisfied knowing that her study gave voice to those parents interviewed and involved in the group sessions who were marginalized in the school. For example, parents reflected upon the existing Title I program at the school and decided to change their involvement in its implementation for next year's program. Additionally, the participants decided to

hold monthly Title I meetings during the school next year and they wanted all parents of Title I students in grades kindergarten through sixth invited to participate.

Data Analysis

A qualitative, critical action research study uses a continuous and constant analysis of the data. Throughout the study, data was collected and analyzed at every phase of this research process. The data was gathered during this study through observations, semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and Title I monthly meetings. A constant comparative method of analysis was used throughout the study as new data and information was collected, analyzed, and reviewed and new findings were reported (Patton, 2002). This qualitative study used an inductive analysis to discover and categorize themes and relationships among parental involvement issues (Patton, 2002). This process allowed the researcher to review the data collected and to formulate emerging themes and categories around parental involvement issues. Once the initial interviews were transcribed and the journaling notes reviewed, the researcher began to analyze this information and look for emerging patterns or themes collected from the data. The researcher was then able to use this information to guide questions and awareness raising discussions in the following group sessions. These group session discussions were collaboratively decided upon between the Title I parents and the researcher as it was important to involve the participants in deciding upon the direction this study took (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002).

Once patterns and categories began to emerge through this process, an analysis of data within this qualitative research study focused on issues of power, participation,

raising awareness of those involved, and linking theory to practice (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Again, it was important to understand that the constant shifting and blurring of phases in this qualitative research design remained intact to ensure the emerging nature of data surrounding the themes and categories as identified by all the participants (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Dependability Strategies

Several dependability strategies were used in this study to ensure the data was collected and analyzed efficiently and as accurately as possible. The strategies used to confirm the trustworthiness of the results helped promote credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985):

The means of establishing trustworthiness involve procedures for attaining: credibility - the plausibility and integrity of the study; transferability – whether results might be applied to other contexts than the research setting; dependability – where research processes are clearly defined and open to scrutiny; and confirmability – where the outcomes of the study are demonstrably drawn from the study. (Stringer, 2004, pp. 56-57)

Credibility

Credibility is how the researcher ensures the accountability of a study and its findings by using rigorous research standards and methods throughout the process. The researcher ensured the quality of the study as she documented credible results using triangulation methods. Triangulation, the process of using multiple data sources to check the consistency of the researcher's findings, was used to assure credibility, the

believability of findings, within the study (Patton, 2002; Stringer, 2004). The relevant data sources analyzed throughout the study included: NCLB Act, Student and Parent Elementary School Handbook, Policy for Parental Involvement for Title I students, Student, Parent and Teacher Title I Compacts, and *Home and School Connection* newsletters. The researcher uses the school's policy for parental involvement as a tool to assess the parents' familiarity and understanding of this written document, as well as to challenge the school systems power structure while analyzing its parental involvement policies.

Credibility of interview data was assessed by using member checks, which had participants review their interview transcripts to assure the researcher reported their information correctly (Stringer, 2002). Also, the transcripts of group discussions were also reviewed for accuracy. The researcher had an interpreter available to read transcripts to the two Spanish-speaking parents who were not able to read English. The fact that I am employed within the school district which I am studying can cause the credibility of my data to be challenged. Member checks, having others review my work, were another way to ensure the credibility of my findings. My advisor and others within my doctoral cohort will review my data for congruency to ensure that my own biases did not overly influence this study or its results. (Merriam, 2002).

Transferability

Transferability is the process by which the researcher in a qualitative study generalizes findings so they can be transferred from one study to another (Patton, 2002; Stringer, 2004). Through interviews taken both individually and within group settings, participants offered thick, rich descriptions within the context of the study. This detailed

information enabled others to gain insight into the study and to possibly transfer its findings to other settings. Even though the action plan devised during this study may be used as a model for other districts to follow, it must be understood that what worked for this particular district may not be easily transferable to another district. The issues surrounding parental involvement were as varied as the structures of other school systems operating around the country. Realizing that no two school districts are exactly alike, researchers are cautioned when trying to transfer results garnered in this study to their own research; however, such data may be used as a guide or baseline to compare other researchers' results while studying parental involvement issues within their own districts.

Dependability

Dependability strategies are used within a qualitative research study to ensure research methods and findings are consistent. Dependability relies on the researcher using adequate and reliable research procedures throughout the study (Stringer, 2004). The dependability of research is achieved through an audit trail where details of the research process "... are made available to participants and other audiences" (Stringer, 2004, p.59). The techniques used to ensure dependability was journaling, recording member checks and using audit trails. An audit trail "...describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2002).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the level at which other researchers can substantiate the findings of a study. Additionally, confirmability ensures documents are retained to allow duplication of the study and that these documents are coded effectively. Audit trails,

triangulation, and field notes are techniques that will be used to establish confirmability. Audit trails were used to verify coding techniques and proper documentation within the study. Triangulation of the data reinforced the data collection of the study was accurate. This was accomplished by conducting follow-up interview sessions with participants to confirm that my observations and notes pertaining to their initial interviews were accurate. Additionally, time was taken within the first half hour of the group discussions to verify and/or clarify any observations or notes taken by the researcher from the previous session.

Summary

In summary, this chapter examined the qualitative research paradigm, specifically using a critical action research methodology. My beliefs as the researcher and detailed information regarding participant selection, data collection, data analysis methods, and a description of strategies used to ensure the quality of the research findings were also presented.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION, RESEARCH STUDY PROCESS AND PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: a) to provide a description of the community where the study occurred; b) to describe how the action research process was followed throughout the study; and c) to present a description of the participants in this study. First, a description of the community is provided below to increase the understanding of the context of where this study occurred, especially its people and the economics of this area. Next, a description of the critical action research process is provided which portrays an accurate account of how this study unfolded. It includes a description of the interviewing process, group discussions, and Title I monthly meetings. Finally, this chapter concludes with a detailed description of the participants involved in this study.

Community Description

The community in which this study occurred was in a small, rural, northeastern Pennsylvania community. It was once a heavily populated area in the heyday of the anthracite coal mining days in the 1920's and 1930's (population 30,000 +) but has since become a depressed area with a current population of approximately 8,600. Economically, this community has one food manufacturing company which employs residents of the community. Additionally, this community is situated within driving

distance of several other food manufacturing factories and one home product manufacturer which employs residents from the community as well. Therefore, aside from the one food manufacturer and the elementary and junior-senior high school employees, the majority of the working people within the community must travel to their place of employment daily. The ethnicity of this region has also transformed. Until the 1990's, the majority of this community was comprised of Caucasian people of Eastern descent; however, as a need for employment within surrounding farming communities grew, an influx of Hispanic migrant workers began to take residency in this small community. Today, the Hispanic community with descendents from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic has dramatically increased in size and the school district has one of the highest populations of Hispanic children within the state.

Currently, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's records (2004), approximately 24% of the current population in this community is labeled as poor. The elementary school (pre-kindergarten through 6th) has an enrollment of approximately 570 students; while the junior-senior high school (7th – 12th) has an enrollment of approximately 540 students. Within this school district, 67% of the elementary students were economically disadvantaged; while 53% of the high school students were labeled as such. District-wide, 61% of the students were economically disadvantaged and received free or reduced lunch prices.

Description of the Process of this Study

The reason the researcher decided to complete a study on parental involvement issues at her school was because she noticed a dramatic decline in participation of her

own Title I students' parents in parental involvement activities offered at the elementary school. The researcher then decided to review previous attendance sheets noting the degree of participation among the Title I students' parents at the school. She noted that this identified group of parents did not participate very often in school-sponsored activities at the school and she wanted to explore the reason for their absence and possibly assist them in becoming more involved.

Participant Selection Process

The criteria used to determine which participants were selected to participate in this study was twofold: a) parents must be Title I parents of children in grades kindergarten through fourth; and b) Title I parents must be limited to participation in two or less after-school activities at the school. Such criteria was established because the researcher wanted to hear from the parents of Title I students who were not participating, especially their perceptions of parental involvement, why they were not participating, and how, if they chose to, they would change the system so they may participate. In other works, the researcher wanted to give Title I parents, who were marginalized by the school system, voice at their public, elementary school.

Before participants were asked to participate, the researcher garnered the support of a Spanish teacher within the district who was willing to complete the Pennsylvania State University IRB process and translate forms and interviews for this study. An additional person, an ESL instructor, proofread all forms in Spanish as requested by the IRB to ensure its semantics and syntax was correct. After the IRB process was completed in March and all participation forms, written in English and Spanish, were ready for distribution, the researcher then identified the Title I students in kindergarten

through second grades by reviewing the Title I student participation list at the district. Approximately seventy-five participants met the criteria to participate and the researcher sent home forms to twenty-five randomly selected participants at a time until all seventy-five parents received an invitation to participate. Unfortunately, the goal to interview between 12-15 participants was not met with only two respondents willing to participate after all invitations to participate were sent home. Immediately, the researcher began calling participants at home trying to garner enough participants to begin the study stating very openly, her ability to meet whenever and wherever they felt comfortable for the interview. An additional two parents agreed to participate. The Spanish translator also called the homes of the Hispanic parents of Title I students and was able to gain two individuals willing to participate.

Interview Process

After several weeks, the six participants, two male and four female, willing to participate were scheduled for their individual semi-structured interview sessions. Not surprisingly, given the community's emphasis on sporting events centering on the school's athletic programs, most parents were very comfortable coming to the school for their interview, while two participants preferred to be interviewed at my home. While these six participants were being interviewed over the following two weeks, the researcher continued to contact parents she thought might reconsider their previous non-participation responses and was able to gain three more participants for the study, all female. Their interviews were scheduled the week after the first set of interviews concluded. After the completion of the nine individual interviews and with the school year coming to an end, the researcher decided to contact all nine of the participants and

invite them to participate in the first group discussion scheduled for the beginning of May.

Through past experience as a teacher within the district, the researcher knew that parent participation after the school year ended in early June was not feasible; therefore, that is why it was important to engage the participants before the year ended. All participants expressed a desire to participate in a group discussion during their individual interview sessions, so the researcher was optimistic that most of the participants interviewed would come to the first group discussion. The researcher and Spanish translator contacted the participants by phone and informed the participants about the upcoming group discussion which would be held in the elementary library at the school. The researcher informed the participants that there would also be food and beverages at the discussion. Even though the participants did commit to participate, only three participants out of the nine, attended. No explanation was ever offered for their non-attendance.

With only nine participants in the study thus far and only three of them participating in the first group discussion, the researcher decided to expand the research study to include parents of third grade Title I students to increase the number of participants for this study. The same procedure was used as above and only one more participant with a Title I child in third grade agreed to participate in an interview session but not within a group discussion setting. The following week, the researcher decided to widen the participants range even further to include parents of Title I students in grades four to meet the goal of 12-15 participants. After two more weeks of trying unsuccessfully to gain participants, the researcher decided to schedule the second group

discussion meeting before the school year ended. After contacting the original nine participants, five agreed to participate in the next discussion, two cited work schedule conflicts and two cited lack of childcare issues for their unavailability. On the night of the second group discussion, only four of the five participants arrived at the elementary library. After the second group discussion ended, the researcher again began to contact possible participants of Title I students in fourth grade following the procedure previously outlined, and she was able to get an additional two participants, a male and a female. Additionally, a parent of a Title I kindergarten student reconsidered her participation in the study and agreed to an interview session as well.

The First Group Discussion: Initial Outcomes

The first group discussion about parental involvement was developed around the current parent involvement policy within the school district and the emerging themes which appeared from the initial nine interview sessions. An important component of this discussion was to raise awareness among participants about the dominant positionality of the school system and its negative effects on parent participation. It was attended by three parents of Title I students in grades one and two. First, the researcher presented the three participants with the school district's parent involvement policy and they immediately began to point out areas of concern about it. This discussion quickly turned to the participants blaming the school district for an existing lack of communication between the school and home which they believed negatively affected parent involvement in school-related activities at the school. As the session continued, the researcher directed the discussion around four emerging themes which resulted from the previous individual interview sessions. These themes, discussed in Chapter 5, are: a) a

clearer understanding of the Title I program; b) inadequate communication between home and school; c) parents' perceptions of involvement and non-involvement; and d) barriers to participation in school-related activities. As the researcher brought up each topic for discussion, the participants became more cohesive and began questioning the researcher about these categories. The tone of the participants seemed angry and agitated which led to them wanting actions taken to rectify the identified areas of concern. They very clearly wanted answers to their questions and changes implemented within the school to enhance their children's learning and their own involvement. Undoubtedly, the parents' voices were being heard about the school's role in hindering their own involvement. The participants decided they wanted answers from the administration about three specific areas they identified as a concern at the school. These categories included: a) understanding the Title I program and how remediation is provided; b) increasing communication between the school and home; and c) more scheduled opportunities to be involved with school-sponsored activities (i.e. conferences, open houses, monthly meetings). The participants wanted to know when the researcher would meet with the administration about the issues and how soon these answers would be reported back to them. Their desire for immediate feedback was twofold: a) it allowed them to voice their concerns and receive answers to their questions; and b) it gave them an opportunity to decide what actions to take, if any, once they received this information.

The first discussion was an hour and a half in length and ended after participants were asked when they wanted the second group discussion meeting to be held and what they expected to accomplish at the next meeting. The participants then scheduled the

next meeting two weeks after this discussion and they wanted the next group session to focus on discussing the answers provided to them to their questions by the researcher.

The Second Group Discussion: Concluding Outcomes

One week prior to the scheduled second group discussion, the researcher and the Spanish translator called all nine participants interviewed up to this point, and reminded them about the upcoming scheduled meeting. All participants, even those who were unable to attend the last discussion, said they would try to make the meeting barring any unforeseen scheduling conflicts. Once the meeting night arrived, four participants were in attendance, two from the last discussion and two new participants. Those who did not attend did not provide the researcher with any reasons for their non-participation.

The meeting began with one participant from the first group discussion asking the researcher for answers to the questions posed for the elementary principal at the school. The researcher told this participant that we would discuss those issues shortly, but first, she wanted to review the themes discussed in the first session with the new participants to find out if they had anything to add to the discussion. The four participants, two females and two males, seemed to know each other which enabled the discussion to flow very well. Humor was interjected throughout this discussion and the participants were very comfortable speaking openly on all the issues being discussed.

The two new participants agreed with the first groups desire to have the principal respond to their issues which included: a) understanding the Title I program and how remediation is provided; b) increasing communication between the school and home; and c) more scheduled opportunities to be involved with school-sponsored activities (i.e. conferences, open houses, monthly meetings). They provided additional information

about the above categories and supported the first discussion groups' desire to have these issues addressed from the administration. Finally, it was time for the researcher to provide the responses to the participants' requests and the participants were eager to hear the results.

The researcher provided the participants with a description of how the Title I program operated and how their input can affect the implementation of the program yearly. The participants definitely wanted the program to change, moving from an in-class model to a pull-out model, because they believed this would positively affect the remediation of their children. The principal and training Title I Coordinator supported incorporating a combination pull-out/in-class remediation program for grades kindergarten, one, and two, but believed the in-class model was more effective for grades three through five; however, students could be pulled-out if a need existed for further remediation. The participants seemed pleased with this outcome and were ready to discuss their next issue of concern, how the school could increase communication between home and school.

The next topic of discussion centered on the participants' dissatisfaction about what the researcher reported to them about the topic of communication, and they were very comfortable voicing their displeasure to her at this meeting. The researcher began the discussion by reporting how the principal felt about existing communications between home and school. The principal believed that the school did provide parents with significant communication and cited several supporting reasons: weekly Thursday Communicator, monthly principal newsletters, monthly calendars with events listed, monthly *Title I Home and School Connections* newsletters, return phone calls/notes

between teachers and parents, and the opportunity to schedule a meeting with teachers at any time during the year. The participants were clearly not satisfied with this response and began to negatively discuss personal communication issues they have had at the school. Each participant had something to add to the discussion whether it was a story about how their child's teacher did not respond to their concerns in a timely fashion, or simply to offer support to the participant discussing a problem. The participants definitely seemed to bond at this point and became a united front as they demanded answers and clarification to the communication procedures at the school. At the end of this topic's discussion, it was evident to the researcher that the participants remained unhappy with the information provided to them and still believed more needed to be done to improve communication between the home and school.

Finally, the topic of the parents' need for more scheduled opportunities for them to be involved was discussed. The participants were united about this issue. They spoke about the limited opportunities provided to them to meet with their children's teachers to discuss academic and social issues, as well as the limited amount of scheduled activities for them and their children to participate. These included: Open House in September, the Reading Festival in April, and the Book Fair in early May. The group demanded more opportunities to be invited into the school and pressed the researcher to provide them with the principal's response to this issue.

When questioned, the principal reminded the researcher that parents are welcome to schedule a meeting with their children's teachers whenever they deemed it necessary and many parents did take advantage of these scheduled meeting times. She suggested that if parents wanted more scheduled conference time with their children's teachers,

perhaps she could schedule a meeting at the end of the first marking period for first and second grades since they were the grades at which three of participants' children attended. The participants seemed to like this but still insisted on more opportunities to be invited into the school and become actively involved in their children's education. The researcher also reminded the participants that teachers can't be forced to work after their contractual work day ends, therefore, any school-sponsored activities provided are purely on a voluntary basis. The participants implied that the teachers should want to be involved more with their students but understood they can't be forced to organize and plan such activities. However, those participants who attended the Reading Festival and the Book Fair were pleased with these activities.

One participant suggested having meetings with other Title I parents during the upcoming school year to provide support for each other and also as an arena to discuss issues they may be having with their children, both academically and socially. The other participants liked this idea and began suggesting various topics and resources they wanted provided to them. Some of these suggestions included: math and reading workshops, computer training, self-esteem issues, handouts, materials and books to support their children's academic performance. Through further discussion, these participants decided they wanted to provide the opportunity to meet monthly to all parents of Title I students beginning next year. They also wanted the meeting to occur before the scheduled September Open House so parents could discuss topics and issues with each other to aide them when they met with their children's teachers. Additionally, the participants did not want the principal or other teachers attending the upcoming

meeting, only the researcher who will be the new Title I Coordinator next year, was invited to organize and attend these meetings.

Title I Monthly Meeting: September

As suggested by the Title I parents during the second group discussion at the end of the last school year, the researcher invited all parents of Title I students in kindergarten through sixth grade to attend the first Title I meeting in early September. Approximately two hundred seventy-five invitations for participation were sent home with forty-two parents stating they would attend the meeting and seventy-six respondents stating they were unable to attend. Some of those not able to attend cited childcare issues and work schedules as reasons for their unavailability to participate. One participant who wanted to attend was unable due to his current situation of being on house arrest; however he did indicate a willingness to attend future meetings.

On the night of the first meeting, the researcher prepared a packet of resource materials for each participant with strategies and ideas to support their children academically and she also had various books on topics such as homework and study skills for the participants to take home with them. Despite the number of respondents accepting the invitation to participate at the first meeting, six parents attended, several also brought their children to the meeting. The participants who attended represented their children in grades kindergarten, second, third, fourth and fifth. The meeting lasted approximately one hour. Only one participant from the thirteen interviewed in last year's study was present for the meeting; however, she was actively involved in speaking to the parents about the identified issues that arose in last year's group discussions and what had

been currently done to incorporate their suggestions into this school year's Title I program.

Since many of the parents interviewed for this study did not fully understand how the Title I program operated within the district, the researcher decided to discuss this with the Title I parents. They asked questions and seemed to understand how the program was run and their active role in suggesting changes to it each year. At several points in the meeting, the researcher noticed that parents were unable to fully focus their attention on the discussion at hand because of their children's needs for attention during the meeting. The researcher suggested providing someone at next month's meeting to supervise the children while the parents met and this was happily agreed upon.

The discussion ended with the researcher asking the participants to decide what they would like offered at next month's meeting. Several suggestions were offered and the group decided on having the researcher provide them the opportunity to use computers to find resources specifically applicable to their children's needs for the October meeting. The researcher agreed and provided the parents with her school phone number and e-mail address for future questions, concerns, or suggestions they had before the next meeting. Also, participants were encouraged to bring a friend to the next Title I meeting. Finally, participants felt that if the meetings were scheduled on the same day every month, it would be easier for them to plan their schedules to attend. They agreed that the Title I meetings would be held on the first Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. in the elementary library. Additionally, it was decided that the researcher would continue to send letters home to all Title I parents monthly. It would include the meeting time and place on a monthly calendar of events to remind them of the upcoming meeting. The

researcher thanked the parents who attended and she was also thanked by the parents for providing them with the opportunity to meet every month.

Title I Monthly Meeting: October

The second Title I monthly meeting was attended by nine participants on the first Wednesday of the month and lasted approximately two hours. One participant was involved in the second group discussion in last year's study and was pleased to see new faces at the meeting. Two parents from last month's meeting also returned. A high school teacher, who helps students fulfill community service hours, volunteered to supervise the children this month. She wanted to provide high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to fulfill their community service hours by assisting her with the supervision of these children in future months. The participants who brought children along were satisfied with this arrangement and allowed their children to play on the playground and then watch a Halloween movie while they attended the meeting.

The meeting began with a brief discussion about the events that occurred at last month's meeting. Participants then had several questions of concern about the Title I program which were answered by the researcher. She then took the parents over to the school's computer lab and handed them a list of educational websites she compiled from elementary teacher input. Some parents were not very familiar with computers so the researcher and other parents in attendance helped each other connect to the Internet. Once all participants were online, they were encouraged to visit the websites listed (or others they knew about) and print any resources they wanted to take home with them. For the few parents who were not comfortable using a computer, the researcher asked

them for their children's specific academic difficulties and helped them navigate to appropriate resources for them to print.

By the end of the session, parents were openly sharing websites they found helpful from the list and also others they found on their own through exploration of various search engines. They seemed pleased with this meeting's outcome and gathered back in a group before leaving to discuss what they wanted to do at the next month's meeting. After several suggestions, the parents decided they would like to meet their children's Title I reading and math teachers and perhaps they could present a lesson to provide them with some study skills and suggestions to help their children in these academic areas. The researcher agreed that this would be an effective topic for next month's meeting and suggested that perhaps parents attend this workshop with their children and actually work with them during the lesson. The parents agreed that this would be beneficial and agreed to bring their children to the November meeting.

Title I Monthly Meeting: November

Before this meeting took place, the researcher met with her Title I staff and informed them about their Title I parents' desires to have them come to the next meeting and provide them with some suggestions to help them work with their children at home. The Title I teachers, three reading (including myself) and three math, were very responsive to the request and began discussing how to accomplish this task. It was agreed that the parents and their children would be grouped according to grade level, kindergarten through second, and third through sixth, with each Title I teacher presenting a lesson with strategies for their grade level. The first forty-five minutes of the meeting would be a math lesson; the last forty-five minutes would be a reading lesson. Each

teacher was responsible for acquiring the appropriate material for their lesson and would be paid for their involvement. Additionally, the teachers suggested that for this month's meeting parents needed to pre-register so they would have the appropriate number of supplies and resources available to the participants. The researcher agreed and sent home a description of the upcoming Title I monthly meeting along with an attached pre-registration form. Nineteen parents responded to the invitation and the researcher decided to send out a second notification/registration for the event. The second response garnered an additional eleven registrations and the teachers were satisfied with the outcome.

On the night of the November meeting, eight participants attended the two hour-long event. The researcher provided the participants with a folder full of study skills suggestions, homework suggestions, and activities to help with improving their children's academic success. Then the parents were introduced to their children's Title I teachers and were grouped by grade level for their math and reading workshop sessions. In addition to the resources provided by the researcher, each Title I teacher provided additional grade appropriate resources to the parents and incentives for the children attending.

At the conclusion of the workshop sessions, the Title I teachers remained to answer any specific questions or concern they had with their children. Both teachers and parents appeared pleased with the workshop sessions and requested similar sessions after the holiday season. The parents agreed to cancel the December Title I Monthly Meeting because of the hectic nature of the holidays but didn't have any suggestions for the

January meeting. Overall, the parents seem to be satisfied with the monthly meetings provided thus far and will hopefully continue to participate in future meetings.

Summary

In summary, the first section of this chapter provided background information about the community and its people where this study occurred. By presenting the economic backgrounds and ethnic structure of the community, the researcher was better able to set the context for this study.

Additionally, this section detailed the process of acquiring participation in the study which proved to be difficult at times. Also, the interview and group discussion processes were discussed in detail. The first and second group discussions provided several examples of the actions taken by the participants about parental involvement issues they deemed important.

Finally, the three monthly follow-up meetings held during the new school year were also addressed. These meetings, which still occur today, were a direct result of the participants' actions and requests for monthly meetings during last year's interview and group discussions. They continue to be a positive source of involving parents of Title I students at the school.

Participant Descriptions

This section includes detailed information about the thirteen participants of this study. Overall, there were ten female participants and three male participants; two of the women were Hispanic while the rest of the participants were Caucasian. Six participants

were labeled as economically disadvantaged and their children received free or reduced lunch prices at the school; the remainder of the participants' children paid full price for their lunches. Additionally, eleven of the participants interviewed were married; while the other two participants were unmarried. However, regardless of their marital status, the participants in this study acknowledged the involvement of the other parent within their children's lives.

Mark

Mark is a Caucasian father of two children, one whom attended kindergarten at the elementary school. His kindergarten son received Title I services for reading during the school year. Mark is in his early twenties and is currently unemployed; however, he was employed full-time in a factory position earlier this year. He is unmarried but remains in close contact with the mother of his first son. Currently he resides with the mother of his second child. This participant was very involved with his children during after-school sporting activities and he also coached his son on one of these teams. Mark enjoys spending time with his children but also stated that it was sometimes difficult to give his school-aged child all his attention during after-school hours because he also has a toddler at home. Mark was concerned that this may have a negative impact on his oldest son because it wasn't always easy for him to spend as much time as he would like on homework with his kindergarten child. Even though Mark is unemployed at this time, he chose to pay full price lunches for his child at school. He was very soft-spoken throughout the individual interview process and remained rather quiet during the group discussion that he attended. Mark had been unable to attend the first two fall Title I meetings due to his prior commitment to coaching his son's team; however, Mark did

state that he will attend the next meeting scheduled in November. Unfortunately, he was not present at this meeting and did not give a reason for his non-attendance.

Alexandria

Alexandria is a Hispanic homemaker of three children: a son in high school, a daughter in second grade, and a toddler at home. Martha's family moved from Mexico to this country seven years ago. Both she and her husband speak their native language, Spanish, at home and with their children. She and her husband are both in their forties. Martha was not employed but her husband worked as a seasonal worker in the surrounding farming communities. Martha stated during her interview that she was very appreciative of the Spanish translator present during the interview session since without him, she would have been unable to participate in this study. Martha's daughter received Title I reading services during the school year. Her daughter was also eligible to receive a free lunch at the school because the family's income met the requirement for this particular year. Martha stated during her interview session that she did not believe the school was doing enough to welcome the Hispanic community into the school system and was willing to help facilitate recruiting other Hispanic parents in the community to become more involved at the school. Unfortunately, Martha was unable to attend any of the group discussions because of family issues. Additionally, Martha and her family moved over the summer break and therefore, her participation in this study had since ceased.

Ellen

Ellen is a Caucasian grandmother of a kindergarten Title I reading student at the school. She is in her fifties and has a total of three grandchildren. Her grandson paid full

price for his lunches at school. She spent a significant amount of time with her grandson and was very involved with his homework and extra-curricular activities. Ellen was employed as a childcare aide and she felt that her occupation allowed her the opportunity to learn new skills to help her grandson succeed academically. She occasionally attended parental involvement activities at her grandson's school when her son was unable to attend. Additionally, Ellen was very active within the community youth organizations and often volunteered her time for special holiday events held in the community annually. During Ellen's interview session, she stated that parents needed to find the time to be involved with their children's activities, both academically and socially. She felt the school offered its parents enough opportunities and activities for them to become involved if they chose to do so. Ellen's perspective about parental involvement may reflect her own occupation as a childcare aide, which may have allowed her views to be influenced by the school system. Ellen stated that she would be willing to meet for group discussions; however, she was unable to attend any of them.

Ava

Ava is a Caucasian woman in her early thirties. She is married and has two children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter received Title I reading services in first grade. Ava was an active participant in both group discussions. She was a very outspoken participant in this study. Unfortunately, Ava was unable to attend any of the fall Title I parent meetings because her daughter no longer qualified for Title I services, thus her participation in this study ended. Ava was employed as a licensed nurse and paid full price for her daughter's lunches. She had always been supportive of her daughter's extra-curricular activities and could be seen in regular attendance. Throughout

the interview and group discussions, Ava vocalized her dissatisfaction with the Title I program and the school's efforts to communicate with its parents about various school related issues. She questioned many of the school's academic policies and procedures and demanded the researcher question the principal about these issues. Additionally, Ava offered suggestions to improve parental involvement at the school. Several of these suggestions have been incorporated into this year's Title I program; however, because her daughter no longer qualifies for these services, her daughter does not benefit from her mother's perseverance in changing the program. Ava's sometimes demanding demeanor during this study produced results which seem beneficial to the Title I program, its students, and their parents.

Thomas

Thomas is a middle-aged Caucasian father of three children. He is the father of a daughter who received Title I reading services in first grade. Currently, Thomas is unemployed due to a disabling injury he received at his previous employment. His wife is employed as a nurse, which allows his children to pay full price for lunches at the school. He attended both group discussions, in addition to his interview session, and was dissatisfied with the school's role in actively involving its parents in school related activities. He was also a very vocal participant during this study who challenged the researcher to meet with the principal to discuss ways to improve communication between school and home. His determination enabled the school to implement several new types of communication between the school and parents to increase parental awareness about academic issues and involvement activities. He was actively involved in participating with his daughter in extra-curricular sporting activities and enjoyed spending quality time

with his child after school. Due to a change in his daughter's instructional plan, Thomas's daughter no longer received services at the school; therefore, his participation in this study was terminated in the fall of this school year.

Samantha

Samantha is a Caucasian mother of three sons, one who received Title I reading services in kindergarten at the elementary school. Samantha is in her early thirties and works as a director of a childcare facility and was very helpful with providing suggestions to increase parental involvement at the school. She was very active in PTO activities in the past; however, with the birth of her newest child, she admitted that she didn't have the time to be as involved in school activities as she was in prior years. Samantha was able to attend an interview session but was unable to attend any of the group sessions held thus far; however she did sign up for the Title I Parent Meeting session to be held in November but was unable to attend due to childcare issues. She felt that the school needed to provide its parents more opportunities to be involved in school activities with their children but she also commented positively on the activities the school did provide for parental involvement purposes. Samantha's employment allowed her children to pay full price for their lunches. She also felt very comfortable contacting the school whenever her sons' had a problem, either academically or socially, and she felt confident in the school's role in addressing and correcting any problems. Additionally, Samantha had a good relationship with both her sons' teachers which increased her satisfaction with the communication between home and school.

Francesca

Francesca is a Hispanic mother who has a daughter receiving Title I reading services in second grade at the elementary school. She is married and in her late twenties and also has a child at home, which she later admitted as being a barrier to her involvement at school. Francesca is a Hispanic woman who did not speak English. It was very difficult to contact Francesca because of the language barrier; however, a Spanish interpreter was able to contact her at home and set up an interview time to meet. Even though the Spanish interpreter told Francesca about his availability to interpret during the interview, she brought her own niece to interpret during the session. It was very apparent during the interview process that Francesca was uneasy as she provided very short, concise answers to my questions. She did not make frequent eye contact or elaborate on her answers when pressed for more information; nor did she offer any additional information other than what was asked during the interview. Francesca's daughter did receive a free lunch at the school and she admitted her small child at home prevented her from attending school-sponsored activities with her school-aged daughter. It was apparent that Francesca's lack of understanding English also hindered her parental involvement with the school. Additionally, Francesca's participation in this study showed her willingness to become involved in her daughter's education, despite her uneasiness and lack of English understanding.

Andrea

Andrea is a Caucasian mother of a second grader who received Title I Reading services at the elementary school. She is in her early forties and is married. Andrea interviewed and attended a group session to discuss parental involvement issues. She

also attended a Title I Parent meeting in October and the November meeting with her daughter. Andrea worked as a nurse in a community health care agency and paid full price for her daughter's lunches at the school. Andrea was a very outspoken parent who believed all parents needed to be involved in activities at the school; however, she felt the school did not provide adequate opportunities for this to occur. Andrea was a strong force during the first group session meeting to change the Title I program at the school. Even though Andrea was unable to attend the second group session in the spring, she contacted the researcher to find out the answers the principal provided the researcher regarding next year's Title I program. Additionally, Andrea has developed a close bond with the Title I Coordinator and is very comfortable at the present time voicing her concerns to the Title I Coordinator who in turn, tries to help her with any problems she may be encountering. Andrea continues to monitor the progress of the Title I program at the school to ensure it provides her daughter with the appropriate academic services she needs to succeed.

Cindy

Cindy is a Caucasian mother of four. Her second grade son received Title I reading services at the elementary school. She also has two boys in high school and a daughter who has graduated high school. Cindy is a single mom and employed as a home health care nurse. Her employment enabled her to pay reduced lunch prices for her children in school. She was active in supporting all her children in school with their extra-curricular activities. Cindy was interviewed and attended the second group discussion session in the spring. She was also present at the first Title I Parent meeting in September and spoke to other Title I parents about the changes that will be occurring in

the Title I program this year based on the past interviews and group discussions. Cindy answered questions the parents had about the Title I program and the proposed changes. The parents were very receptive of this information. Cindy was also registered to attend the November Title I Parent meeting with her son but did not attend. During her interview, Cindy felt the school was not meeting her needs in providing her opportunities to get involved in school-related activities. Additionally, she wasn't satisfied with the communication between home and school and she wanted that to change. Furthermore, Cindy talked about the lack of communication between her son's teachers and her regarding an academic issue. She felt that because of her persistent requests to the teachers, her son's academic problem was finally dealt with; however, she believed it was the school's responsibility to address the issue first, not her responsibility to bring her son's academic problem to the teachers' attention.

Shannon

Shannon is a middle-aged, married, Caucasian parent of three children in the elementary school and one child in high school. Two of her children received Title I reading services at the school, a son in kindergarten and a daughter in fourth grade. Currently, Shannon is unemployed and her children receive free lunches at the school. Shannon spoke about her unemployment positively because it allowed her to spend more time with her children during after-school activities. She worked as a nurse's aide in a home healthcare facility in the past. Also, she was in the process of receiving her background clearances which will allow her to donate some of her time during the day to assist in her elementary children's classrooms. During her interview session, Shannon spoke positively about her experiences with the school. She felt that the school did

provide enough opportunities for parents to be involved such as Open House and Family Reading Night; however, she felt that other parents might be unable to attend these activities because of conflicting work schedules. Shannon seemed very nervous throughout the interview and she seemed to answer questions the way she thought the interviewer would like her to respond to them. Shannon did not provide the researcher with any additional information beside the questions asked of her, and she did not speak negatively about the school system at all during the interview.

Susan

Susan is a Caucasian parent of three children at the elementary school and one child in high school. She is in her mid thirties and is married. Only one of her children, a daughter, received Title I reading services in the fourth grade during the school year. Susan worked part-time in a food service position and her children received reduced lunch prices at the school. Susan chose to be a stay-at-home mom until her children began school because she emphasized the importance of raising her own children. Just recently, Susan returned to the work force but she insisted on working only part-time so she can be home for her children after school. Susan was actively involved in her children's extra-curricular activities which included the latest seasonal sporting activities. During her interview session, Susan spoke positively about the opportunities presented to her to be involved in her children's activities; however, she felt that other parents should also be given the opportunity to become involved with their children at the school. She attributed her reoccurring invitations to participate as "luck" because the teacher's at the school got to know her through her participation with her older children at the school;

therefore because of her presence at the school in prior years, she felt other teachers noticed her and requested her participation in school activities at the school.

Alec

Alec is a Caucasian parent of four children, three who attend the elementary school and one who attends high school. He is married and in his mid thirties. His fourth-grade daughter received Title I reading services during the school year. Alec was currently not working due to a work-related injury but he should return to his factory position within the food industry shortly. His children received reduced lunch prices at the school. Alec participated in an interview session and tried to attend future group discussion but would not commit himself because of his work schedule. Despite his work schedule, Alec tried to be very involved with his children's activities both at school and at sporting events. He had chaperoned field trips for his children in the past and also volunteered his time to coach his children during many t-ball and baseball seasons. Alec mentioned during his interview how the abundant amount of homework he needed to help his children with nightly interfered with his family time with his children. He preferred that homework be drastically reduced or eliminated altogether because children needed time for themselves and their families after the school day. Additionally, Alec suggested more opportunities should be provided for parents to become involved in school-related activities. He also recommended increasing activities for parents to meet for support and to discuss issues, both academically and socially, with one another.

Jackie

Jackie is a middle-aged, Caucasian parent of two school-aged children, a daughter in elementary school and a son in high school. She is employed within the field of

education and her children pay full price for their lunches at the school. Her third grade daughter received Title I reading services this year at school and her son received Title I reading services in the past as well. Jackie reluctantly agreed to have her interview recorded and was unable to attend either of the group discussions due to time constraints placed upon her because of work issues. During Jackie's interview, she spoke positively about the various opportunities the school provided its parents to get involved in their children's education; however, she gave several suggestions on how the school could increase parental involvement at the school. One suggestion was for parents to have regular social meetings to discuss topics relevant to their children, both academically and socially. Jackie felt that such networking would enable parents to become more informed about school issues as well as social issues. Furthermore, Jackie believed the school communicated well with its parents and she was aware of school activities and upcoming events. Additionally, Jackie was very comfortable addressing her children's teachers with academic problems that arose and she had positive results with each of these encounters.

Summary

In summary, the second section of this chapter highlighted the descriptions of the participants in this study. These descriptions provided background information, including employment information, marital status, socioeconomic status, and family composition. Additionally, information was reported which focused on the participants' perceptions, whether negative or positive, about parental involvement issues at the school. The content provided in this chapter enabled the researcher to further set the

context for this study and prepare the reader for the presentation of the research study findings in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this critical action research study was twofold: a) to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools; and b) to foster awareness among Title I parents about the individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in public schools. There were three phases of data collection: a) individual interviews; b) group discussions; and c) monthly Title I parent meetings. While not all parents interviewed individually participated in the group discussions, several of them participated in two in-depth group discussions that allowed participants to reflect and build upon the emerging themes of their individual interviews. Additionally, data collected from each of these phases of the study provided the Title I parents the opportunity to actively challenge and change the existing Title I program at their school based upon their identified needs. Furthermore, three follow-up monthly meetings for September, October and November of the following school year provided the participants an opportunity to discuss how the parents' interviews and group discussions of the study impacted the implemented Title I program for the new year.

Four main themes emerged from the individual and group discussions about Title I parents' perceptions about parental involvement. They were: a) parents' desire to understand the Title I program at their school; b) parents' desire for increased personal communication between home and school; c) parents' perceptions of involvement; and d)

parents' identified barriers to involvement. Each theme is discussed below in addition to its related sub-themes.

Parents' Desire to Understand the Title I Program

The participants in this study expressed a desire to understand the policy and procedures associated with the Title I program at the elementary school. In particular, issues relating to understanding what model the Title I reading and math programs followed, parents' roles in planning a Title I program, and Title I teachers' roles within an in-class model were discussed. During this study, the Title I program at this elementary school provided supplemental remedial services for students in grades kindergarten through fifth in the subject areas of reading and math. When this study began, Title I teachers followed an in-class model which allowed students to receive remedial help in their subject areas within their classroom. This in-class model enabled the Title I teachers to come into the children's classrooms to assist this teacher by providing the Title I students with additional support with the lesson. Students were not "taken-out" of the classroom to receive this extra help as would be the case in a Title I pull-out model.

The participants in this study did not feel that they were adequately made aware of how the Title I program was implemented at the school nor were they aware of how the Title I teacher serviced their children academically at the district. Additionally, the participants did not feel like they were involved in the planning process of the Title I program at their school, which is stated within the district's parental involvement policy. These issues were discussed with great fervor during the group sessions.

Parents' Misunderstanding About the Title I Program

As previously stated, the Title I program is a federally funded program that offers remedial assistance to students in the areas of reading and math. Within this particular school district, students were eligible to receive Title I reading and/or math services if they needed additional support in these academic areas. The current Title I reading program was offered in grades kindergarten through fifth while the math program is offered in grades three through five. Federal funding within the district is based upon students' eligibility to receive free and reduced lunch; however, inclusion in the Title I program is based on academic need.

The Title I program at the school followed an in-class model that allowed students enrolled in the Title I program to receive supplemental support in their classroom from an additional highly qualified teacher. Unfortunately, parents in this study expressed uneasiness relating to how the program was implemented at the school. Procedurally, the parents seemed uncertain about its implementation at the school. During our individual interviews, Samantha admitted “[Parents] don’t understand what Title I is. They don’t understand any of that.” She added, “They don’t understand the whole concept of what it is.” Supporting Samantha’s belief that some parents really do not fully comprehend how the Title I program at the school operates, Andrea confirmed her claim, “Like, I don’t fully understand the Title I...what, what else could be provided with that. I just think something needs to be expanded upon. Like I said, I don’t want my child to be the one that falls through the cracks or anybody else’s [child].”

Undoubtedly, Andrea expressed her concern over her lack of understanding about the Title I program and how it may negatively affect her child’s learning potential in the

future. Her need to more clearly understand the Title I program's was evident as well as her concern for her own child and other children to have their academic needs met within the program. She went on to say: "If they're not learning like the other children then what?" Andrea asks. She continued on to say, "There just seems like there's a need for a little bit more. A little bit more involvement or a little bit more help. That program is going to just shuffle them along through the system."

The participants' concerns about parents not fully understanding the Title I program at the school were addressed more thoroughly in the two group discussions. These sessions allowed other participants to discuss their uneasiness about how the program was implemented and what they felt needed to be done for the program to be successful for their children. This information will be provided fully within the group discussion sections of this chapter.

Parents' Role in Planning the Title I Program

Participants interviewed were unaware of their role in planning the Title I program for each school year at the elementary school. The participants also misunderstood the current arrangement of the Title I program pertaining to its implementation at the school, its teachers' roles within the program and finally, their roles as parents within deciding this process. This year's Title I program at the elementary school followed an in-class model whereas the Title I teacher remediated the children in reading and/or math within their classroom. Other districts in the area provided their Title I instruction using a pull-out model, which allowed children to be taken from their classroom by the Title I teacher to receive supplemental instruction in a small group or one-on-one with the remedial teacher. Two parents who were

knowledgeable about the difference between an in-class program and a pull-out program began a discussion as to why their district did not provide its students with a pull-out program. Ava said, “See I thought years ago they used to take the kids out of the room. It was more of a one-on-one.” Andrea concurred:

I like that. That’s what I was thinking. That’s what happens when they go to [a neighboring school district]. They take her out of the classroom if she needs to take a test...if she does poorly on tests, they modify [the tests]. The way tests are given; she’s on the honor roll. That’s Title I.

Ava was unsure the program Andrea described was really a Title I program and not an individualized educational plan (IEP) so she asked, “That’s Title I, not an IEP?” Andrea confirmed that the program she talked about was an existing Title I program at a neighboring district which lead Thomas to wonder “Is there some way we can change it?”

The discussion then turned to the researcher giving an explanation about the process involved in implementing the Title I program and how parents are invited to take part in the process at the Annual Business Meeting held in the spring. Unfortunately, the three participants in this group discussion were unaware of the meeting the last several years and did not believe it was advertised in the local newspapers. Andrea stated “I never saw it.” Both Ava and Thomas agreed. In fact, Ava was not really sure what the purpose of the Annual Business Meeting was as she said, “I don’t really know what it’s about.”

Again the researcher used this moment to make the participants aware of the purpose of the Annual Business Meeting, which is for parents to meet with the Title I Coordinator to discuss the current Title I programs, student eligibility requirements,

funding sources and other pertinent information each year. Also during this meeting, the coordinator listens to parents' suggestions about program planning and development ideas for the following year's Title I program. However, since these meetings have been scarcely attended (parents have not shown up for the past few years), the Title I Coordinator planned and implemented the program without receiving input from the Title I parents whose children received these services in the district. In response, Ava angrily concluded, "They say they care about the children [but] they don't."

Upon hearing this explanation from the researcher and Ava's comment, Thomas was put on the defensive and believed that the parents have not been sincerely invited into the school to participate in the planning stages and implementation of the Title I program and he stated, "The parents have to catch that [not being adequately informed about their responsibilities and invited to the meetings]." When pressed further on the subject during a member check, Thomas explained that the parents had to catch what the school district was doing by being aware of what their own responsibilities included, such as being able to provide suggestions and question whether or not the existing program was effective or how they could play a role in changing the program to benefit their own children. Also, he believed that the school did only what was required of them to invite parents to the Annual Business Meeting but he felt that the school did not actively seek parent participation at the meeting.

Parents' Awareness of their School's Parent Involvement Policy

The school district involved in this study provided parents with a copy of its own parental involvement policy to parents of students receiving Title I services when permission to provide Title I service papers were sent home at the beginning of the

school year and periodically throughout the year when new students were added to the program. The majority of the parents interviewed for this study seemed unaware of this policy and did not remember receiving this policy when their child began receiving Title I services at the school. Furthermore, the policy clearly stated that parents will meet with the Title I Coordinator to discuss their input and suggestions on the creation and implementation of the Title I reading and math program at the elementary school. In response to this information, the parents seemed angry that they were not invited to participate in formulating a written plan and blamed the school's lack of communication as a major factor hindering their participation. When parents were asked to review the parent involvement policy at the school, one parent, Thomas, stated his disgust with this issue during the first group discussion: "I see a problem already on this [policy]... '[School District] promotes two-way communication between home and school' ...they don't communicate [with us]. We have to communicate with them. They don't get in touch with us." Supporting Thomas, Andrea asserted, "I've never been involved in a written plan either." She continued to ask, "Is this something new?" While both Thomas and Andrea continued to react in disbelief that such communication was lost between the school and the parent, Ava also acknowledged her own absence in being invited to a meeting to offer suggestions on the implementation of a Title I reading and math program.

As the participants awareness relating to their own involvement in the implementation of the Title I program increased, so did their anger and frustration for not being properly invited to the meeting to voice their own concerns and suggestions. When asked about what the participants perceived their roles as parents to be pertaining to the

parent involvement policy, the responses remained negative. Ava noted that the policy did state that '[Parents are] to be involved in a written plan...' however, Andrea quickly adds, "There's not any [parent involvement]." This discussion then led to an exchange about Title I teachers' roles within the Title I program's in-class remediation model.

The Role of the In-Class Model Teacher

The districts Title I program followed an in-class model which at times, allowed the roles between the Title I teacher and the classroom teacher to become blurred. Often times, the Title I teacher was unable to completely focus on his or her students during the lesson because the main lesson was taught by the classroom teacher. The Title I teacher was responsible to supplement the lesson taught by the homeroom teacher which likely included a remediation strategy to be used within the classroom after the main lesson was completed. Since the class periods were divided into forty-five minute segments, the Title I teacher wasn't always able to provide as much academic assistance to his or her students as desired. Two participants, Ava and Andrea, quickly questioned this topic during the first discussion as to whether or not the teacher's role within an in-class model or pull-out model was more beneficial for the students. Ava asked, "Wouldn't you think that would be better if you did pull them out? It would make them feel a little bit better about themselves." Andrea agreed, "Yeah. I know that works better with my child." Both women felt that the more contact their children made with the Title I teacher, the more effective their remediation would be. Ava said, "Yeah [in a pull-out program] they have more one-on-one."

Within the in-class Title I model, Title I teachers sometimes teach the whole class and work with students not identified as needing supplemental help in reading and/or

math because of various reasons, such as scheduling conflicts, changing student needs, and lesson modeling. All three participants during this discussion agreed that this was not successful use of the Title I teachers' expertise and therefore, was allowing their children to receive less help for their identified problems. Ava stated, "They should be helping just those kids that need the help. Not the other kids that do well in reading."

Andrea was unsure of what Ava meant and asked, "Oh, they teach the whole class?" As the researcher explained to the participants how the Title I teacher did at times teach the main lesson to the entire class, and did not focus solely on Title I students during the forty-five minute session, Andrea added, "See, I didn't know that. I thought it was one-on-one." Ava supported Andrea, "That shouldn't be." As the researcher explains the process as a sort of team-teaching technique within the classroom, both Ava and Andrea become visibly distressed and began questioning the teacher's role within the classroom more intensely.

"Title I should be a special program, but it's really not," said Andrea, "You're targeting the child as Title I but yet everybody in that class is getting the help."

Ava agreed, "Oh, no."

"Oh, nope, no...I'm out," stated Andrea. As both women shared their displeasure toward the Title I teachers' roles, Ava and Andrea noted several programs already in existence at the school that pulled children out of their classroom to receive additional support, such as: speech therapy, occupational therapy, English as a Second Language (ESL) and learning support for various academic subjects. "I hear about a lot of kids being pulled out for different programs so to me it makes no difference if they're going for speech or if they're going for reading," said Andrea. Ava added, "What would be the

difference because eventually they'll be passing classes anyway so nobody is going to know where anybody is going.”

All the participants were adamant about their desire for the Title I teachers to focus only on the children identified as needing additional academic support and not on the other students in the classroom; that was the regular classroom teacher's responsibility. They agreed that the sole purpose of the Title I teachers was to serve those needing remedial support in reading and/or math and they also believed that the best way for the Title I teachers to provide that support was by operating a pull-out Title I program.

Summary

In summary, the participants in this study clearly identified a desire for parents to understand the Title I program more thoroughly within the district. The findings showed a lack of understanding about parents' roles in the planning and implementation of the Title I program at their school as stated within the district's Parent Involvement Policy. The participants gained awareness about their roles as stated in the policy, and were generally concerned that their participation was not actively sought by the school to become more involved. Also, parents believed that the Title I teachers were not being effectively used in the current in-class model of the Title I program and preferred the program changed to a pull-out model. The participants felt that their children would make greater academic gains if the Title I teachers instructed their children one-on-one or in small groups instead of the current method which may have resulted in team teaching with the classroom teacher and the Title I teacher in the regular classroom setting.

Parents' Desire for Increased Personal Communication Between School and Home

The participants in this study expressed a desire for the elementary school to provide its parents with more consistent forms of communication. Currently, the school provides parents with monthly principal newsletters, monthly Title I *Home and School Connections* newsletters, and Communicators which are sent home every Thursday and may include student tests, important classroom information, and any school district information. Additionally, teachers and parents communicate through phone conferences and personal conferences initiated by either party when deemed necessary.

Two subthemes that emerged from the individual and group discussion about parents' desires for personal communication between the school and home were: a) positive communication; and b) inconsistent communication. Both of these subthemes are discussed in greater detail below.

Positive School/Home Communication

While the majority of the interview and group discussion data about personal communication between the parents and the elementary school centered upon its negative aspects, several participants believed certain facets of the elementary school's communication efforts were satisfactory. The positive communication elements included: a) personal teacher contact; b) written communication; c) the use of homework books; and d) the homework helpline.

While not all parents believed that the school provided them the opportunity to communicate effectively with one another, Samantha felt that the lines of communication between teachers and parents were open. "I personally have good communication with both my sons' teachers. They know if they need me they can call me anytime and they

already have,” she stated. Supporting Samantha’s accessible communication with teachers at the school, Alec talked about a particular problem he had with his daughter during the previous school year and how communication with his daughter’s teacher helped solve a problem she was having:

The teacher noticed something and she expressed her concerns and ideas about it and it really had a dramatic change because we then got with a specialist and recognized a problem that she did have. Alec continued, And if not for that teacher’s input...saying that I’ve seen this before and maybe you should look into this. It helped tremendously.

While Alec’s communication was initiated by the teacher, Susan believed that it wasn’t always the teacher’s responsibility to begin contact; a parent can also recognize a problem and contact the teacher as well. “I think it depends on the situation. If my child is having a problem with say spelling, the teacher will come to me and then we just keep talking back and forth until the problem is solved,” said Susan. When Alec was asked if he found it helpful for his child when he initiated communication with a teacher, he stated: “Oh, absolutely. If not by a letter but by actually speaking to them...which that seems to be better but letters of communication have worked also.”

Another category of communication positively mentioned by the participants pertained to efforts the school made to increase its communication with parents in the form of written communication. “They have newsletters and the calendar sent out so the parents are informed of what’s going on,” Jackie states. Ellen also supports Jackie’s claim, “They send papers home telling them [parents] there’s activities they have, things at night they can be a part of if they choose.” “I see all the things that come home from

Title I and that's helpful," Jackie stated. Another participant, Andrea believed the newsletter a particular teacher provided his parents with about classroom activities and upcoming events had kept her informed throughout the year:

The newsletter...I do like that. [teacher's name omitted] does send a monthly newsletter that he does on his own. I feel more informed then I was last year.

Last year I didn't get that, but he chose to do that. I like that. Andrea continued, he [teacher] does give you progress of what they [students] do every month. I really have to commend him for that, taking the time to do that.

Within this interview, Andrea inadvertently brought up the point that teachers were not required to publish their own newsletters or monthly progress reports, but some teachers do provide this "extra" communication with the parents and she agreed it was helpful.

Another form of communication that was not required by the school but some teachers used in their classrooms was the use of the homework book. The homework book is a daily communication log between the teacher and parent pertaining to the child's nightly homework assignment and classwork. Usually, parents are required to sign off in the homework book allowing teachers to know that parents have seen the student's daily homework activities and have reviewed the work with them. There is also space within the homework book for parents and teachers to write any concerns they are having with the child. Samantha talked about the use of the homework book:

I'll sign it to know that I saw it. It's letting the parent know and the teacher know that the parent knows what he's doing as soon as the homework is done, and it's getting done. I think they do that for all students especially if they are having problems.

Again the use of the homework book is optional for teachers; however the elementary school principal does require all teachers to write down daily classroom homework assignments for the students and have it entered into the homework helpline which is an automated system parents can access at home using their phones. This helpline provides parents with daily information about their children's assignments, classroom activities, upcoming events, etc. Jackie believed it was a useful tool in staying connected with her child's teacher. "I like the idea of the homework helpline. That's kept up so that the parents know what's going on in their child's classroom." When pressed about the relationship between the homework helpline and the homework book during a member check, Jackie felt that the homework book was probably more effective with the younger students just learning organizational skills pertaining to homework, like having the necessary paper and book to complete the assignment, while the homework helpline was more effective for upper elementary students who have already mastered those concepts.

While this subtheme identified the few areas of personal communication parents' deemed positively, most participants regarded the consistency of personal communication between the school and parents as inconsistent and inadequate. These findings now follow.

Inconsistent and Inadequate Communication Between School and Home

Participants, who spoke about inconsistent and inadequate communication between school and home, cited the relevance of such communication with regards to the educational well-being of their children. They expressed a need for the school to increase its communication with them in matters directly related to their children's education. The participants also suggested a desire for this communication to occur more frequently and

in a timely fashion so problems can be addressed quickly and accurately. These participants believed there were too many inconsistencies among teachers pertaining to personal communication including regular and consistent contact, ongoing feedback, follow through phone calls or written notes, and grading procedures.

Cindy discussed her concern about receiving timely communication regarding a reading concern she had for her child:

Communication...I don't feel there's enough. Or when you do communicate it takes so long. Like in the beginning of the year I mentioned my concern and I think I even spoke to [teacher's name] that I had a concern about [child's name]. After the first marking period was already over...I seen him getting help in different things but it took quite some time to get there.

Cindy continued to relay how the responsibility rests upon the school to communicate with parents about academic problems students are having in the classroom.

Unfortunately, this particular participant did not feel the school adequately contacted her about this problem and it was her responsibility to address the issue with the school. "I contacted them first that I had a concern with it," she stated. "I noticed it this year more so than any other year with reading. See the prior year's he did well," Cindy added. She continued, "And everything that came home, I thought he was doing well. If you don't inquire, you don't know."

Another participant interviewed who was not pleased with the current communication between home and school was Ava. She did not feel adequate communication between the two entities existed. "Well, there should be a better role for parents in the school. The role isn't really good because there isn't a lot of

communication, lack of communication,” Ava said. Samantha agreed that the parent’s role to become involved was limited because of the lack of communication between the school and home. She added:

Even with them going on field trips next Friday...they didn’t send a note home needing chaperones. If they did, I would have [gone]. Nothing was said. I wasn’t asked. I think if they offered more stuff it would be more fruitful.

Ava also had an issue with the lack of communication pertaining to accessing teachers in a suitable time frame:

You have to trust what your children come home and tell you. Everything has to be a meeting. You can’t just go into school and say well I want to see how they’re doing. You write a note; nine out of ten times they don’t come home in a timely fashion.

Additionally, parents interviewed related inconsistent communication between school and home in grading procedures at the elementary school. Within the first group discussion, three of the participants discussed a concern about existing grading inconsistencies among teachers at the elementary school. Thomas, Ava, and Andrea all noted the difficulties they had in understanding why certain teachers at the school did not adhere to the school’s grading policy nor communicate to the parents the reason for its variation.

Andrea began the discussion about grading by talking about her experience when she received a failure notice in the mail:

With my daughter, she started off with good grades and then started getting F’s and then I started working with her because there were some D’s and C’s but I

can't understand why this was going to be an F so I asked [teacher's name]. In the end, she got a D but I did get a failure notice for reading and math. And with her math, it was always A, A, A with only a couple I saw were failures. I asked if he could show me how he figured it out. I didn't think I was going to get a failure notice. I was shocked when I saw the math [grade].

Andrea lacked the understanding about why her child received a failure notice in two subjects but later passed the subjects at the end of the marking period. Ava questioned whether or not her teacher explained the grading process to her. "Does the teacher show you like, our teacher showed me and him, which really confused us. This many goes for this, this many goes for this, this many goes for this," Ava said.

As requested by Andrea, the researcher clarified the grading procedure at the school for the three participants. The grading system is weighted whereas 50% of the student's report card grade comes from test scores, 30% of their grade is from classwork and 20% of their grade comes from homework. Referring to the researcher's explanation of the school's grading system, Ava added, "That's not how we were explained that," she continued, "we were explained about tests they have no idea about, this comes from vocabulary, this comes from this...homework wasn't even included."

The researcher also explained the purpose of failure notices to the participants after Andrea spoke about not understanding the process. "I don't understand why I get a failure notice and she ends up with a D." Ava continues, "I mean I know that's not a very good grade either but yet that's not failing." Failure notices are mailed home to parents halfway through each of the four marking periods if a student's average in classwork, test scores, and/or homework is close to failing. Students have the remainder of the marking

period to raise their grades and thus not receive a failing grade on their report cards.

Upon completion of this explanation, the participants agreed that further communication between the school and home was needed for the failure notices to be an effective educational tool for their children.

Summary

In summary, the participants in this study identified their desire for increased personal communication between the school and home. Several parents did note some positive communication between home and school through various forms such as personal teacher contact, newsletters, homework books and the use of the homework helpline; however, the majority of the interview and group discussion data focused on the inconsistent and inadequate communication provided to them by the school. The participants believed the school did not provide them with adequate information relating to their children's education and they did not believe this information was presented to them in a timely fashion.

Parents' Perceptions of Involvement

The participants in this study spoke about their perceptions of parental involvement. These were twofold: a) active participation with homework; and b) active participation in school-sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. The data collected within the individual interviews pertaining to these subcategories is presented below.

Parents' Active Participation with Homework

The majority of parents interviewed discussed their active participation with homework assignments. The parents supported homework assignments that closely followed information and tasks studied in school; however, several participants spoke of the negative aspects of daily homework assignments. These negative elements included: teaching new material to their children, the amount of time required by them and their children to finish homework assignments, and the unnecessary level of frustration homework placed upon their children at home.

Being Involved Through Homework

The common belief held by most participants in this study was that homework does play an important role in their children's education. Parents felt their own involvement was a positive extension of what was being taught in school and it encouraged their children to perform better academically. For some, homework was a role parents' embraced to reinforce lessons learned in school and it increased good study habits at home. Mark spoke about this reinforcement, "We go over his homework every night and go over it in the morning again." Shannon also told about parents' roles in homework, "Parents being involved with everything schoolwise...homework, everything. To make sure that, focusing on [student's name]... to keep up their grades, you know, help them when needed." Jackie also supported the role parents' play in enforcing good study habits at home:

Parent involvement is twofold. I believe that it is when a child comes home they help them with their homework. They provide good study habits and good study areas. The parents' role in school is to make sure the child comes to school

prepared in the morning; make sure that they keep track of their homework...to cooperate with the teacher if there are any issues.

Homework as Excessive and Time Consuming

Some participants in this study believed that the homework assignments their children were given were at times excessive and time consuming. They felt that homework should be limited and when it is given, the students should be able to complete it independently. Andrea was not pleased with homework tasks which required her to actually teach or review new material with her child at home. She stated:

I'm very involved with homework. Well, I think it's an extension of the school. I think it should be like an adjunct to what the school provides. I see helping with the homework, supporting it, but I don't think the parents should have to do the majority of the work.

Another participant, Susan, who has four children currently in school, spoke about the frustration of parents and children associated with homework assignments. Susan said:

I don't think that it's so much, that it's a lot for one but because we have four, it seems like it can go on forever. She continued, I'm not one for homework. In my opinion, they spend their whole day in school so when they come home, they should be able to do what they want to do.

During Alec's interview, he agreed with Susan about the negative aspects of homework:

[Homework] gets them frustrated. It's taking my time...I did my work like, then come home and do more work for work. I'm done with it. I just want to forget

about it and they're still dwelling on it and it makes them more frustrated about school. And they don't want to go. So it's helping them learn but it is a bit overwhelming.

Both Susan and Alec agreed that homework assignments should be given less frequently so children and parents can equally relax and enjoy their time after school and work. Family time devoted toward homework should be minimized because it puts a strain on parent/child relationships. Susan agreed, "Well [child's name] puts up a [fight]. He doesn't want to do it at all. You're dragging him then it takes all night." Adding input to this data, Alec asserts, "But what I'm saying, if it wasn't even there. If they could have got it done in school, our lives would be so much easier."

While several parents did agree with the school giving nightly homework assignments, other participants felt time after school and work should be used to complete activities other than an extension of the school day, such as extra-curricular activities either sponsored by the school or not school sponsored. The information provided below supported the parents' active participation within these activities.

Active Participation in School-Sponsored and Non School-Sponsored Activities

The majority of parents interviewed spoke about their desire to actively participate in activities, both school sponsored and non-school sponsored, which may benefit their children. Since this study focused on interviewing Title I parents with limited parental involvement participation, their participation was not abundant. While these participants acknowledged their participation could improve, they were able to discuss several school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities they participated in during the school year. Several school-sponsored activities mentioned by the

interviewees included: helping with classroom activities at school, Family Reading Night, PTO (including yearbook committee, holiday festivals, and fundraisers), Open House, field trips, and the Book Fair. All the non-school sponsored activities parents spoke about being involved with centered on sporting activities including: soccer, baseball, football, and cheerleading. Each of these activities along with its appropriate supporting data from interview sessions follows below.

Both Susan and Alec believed they were fortunate to be involved in coming into the school and their children's classrooms to help with various activities throughout the year. They felt that this involvement strengthened their personal bond with their children's teachers as well as provided these teachers with the extra help they needed in the classroom. Alec said:

Just like that... coming into the classroom, putting their books together and you see...it sounds so little but you could see that if the teacher had to do that put all their books together, pamphlets, a couple of pages, stapling them together, that takes their time. If we could free up their time for that... that seems like a big plus.

While Susan agreed that volunteering time in her children's classrooms was beneficial, she also pointed out how she enjoyed participating in their day: "See what they do during the day. And we've come in to read for them already, which is fun. Just to see what they do during the day." Alec added, "It's a change of pace to have a parent there."

Samantha, Ava, and Shannon agreed they enjoyed participating in their children's activities, especially connecting with other parents, but they also acknowledged their participation was limited. Samantha spoke about her limited involvement apologetically:

Not this year but last year I was with the PTO and the yearbook committee. And I enjoyed coming down to sit with the other parents, talking...to hear what the other kids are doing. It actually helped me with the school. I was more aware of what was going on and what my kids are learning. Not this year...I wanted to be with the PTO and I loved doing the yearbook committee but with being pregnant...

Ava mentioned the activities she took pleasure participating in with her children, "I enjoy being involved in their [her children's] activities...after-school stuff and some of the, you know, school activities. Like the reading programs, you know, the reading night. Different stuff like that." Shannon talked about her participation, "Open houses, yeah. I didn't come to the Book Fair." When Shannon was asked if she participated with PTO activities, she responded: "I thought about it a couple years but I never actually did it." Shannon continued to name other opportunities available for her involvement at the school such as, the Halloween parade, the fun day in the gym, [Family] Reading Night and the Book Fair; however, her awareness of these activities didn't correlate with her participation in them. Another participant, Jackie, spoke about her awareness of activities offered at the school for her involvement, but she did not say whether or not she participated in them. Jackie said, "You have PTO, ummm, and there's always opportunities to participate in the Book Fair, field day and field trips." When pressed

during a member check whether or not Jackie participated in any of these activities, she cited work-scheduling conflicts which made her unavailable to participate.

During his interview, Thomas, did not believe enough opportunities for participation existed at the school. In fact, he believed the only time the school wanted parental involvement was when they needed something. “The only way they get parents involved is fundraisers. That’s the only thing I can see that they get parents involved. It’s always for fundraiser.” When pushed further during a member check, Thomas admitted to attending the Open Houses and Family Reading Nights in the past; however, he still did not believe they were sufficient to increase parental involvement at the school.

The non-school sponsored activities that Andrea, Cindy, and Ava spoke about participating with their children centered upon sports. Andrea liked to actively involve herself in her sons’ seasonal sporting activities. “With baseball coming up, we’ll discuss baseball season. We do activities outside, like over the weekend we played baseball. We took them to the park,” she said. Andrea also spoke of her and her husband’s involvement with sports, “I’m involved...she plays soccer. My husband’s a coach and I participate in a lot of those activities, of course.” When asked about her involvement, Cindy reported her participation in, “Baseball and soccer.” Finally, Ava added, “Sports...soccer, t-ball, and cheerleading.”

Also, these interviews revealed that participation in school-sponsored activities such as Open House, PTO, Family Reading Night, and the Book Fair were important to the participants; however, the participants also spoke of the importance of being involved in non school-sponsored activities such as seasonal sports. It seems that both the school-sponsored and non-school sponsored events were equally weighted in regard to

importance by the parents in this study. Both groups of activities allow parents to be involved educationally and socially in their children's lives.

Summary

In summary, the participants in this study identified their perceptions of parental involvement. These included: a) active participation with homework; and b) participation in non-school and school-sponsored activities. Most participants supported homework assignments that were not excessive and were an extension of the daily lesson; however, several participants were overwhelmed by the homework assignments and believed they placed undue stress upon them and their children.

Parents' Identified Barriers to Involvement

The participants in this study identified several barriers that hindered their involvement in school-related activities. These barriers were divided into three subthemes: temporal constraints; an unwelcoming atmosphere present in the school system; and language and cultural barriers. All three of these subthemes are discussed in greater detail below.

Temporal Constraints

Temporal constraints were identified as barriers to involvement in school-related activities by ten parents in this study. Temporal constraints as specified by the participants, related to issues of work schedules, childcare issues and time conflicts. These constraints limited opportunities for parents to become actively involved in school-related activities and the participants could often not control them. Three sub-categories

within this category that emerged from interviews and group discussions were: work-related issues; childcare issues; and lack of time. Several of the participants told about conflicts between school-related events and their own work schedules. When Cindy was asked to provide a reason, which she believed, might be hampering her own involvement with school-related activities, she responded, “Well I have to work. You work full-time. You don’t have the opportunity.” When posed with the same question during their interviews, Alec, Ellen, Alexandria, and Shannon all responded similarly. For example, “Typical hours they [parents] work. That’s a barrier,” Alec commented. Ellen stated, “I don’t think they [parents] can come, as many [parents] during the day because of work.” Alexandria supported Ellen’s statement when she said, “It’s difficult because parents have to work.” Additionally, even though Shannon was unemployed at the moment, she still believed work constraints were affecting parent participation. When posed the same question she answered, “Probably work. Yeah, probably work.”

The participants in this study also identified childcare issues affecting their participation in school-related activities. The two barriers associated with childcare issues were the amount of children parents had to divide their time between and finding reliable childcare while parents attended school-related activities. One parent, Alexandria, spoke about her childcare barrier:

[I have] difficulties participating because I have a little child. It’s hard to participate when you have a child at home. I like to participate but with my child, my smaller child, it’s difficult. A lot of Hispanics [have] small children. That’s one reason.

Similarly, Mark stated: “Well, I have two kids in the house,” Mark said, “and dividing the time between them...and I got a two year old so he’s, while I’m trying to do homework, he’s running around Daddy, Daddy this, Daddy that.”

During Susan and Alec’s interview session, they also spoke about dividing their time among their children and how it affects their participation in school-related activities. “Especially with four children,” Susan said, “You get tons of homework and they want to be involved in baseball, basketball and...” Alec concurred, “Time. It takes a lot of time.”

Likewise, Jackie also stated how much time she needs to spend with her children affects her involvement, “Most times, it’s time conflicts. I have four children.”

Finally, Samantha reported how her three children limited her ability to participate in school-related activities:

I don’t know if they say they can’t get involved because of their time. That’s why I felt bad this year because I wasn’t involved with it. She added, the baby takes a lot of time but when they’re involved in sports, you just have to do it [participate].

The School’s Unwelcoming Atmosphere

The participants in this study expressed their concern of the school’s unwelcoming atmosphere. This unwelcoming atmosphere was seen as a reason for their non-involvement in school-related activities. They believed the school provided limited opportunities for parent involvement at the school. Several participants even reported that they believed the school itself was a barrier to their own participation. Despite the majority, there was one participant who disagreed with that statement, and supported the

school's welcoming atmosphere by detailing the existing opportunities of involvement for parents provided by the school.

When participants were asked during the interview sessions about the school's welcoming atmosphere towards parents, the data was overwhelmingly negative. For example, Alec stated:

No, it's not. I wouldn't say it's discouraging but it's not [welcoming], it's not announcing it. If it's there, no one knows about it. Maybe, like, if the teachers would ask...I'm just throwing this out...if the teachers would ask for more involvement...if they want the volunteers to come in to help with stapling or reading to the kids or things like that. Maybe that would be something to think about. If they [parents] don't know they could volunteer, they don't volunteer.

Alec also spoke about the school not providing parents with opportunities to become involved. "The school...I don't see it. I don't. The individual teacher will [ask you to be involved] but [the] school, no," he said. Alec added, "I just think with the involvement...letting the parents get involved. [The school] getting them involved. Letting them know the school wants them to get involved." Additionally, he provided his perceptions on involvement:

And that's a shame when you think about it. I don't think of it that way...I always want...I love going on field trips, coming in and such. It's nice to have others [parents] there but it's usually the same ones. It would be nice to have the other ones involved, not just for the field trips but for the education of these kids. And if the parents are involved in really understanding in what they're [children] doing in school, it's better.

Similarly, during Thomas' interview, he vocalized his disapproval with the school's self-proclaimed welcoming atmosphere:

I feel like the school doesn't need parents to get involved. It's like they don't want them to get involved, like they want control over them [parents]. When asked to clarify, Thomas continued, There is no parents' role because the school doesn't leave you really here [at the school] to get involved. The only time your involved is when you ask to have a meeting with the teacher. And half the time the teacher doesn't even get back to you when you send a note in with your child. They [parents] have children in the school. They should be more involved. Leave us get more involved. The parents are just pushed back further and further away.

Thomas angrily stated, "I'd say the school itself is a barrier. They don't inform you about a lot of the stuff [opportunities to participate]." He added, "The school will not leave you get involved." When asked to elaborate, Thomas responded frustratingly, "No. I don't want to say any more on it."

Both Alec and Thomas spoke negatively about their perceptions of the school's welcoming atmosphere and believed it impacted parental involvement at the school. Further substantiating this view were Cindy, Ava, Mark, Samantha, and Andrea. For example, Cindy complained, "They welcome it [parent involvement]. It all sounds good but when you want the parent involvement, you don't get the feedback you need...or if at all."

Ava agreed, “Not enough of parent involvement in the school. They don’t include the parents in as much as they should.” When asked what the school did to get parents involved, Ava replied, “Nothing. Nothing at all.”

Ava continued to show her dismay at the lack of opportunities for parental involvement at the school:

Well they [school system] don’t let you be more involved. The school doesn’t let you be more involved. You’re isolated. You can only have meetings. You can’t, you know, what I mean, you have to do what they [school system] say. And if they want parents to be involved, maybe they should come to the parents a little bit more and, you know what I mean, and not try and put that barrier up, between the teacher and the parent. It should be an open relationship between the parents and the teachers and all the higher ups. Not only the teachers but the administrators, principals, all that kind of thing.

As the participants finished speaking about the unwelcoming atmosphere present at their school, they were then asked to provide suggestions which may enhance the atmosphere at the school thus increasing their own involvement. Ava continued:

Well, they should let the parents come in and see what goes on in the school. Like parents come in randomly, like the do at daycares. You can come in, just go in and see what is being taught in the classroom. Ava finally said in frustration, I want to pop up at that school anytime I want. And they should open their arms and say a parent’s concerned, she wants to come and see how the children are doing. And you don’t get that from nobody.

Similarly, Mark shared his perceptions on the limited opportunities provided by the school for parent involvement:

Honestly, I don't think they [school system] do enough. When asked to elaborate, he added, Like where parents come in for that parent/teacher reading thing [reading festival]. Even like another open house would be good...in the middle of the year to see if your child's improving. If we could get more things going with the school... like the parent reading thing is a good thing. Maybe like I said, more open houses like in the middle of the year.

Additionally, Samantha spoke about the limited opportunities for involvement provided to her by the school:

Well, the only thing there is to be involved in is like the PTO. I think if they offered more, I think I would be involved more. Even with them going on field trips, next Friday, they didn't send a note home needing chaperones. If they did, I would have [participated]. Nothing was said. I wasn't asked. I think if they offered more stuff it would be more fruitful.

Finally, Andea expressed her perceptions about the welcoming atmosphere and the limited opportunities of involvement provided to her by the school system. Andrea stated:

I do feel like in the beginning of the year they have that open house but I don't know, other schools have them quarterly. I feel that they should be offered quarterly. That you can come in and discuss and be more involved. It seems that all the involvement is emphasized at the beginning of the year and then there is nothing.

Andrea was also concerned that she was not offered to participate in school-related activities at the school. She said, “Field trips and things like that, it seems like the chaperones are pre-set. I’ve never been offered and I’ve never had the opportunity [to chaperone].” She tried to explain her non-invitation, “Maybe they’re [chosen parent chaperones] more available. I don’t know.” Andrea commented on opportunities to help in her child’s classroom, “See, I didn’t even know that there was an opportunity to do that.” She continued, “My daughter told me that but I didn’t know that there was anything offered and I’d love to do something like that. I just want to be...everybody should have the opportunity to participate,” Andrea concluded.

In opposition to the previous participants’ views, one participant, Jackie believed the school did project a welcoming atmosphere and provided enough opportunities for parents to be involved in school-related activities. When asked whether or not the school projected a welcoming atmosphere, Jackie readily responded: “I would agree with that statement. Secretaries are always there; people are always buzzed in [to the building]. Faculty and staff are always polite and I think you [as a representative of the school system] are doing a very good job in offering the different nights. A lot of parents really like the reading night.” When asked to elaborate, Jackie stated:

Well, schools provide the opportunities for parents to come, either during the day...various times during the day. They have the newsletters and the calendar sent out so parents are informed of what’s going on. And they also...I like the idea of the homework helpline that’s kept up so that the parents know what’s going on in their child’s classroom.

Language and Cultural Barriers

Two participants in this study, Alexandria and Francesca, were Hispanic and spoke Spanish as their dominant language. Both of these women felt that a language and cultural barrier existed at the school and in the community that prohibited them from participating in school-related activities. However, when the topic of language and culture was brought up in individual interviews and group discussions, several of the non-Hispanic participants were angered by the information presented. In response, they further isolated the non-dominant, Spanish speaking women by negatively speaking about the Hispanic population present within the school and the community. This seemed to support the Hispanic women's perceptions about the existing language and cultural barriers present in the school system and surrounding community. Alexandria's and Francesca's perceptions about how language and cultural barriers interfere with their participation are discussed first, followed by the other participants' opposing views related to these issues.

Alexandria explained how the language barrier affected participation during her interview: "The barrier, the English barrier...the problem is the language. It's the main reason why Hispanics don't participate." She added, "I don't participate. I help my children with their homework. Basically, we don't participate because of a lack of understanding English."

Alexandria continued, "It's difficult to participate because of the language barrier. There's little...a lack of Hispanic Community. It's difficult because there aren't a lot of Hispanic people in the community. They [Hispanics] feel ostracized." When asked to

elaborate on the topic, Alexandria said, “Here it’s a problem [lack of Hispanic community/shared language]. There might be other opportunities in other communities.”

During her interview, Alexandria went on to say, “California has... it’s easier in California because there were teachers who spoke it [Spanish], but here it’s difficult.”

When asked how communication could improve, she said:

I understand English. Speak a little...I understand but doesn’t speak well. There aren’t many Hispanics here. Perhaps for other people it would be beneficial to send the letters home in Spanish. When things are translated from one language to another, sometimes you lose context. That’s what happens. Computer translations aren’t the best. It would be good to have a representative from the Hispanic community ...inside the community. A leader.

Unfortunately, Alexandria was not interested in taking that role, and wasn’t sure who from the Hispanic community would. “I’m not sure who can,” she responded. However, Alexandria was willing to reach out to other Hispanic parents to find a representative from the community to assist in increasing participation in school-related activities.

Alexandria then continued to explain the cultural differences between participation between our American culture and the Hispanic culture. She explained:

I’m from Mexico and I have two children. Mothers participate [in Mexico] but fathers didn’t. It’s so difficult to live here because I’m so used to the participation in Mexico of the mothers. We’re from different cultures. We’re a little bit outside the box. We don’t feel welcomed. We don’t feel integrated, like a division of people. It’s a very closed community. It is very difficult to integrate.

We're not sure if it's just that they're [dominant community] are closed-minded with us or we're open-minded.

Similarly, Francesca was also asked if it was difficult for her to participate in school-related activities because information from the school system was only sent home in English. She responded: "Yes. Nothing gets sent home in Spanish."

As Alexandria and Francesca spoke about the language and cultural difficulties and its affect on their participation in school-related activities, other participants in the study responded with negativity toward this problem. Both group discussions garnered the same results. For example, Ava spoke out angrily, "They [Hispanics] should learn to speak English. They should learn how to speak our language not us learning theirs. They should learn how to do English."

Other participants agreed that information should not be sent home in Spanish to the Hispanic parents, "If I go to Mexico, I have to learn that [Spanish] there," Thomas said, "When they come here they should learn..." He was interrupted by Ava, who called out, "They should learn it [English] before they come here. If you don't know it [English], get out." Andrea chided, "Do they [Hispanics] pay more taxes than we do?" Ava quickly answered, "No, they don't pay any so they shouldn't get any privileges." Andrea continued, "The same program should be offered to all the children. Not anything special [Spanish]. Get that outside the school."

When asked if they believed the children should suffer and not learn because the programs wouldn't be offered in English, Ava said, "That's not our fault. Then they got to go down to Mexico and learn English before they could come back here." Andrea agreed, "That's right. That's how I feel."

The second group discussion relating to the Hispanic participants' needs was also hostile. When asked their thoughts about sending letters and information home in Spanish, Ava responded, "We said no. It's wrong. No. They should have to learn [English]." Cindy added, "Now that the children are here, they have to learn [English]." Thomas continued, "If they can't read English, they shouldn't be over here." Ava added, "How do we know if they're illegal?"

Later on the participants in the group discussion were asked if they would be willing to attend meetings with Hispanic parents and their interpreter. The response was less than enthusiastic. "We might," Ava said, "They have to show us their green card." When asked if they'd be welcoming to these parents, again Ava angrily responded, "No. No because I don't know it [Spanish] and they're sitting there going ditdidadadid...How do I know what they're saying." Cindy added, "They haven't come to these [group discussions] so maybe they won't [come]." Thomas suggested that the Hispanic women did not participate in the group discussions because they were prejudiced toward us as the dominant culture. "It's a race thing," he said. Ava questioned, "But why? If you [Hispanics] feel that way then goodbye."

Again the researcher tried to explain to the participants that the Hispanic Title I children in our school needed additional academic support to be successful; however, the participants did not want to hear that these children should receive the help. "Our kids need that help," Ava angrily said, "Our kids should get it [help] first." "If we went there [Mexico], they [Hispanics] would feel the same way," Cindy agreed.

Summary

In summary, participants spoke about barriers they identified as hindering their own parental involvement in school-related activities. Specifically, parents discussed: temporal constraints; an unwelcoming atmosphere present in the school; and language and cultural barriers. The participants agreed that issues of work schedules, childcare issues, and time constraints affected their participation in school-related activities. Additionally, the participants believed more opportunities needed to be provided to them to become more involved at the school. Finally, the two Hispanic participants agreed that the dominant language and culture present within the community and school system hindered their own participation in school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. Unfortunately, the non-Hispanic participants in this study felt that the Hispanic community needed to learn English before they or their children received any additional support from the school system.

First Group Discussion: Initial Parent Requested Outcomes

The first group discussion occurred in early May after the individual interview sessions were completed by nine participants. These nine participants were: Mark, Alexandria, Ellen, Ava, Thomas, Samantha, Francesca, Andrea and Cindy. The purpose of this group discussion was twofold: a) to have parents discuss their perceptions about the Parent Involvement Policy present within the school district; and b) to discuss the themes that emerged from the individual interview sessions. All participants interviewed thus far were invited to participate in the group discussion; however, Ava, Thomas, and Andrea were the only participants in the discussion.

The three participants began the group discussion session by reviewing the Parent Involvement Policy. This led to an immediate discussion on the first theme, improved communication between home and school. Then the participants discussed suggestions they had to promote increased involvement. Next, the participants discussed a need for parents to understand and change the Title I program. These three themes contained the majority of data obtained from this discussion. The final two identified themes that emerged from the nine individual interview sessions: parents' perceptions of involvement and existing barriers hindering parent involvement were not of major concern to the group and therefore did not produce much data. The data obtained from the group discussion about the Parent Involvement Policy and the four stated themes will be discussed in greater detail below.

Improving Communication Between Home and School

Before participants were asked to comment on communication issues between home and school, they were each given a copy of the current Parent Involvement Policy of the school district to review and comment on its presentation of communication between home and school. After the participants read the policy, the researcher asked them if they thought the policy was effective or presented any problems to the group. As stated previously, Thomas disagreed with the policy statement: '...promotes two-way communication between home and school.'

Beside the inadequate communication between home and school as quoted in the policy by Thomas, Andrea also noted the lack of communication and involvement between the two entities in writing the written parent involvement plan. "I've never been involved in a written plan either," Andrea stated referring to the part of the policy which

states how parents should be involved with the development of such a plan to increase parental involvement at the school.

The researcher explained to the participants what the written plan entailed and that copies of the plan were sent to every parent of a Title I student at the beginning of the school year along with the permission to service forms and school-parent compacts. Andrea responded, “Ok, I have it at home. I did receive that but I thought the written plan was something...a specific plan on a kid.”

Once the district’s Parental Involvement Policy was reviewed, the discussion once again turned to the topic of lack of communication between home and school. Thomas said, “It’s [lack of communication] not the parents, it’s the school. It’s on their part.”

“I’d like to see notes sent home before they [students] flunk, you know...before the flunk happens,” Andrea stated. “Half the time that [Thursday Communicator] doesn’t come home.”

Thomas agreed, “No it [Thursday Communicator] doesn’t.”

Another example of a lack of communication between home and school was discussed by Andrea who gave an account of inadequate communication between her daughter’s teacher and her about her daughter’s grades. Her daughter received a failure notice in the mail for math, something she wasn’t expecting. Andrea didn’t believe her grades warranted this notice at all. Andrea stated, “You know what I mean....she gets an A, sometimes she doesn’t get anything wrong.” She continued to speak about her daughter’s inconsistencies on a test, “If she has more than one thing on a page, five different types of math [problems/concepts] she can’t do it. She freezes on the test and I can see that coming home.”

Ava added to the discussion by elaborating on her own confusion pertaining to the grading system present at the school. Like Andrea, Ava did not understand why her child received a failure notice and asked the teacher to explain the grading procedure to her. At this point the researcher clarified the weighted grading procedure at the elementary school which was: fifty percent of a student's report card grade comes from test scores, thirty percent of a student's report card grade comes from classwork participation, and twenty percent of a student's report card grade comes from homework assignments.

“That's not how we were explained that [grading system]”, Ava disagreed, “That was totally different than that [researcher's grading explanation].”

Thomas agreed, “They [student's teachers] didn't say anything about homework.”

Andrea still confused asked, “I don't understand why I get failure notices and she ends up with a D. I mean I know that's not a very good grade but yet that's not failing.” “Whatever,” she continued, “I have a meeting about that [failure notices]. I'm alright with that.”

Promoting Increased Involvement

The participants in the study identified a need to increase parental involvement at the school. They provided the researcher with several ideas they believed would promote greater parental involvement. Additionally, parents of Title I students at the school held various perceptions about what encompassed involvement in school-sponsored activities thus their suggestions for involvement were varied as well. The majority of the parents interviewed thus far all noted their participation in Open Houses, the Reading Festival and the Book Fair over the past few years; however, areas of participation also included: helping with homework, PTO membership, yearbook committee, organized sports, field

trip chaperones, and helping in their children's classrooms. Parents attending the first group discussion were more interested in talking about their perceptions of involvement in some of these areas but also suggested ideas for the school to increase their own participation.

For example, Andrea discussed the need for more events offered which would enable her to meet with her daughter's teacher more often throughout the school year. She felt that by the school sponsoring an Open House a few weeks into the school year, the teachers weren't able to accurately assess academic problems her child might be having because it was too soon in the year. Andrea stated:

But you know what's not right either...like I said before, you get an Open House two weeks after they're [students] in school. I think there should be something [meeting or conference] quarterly, you know, so you can come, yeah, every three months so you can come and see your child's classroom. See what's going on. See how your child is doing. Talk to the teacher. Even if the parents become more involved...it shows who cares.

Thomas agreed with Andrea and suggested, "Yeah, yeah, [a meeting or conference] in the middle of the year."

"Before report cards," Andrea interjected, "before the trouble."

"Yeah the halfway mark [of the marking period]," Ava said.

Andrea continued:

Yeah, when we got that failure notice in the mail...I was really upset over that. I had Title [I] meetings. I didn't feel like I received any help from the school on what to do, and now here we are. What did we do for her [Andrea's daughter]?

Nothing. And that's a failure because she's [daughter] the one that got hurt from that. [She received a failure notice in] math and reading. When she was always good in math. Yeah, maybe if you had something [meeting or conference] like that, maybe you could see it [academic difficulties] more.

When the researcher asked the group for more suggestions how this could be accomplished, Andrea responded first:

People [parents] could just come in [to the school] when they don't have to have [a scheduled meeting]. That might be something better than a conference. I don't know. You can just walk into the classroom without having a meeting. People [parents] might feel better about that. Come in and talk to the teacher. They give you one [Open House] in the beginning of the year but it is not enough.

"Yeah, you're right with the Open House," Ava said, "I agree."

Andrea continued, "Especially for the kids that are having trouble. Nothing against those that don't [have trouble]"

"Yeah but we need to talk to the teachers more if our child is having trouble," said Ava, "Really, I mean if my kid is getting all A's, that's good, then let her go, but I mean, I need to talk to the teachers more."

Andrea added:

I know you can call for a conference but if you have a scheduled Open House meeting that you can come in and see...it's more of a chance to come in and talk with the teacher and see...more contact...to see what's going on. In a meeting, sometimes you don't always get [answers]. There isn't enough time allotted.

Thomas agreed, “Like you said, Open House two weeks into the school year...they [students] just started.”

“They [school] shouldn’t even do it [have Open House in early September]. They should do that before school starts. Bring the parents down, show them where everything is...that’s Open House. Then conference with them,” Ava said.

“The parent/teacher meeting should be later on,” said Thomas.

Ava suggested how to schedule the meetings, “Go by last names, from A to B...D to G...E to...you know what I mean. Yeah, and just go by the alphabet. Just so many kids [at a time].”

“That’s how they have parent/teacher night in other school districts,” Andrea added.

It was clear from this interaction with the participants that they wanted more scheduled teacher/parent meetings at the school with their children’s teachers. The researcher agreed to discuss this issue with the principal and report her findings to the parents at the next group discussion. The conversation then led to a discussion about the Title I program in the school and changes that parents wanted to the program to increase its effectiveness.

Understanding and Changing the Title I Program

The need for parents of Title I students to better understand the Title I program in their district prompted Ava, Thomas, and Andrea to request more information about the program and suggestions for specific changes to the program as well. During this discussion, Ava was unclear why students were no longer pulled-out of the classroom to receive remediation services with the Title I teacher. “See, I thought years ago they

[Title I teachers] used to take kids out of the room [who] needed help,” Ava continued, “It [remediation] was more of a one-on-one [student with teacher].”

“Is there some way we can change it [Title I in-class model]?” Thomas asked.

At this point the researcher explained to the participants the differences within Title I programs, typically they either follow an in-class model or a pull-out model. As discussed earlier, a Title I program which follows an in-class model sends the Title I teacher into the students’ classroom and provides remediation within that whole-group setting. A Title I program which follows a pull-out program allows the Title I teacher to take the students out of their classrooms to receive remediation individually or in small-group settings. The researcher continued to explain that the type of program within the district may be changed when the district’s Title I Coordinator completes the application form identifying the type of Title I remedial program being used within the district for the upcoming year. This application is typically completed in late spring to early summer and sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for final approval. A discussion about the type of program that will be implemented is an agenda item for the Annual Business Meeting and is presented by the Title I Coordinator to the parents’ of Title I students. This meeting is scheduled in the spring of each school year and has had zero attendance of Title I parents for the last two years; therefore, parent concerns about the existing program were not heard.

Andrea and Ava voiced their concerns about not being made aware of the Annual Meeting, “A meeting for what?” Andrea asked. “Well, we didn’t come because we didn’t know about it the last several years,” she stated.

“[The meeting was advertised] in the newspaper?” Andrea asked.

Following the exchange about the Annual Meeting, Ava focused once again on understanding the Title I program and why it followed an in-class remediation model. A discussion with the researcher ensued pertaining to the reasons many Title I programs followed in-class models. Within this discussion, the issue of removing students from their classroom for remediation and how it may negatively affect students' self-esteem arose. Thomas understood and said, "Oh, I see what you're getting at, yeah. They'll [students' classmates] will be teasing them and poking fun [for needing additional instruction]."

Andrea thought this over and responded, "I don't know, I mean I don't have no idea about that [students' poking fun at those leaving the classroom for remediation]. It [Title I pull-out program] should just be made like another program [speech therapy, occupational therapy, ESL]."

The participants continued to ask the researcher questions about the Title I teachers' roles in the classroom and began to spark ideas amongst one another. Andrea asked, "Why couldn't you pull them out as a group and teach them as a group and then..." Ava quickly jumped in, "Yeah, let the regular ed [education] teacher teach that class that's up on that level. Yeah, that's just, that's just not right that they're [Title I teachers] teaching the whole class. So if somebody's getting all A's on their report card I reading and phonics and there's that kid that got all F's...that isn't right." Both Thomas and Andrea nodded their heads in agreement to Ava's statement and she continued, "I'm not putting any kid down but this kid is obviously not having any problems and can understand and can do the curriculum but this kid can't so let's not say we don't need to help this one because this one might not be a bad one, but this one needs to be brought up

to speed before it gets lost in the shuffle.” Andrea concurs, “Put them in that group together and give them the extra attention that they need.”

Thomas asked, “Well, what can we do about that [changing the existing Title I program]? Who would we address that [issue] with?”

The researcher informed the three participants that the issue about changing the Title I program to include a form of pull-out remediation would be discussed with the principal. Ava, Andrea, and Thomas all seemed satisfied with this suggestion and agreed to discuss this matter at the next group discussion after the researcher had spoken to the principal about their concerns.

Second Group Discussion: School Endorsed Outcomes

The purpose of the second group discussion was for the researcher to provide the three participants from the first group discussion with the information they requested pertaining to increasing communication between home and school and changing the existing Title I program currently implemented at the school. Additionally, the researcher heard parent suggestions to increase parental involvement at the school. This discussion occurred at the end of May, two weeks after the prior discussion and after the researcher had time to discuss the previous issues of increasing communication between home and school, changing the Title I program and parent suggestions to increase involvement with the school’s principal. This second discussion was attended by four participants, Ava, Thomas, Cindy and Mark. A significant portion of this discussion focused on the researcher providing the participants with the information they requested; however, when discussion about this information occurred, Ava, Thomas and Cindy

dominated the discussion. It was obvious that those three participants knew each other and Mark was an outsider to the group. He didn't add much to the discussion, instead he seemed to listen to the three participants and agree with most of what they said.

Improving Home and School Communication

The first group discussion focused on increasing communication between home and school when students are struggling academically in the classroom and this was the first theme discussed during the second group discussion. The participants stated that there weren't enough opportunities to meet with teachers to discuss academic issues their children were having. The researcher informed the participants that the principal liked the idea of incorporating conferences in first and second grades in November. She suggested having parents sign up for these meetings offered during school hours and at night to accommodate working parents and issues of childcare. When she asked the participants about this outcome, the responses were short but positive.

“Good,” said Cindy.

“It's a start,” said Thomas.

The researcher reminded the participants that they could still call the school to schedule a meeting with a teacher to discuss any problems their children are having at anytime but Ava wasn't convinced. “No you can't [schedule a meeting], you can't,” she said, “I still didn't get a response in a week (laughs).”

The researcher told the participants that they could contact her next year at the school to schedule their meetings when she assumes the position of Title I Coordinator. The participants began joking about this. “You'll hear from me,” replied Ava.

“You won’t answer your phone,” joked Thomas, “I think you should have a pager.”

Satisfied that the researcher would help them schedule meetings next year, the participants began to discuss the issue of receiving information about their children’s academic difficulties before failure notices came home in the mail halfway through each marking period. Ava stated:

When you see an F coming home, you almost fall off the chair because you didn’t expect it. Maybe if you had a little bit of warning that your kid wasn’t doing so good and then all of a sudden boom this test is an F. You study and study and read this...what happened?

The researcher suggested that Title I teachers send a progress report home with their students halfway between each marking period. “Yeah, it’s an invitation,” said Thomas.

After discussing that the midpoint of each marking period was four and a half weeks, Ava began to reconsider the timeline to contact parents each marking period. She asked:

Four and a half [weeks] the failure notices come out, right? So then you’d want to go three weeks. Wouldn’t you know as a teacher, don’t you think in three weeks you know if they’re doing ok [academically] or if they’re doing bad?

Ava presented an observation and the participants agreed that three weeks into the marking period, Title I teachers should know enough about their students to send a progress report home if the students are having difficulties. The discussion then moved to Title I teachers providing parents with available resources to help their children

succeed in the classroom. The participants felt that communication of resources was missing between teachers and parents. Cindy said:

Can you make it like, if parents need information... to make it available? Can you make it known to each Title I teacher... for the parents to let them know [what resources are available]? Like when we have the conference [in November], maybe then the Title I teachers can say that we have resources available. They can help you. Then we would all be [given the resources we need]. We would have what they [teachers] have.

“They [teachers] could say look this up on the computer. There’s a website that you can go on [to get additional resources],” Ava said.

Cindy agreed, “Here are some resources so we can help.”

“Right,” said Ava.

Later on in the discussion the topic of resources came up again. Ava stated, “There’s got to be resources for parents. You need to tell her [principal] that. She [principal] needs to make that stuff [resources] available to us.”

Cindy added, “That would be good at the November conference. Here’s what they’re struggling [with], here’s the resources.”

“Because I don’t know...we don’t know nothing [about resources to help our children],” Ava said.

The researcher assured both Ava and Cindy that she would be able to accommodate their needs on this issue and the discussion turned to conversing about the outcomes of the researcher’s discussion with the principal about changing the Title I program.

Changing the Title I Program

After meeting with the principal about this topic, the researcher informed the participants that she would be able to incorporate a Title I program at the elementary school which incorporated elements of both pull-out and in-class models of remediation. The parents were satisfied that students in the primary grades (K-2) would receive approximately two periods a week of one-on-one time with their Title I teachers. The third through fifth grades would continue to operate using primarily an in-class model but Title I teachers would be able to pull students out periodically from a different subject for remediation if necessary. The researcher, who is also a reading specialist, agreed with the principal that upper-elementary students would benefit more by staying in the classroom and receiving their remediation there because the content of the subjects in these grades is greatly increased and it's believed students would learn more if they remained in the classroom.

In response to this explanation, Ava said, "Good."

Cindy also agreed, "If it's going to benefit [the students] where they are lacking...good."

Mark was unsure why students were being pulled out of different subjects to receive remediation in reading and math. "Why are they [Title I teachers] going to pull them out of another subject?"

The researcher explained that Title I students were unable to be pulled for remediation during the regular reading or math lesson, that would be supplanting services instead of supplementing services, which is illegal for Title I teachers to do. Mark asked,

“Yeah, but then aren’t they going to fall behind in that subject [one they are being pulled out of] then?”

Before the researcher could answer, Ava said:

Why don’t they [Title I teachers] pull them out of something...like say the kid’s having problems in reading but they’re doing outstanding in math? Why can’t they be pulled out of math because in math they know they’re not having problems? What about spelling?

“Recess?” Mark asked.

“What about fifteen minutes before school, or fifteen minutes longer?” Ava asked.

The researcher told the participants that the principal decided to switch phonics and reading lessons so first and second graders could be pulled out for remediation.

Ava questioned, “Why not like I said, fifteen minutes before school, fifteen minutes after school or whatever?”

The researcher informed Ava that those time slots were already being used to increase students’ reading fluency in grades first through third. Finally, the researcher told the participants that we’d try the pull-out program the way the principal suggested but if it wasn’t working, the program could be revised. Cindy asked:

What if we feel that Title I things aren’t changing and we don’t... and we have an issue with our Title I [teacher]. If we feel uncomfortable and still haven’t gotten our way? Can that be brought up to you? And you would address that?

The researcher assured the participants that she would try her best as Title I Coordinator to effectively resolve any of their problems within the Title I program. The

participants seemed satisfied with this response and the discussion turned to participants offering suggestions to increase parental involvement.

Promoting Increased Involvement

As the group discussion began to draw to a close, the researcher asked the participants if they could suggest ways to involve more Title I parents in school-sponsored activities at the school. Cindy suggested, "It would be nice to get more of them [Title I parents] together. They [the school system] have PTO meetings, why not Title I meetings? Like a stress release. This is what my teacher's doing, this is what my teacher's doing. My teacher's good. Is your teacher any good?"

Ava laughed and answered Cindy's question about the teacher, "No."

The researcher sighed and Ava said, "But you want us to be honest?"

The researcher agreed and Cindy added, "If we can be honest and we're communicating with each other. And you said communication...well there's one great way. Find out what this mom has to say because you're not going to hear it from us."

"We'll have our own support group," Ava said.

"We'll have our own PTO...Title I [meeting]," Cindy suggested.

When asked whether or not the participants wanted me to attend their meeting next year, Cindy responded, "Yeah and you could hear how we honestly and truly feel and get a gist of what's going on [with the Title I program]."

"Because we would be honest with you," Ava added.

"I think that would be wonderful," Cindy said.

The participants wanted other Title I parents to be invited to these meetings and asked the researcher to help with getting the word out about the meetings. "Would you

send something home?” Ava asked, “For next year, you know we’re going to start this...we’re going to have this Title I, whatever it is.”

Cindy added, “If you can even invite them here. We can say, if you’d like to join us, to become more involved and like to know what you are doing...even if there’s ten [parents] and maybe it would grow to twenty.”

“Word of mouth,” Thomas said.

The researcher asked when and how often the participants wanted the meetings to take place. All three participants responded, “Monthly.”

Cindy said, “The beginning of the year.”

Ava asked, “Will the principal know that we’re going to have these groups next year?”

The researcher told them that the administration would know about the meetings but their identities would be kept anonymous if that’s what they wanted.

Ava said, “It doesn’t matter. I mean, she’s welcome to come.”

Thomas added, “She’s [the principal] liable to get her ass reamed out, too. She won’t want to come to another one [meeting].”

“We can offer,” Ava said.

“Well this first one [meeting] we don’t know if she can or can’t [attend],” Cindy added.

“Maybe we shouldn’t [invite her],” Thomas said.

Cindy agreed, “I don’t think at first. I think the parents [only] first.”

Mark added, “I know they’d talk to you [the researcher]... so they [Title I parents] wouldn’t be afraid.

“And we definitely need you,” Ava said.

Summary

In summary, the first and second group discussions enabled the participants to meet and discuss parental involvement issues that arose during the initial interview sessions of all participants. It also allowed them to review the current parental involvement policy at the school and discuss its effectiveness and parent roles in creating/changing the policy.

During the first group discussion, the participants decided to take action and challenge several aspects of parent involvement at the school. They included: increasing home and school communication; changing the present Title I program; and suggesting ways to promote increased involvement in school-related activities. The participants challenged the researcher to discuss these issues with her principal and to report the outcomes of this discussion to the participants at the second group discussion.

Finally, the second group discussion allowed the participants to hear the outcomes of their initial requests based on feedback from the principal and the researcher. The participants seemed pleased with their accomplishments which would directly change the existing Title I program for the upcoming year to a partial pull-out program. Additionally, parent requested changes to increase school and home communication and increase parental involvement opportunities to participate, especially through established Title I monthly meetings, were also effectively incorporated to promote parental involvement at the school.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This qualitative, critical action research study was designed to explore Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools and to foster awareness among Title I parents about individual and societal factors that influence parental involvement in school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) How do participants describe their perceptions of parental involvement?
- 2) How do awareness raising efforts impact parental involvement?
- 3) What action(s), if any, do participants take to challenge the school system's perception of parental involvement and possibly increase their own involvement?

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first section interprets the findings presented in chapters four and five and discusses this analysis in relation to the reviewed literature. This is followed by a discussion of insights and challenges associated with implementing a critical action research study. The third section discusses implications of the research as it relates to the fields of elementary education and adult education. The fourth section provides recommendations for future research on this topic. Finally, the last section offers a chapter summary followed by the researcher's reflections on the significance of these findings within the field of education.

Interpretation of Findings

The interviews and group discussions with the participants from this study provided important information about Title I parents' perceptions of parental involvement in public schools. This information included parents' insights about the individual and societal factors hindering participation in school-related activities at the school. After a thorough analysis of the data, several relevant findings emerged. They are: parents' desire to understand the Title I program at the school and their role in planning this program; parents' request increased communication between home and school; how parents' perceptions of involvement differed from the school system's perceptions of involvement; and parents' identified barriers to involvement. To better understand the meaning of the findings, an interpretation of the data in relation to the literature is now presented.

Parents' Desire to Understand the Title I Program and Their Role in Planning this Program

In this critical action research study, parents of students receiving Title I remediation services expressed a desire to understand how the Title I program was organized and implemented. Within their interview sessions and group discussions, parents expressed their lack of understanding how the Title I program provided remediation services for their children at the school. For example, many of the participants in this study were not aware that the Title I program followed an in-class remediation model which provided additional academic support to their children in a classroom setting through a Title I teacher. Several of the parents assumed that their children received Title I services in a small group setting or were remediated individually

by the Title I teacher. Once parents were presented with information by the researcher during the first group discussion which explained how the Title I reading and math programs were organized and implemented, the parents began to question their own roles and responsibilities involved in providing suggestions to change the program. The researcher stimulated parent inquiries by leading a discussion of the school's Parental Involvement Policy which included information pertaining to parent participation roles at the district. As the study began, parents were unaware of the opportunities that existed for them to be involved in the planning process of the Title I program. Their role, they believed, was to follow the program that had already been implemented by the school system. After participating in the group discussions, parents became aware of their role in this process which included actively participating in making decisions about the Title I program for the upcoming year. They now know they have a voice in suggesting ideas for the organization and implementation of future programs at the school.

In addition to not knowing about their role in the planning process, the parents were unaware that they were to be involved in providing suggestions for the organization and implementation of the Title I program at their school for the upcoming year during the Annual Business Meeting held each May at the school. The Annual Business Meeting was the forum provided by the school to gather parent input for the organization and implementation for the following year's Title I program. During this meeting, the Title I Coordinator presents fiscal information about the Title I program and provides an opportunity for parents to offer suggestions to be incorporated into next year's program. Unfortunately, this meeting has been poorly attended in the past, therefore parent input

had not been used in the planning and implementation of past Title I programs at the school.

A good example of the parents' limited awareness can be seen in their lack of involvement in the free lunch program at the school. Seven parents in this study revealed that they paid full price for their children's lunches at the school even though two of them qualified for the service because of their present employment status. While the school does send forms home explaining how parents can qualify for free and reduced lunch prices at the beginning of each school year, it doesn't provide additional support in completing the application process. Free and reduced student lunch counts determine the amount of money this particular school district receives each year for the federally funded Title I program. Parents may not be aware that their non-participation in this lunch program affects the funding of the Title I services their children receive at the school.

Clearly, the majority of parents in this study fall below the middle-class SES present at the school and their value systems may also not be consistent with the school's either. Also, two participants were of Hispanic descent and their cultures varied significantly from the dominant one held by the school system. These noted dissimilarities among the participants further support the fact that some of these parents were unaware, and most likely others who did not participate in the study are not aware, of how the Title I program is organized, implemented, and funded at their school. Further, their roles for being involved in suggesting program changes and increasing funding which could affect the future program's development and implementation are not fully understood.

One way to make sense of why these parents were not involved in the process of providing suggestions for the organization and implementation of the Title I program at their school may be connected to dominant positionality of the school. The school system's dominant status may oppress the parents outside the school's dominant belief, value and cultural systems. For example, the parental involvement literature explains how school systems adhere to middle-class value systems and plan their academic curriculum accordingly (Griffith, 1998). Input into planning is generally not sought by the school system from lower and working-class parents since the school system believes they know what is best academically for its students. In fact, input into planning curriculum at this particular school is generally not sought from parents following middle-class beliefs, values or cultures either. Consequently, the school system is continuing to reproduce its existing power structure by transferring its own beliefs, values and cultures within the implementation of programs designed by the school (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 2001). Furthermore, the school uses hegemonic practices to maintain its dominant status over the parents at the school by eliminating their involvement in the process of creating and implementing the Title I program. By doing this, the school maintains its dominance by ensuring its own beliefs, values, and cultural systems remained intact, thus oppressing its parents and students.

Additionally, the findings in this study suggest that parents' voices, regardless of economic or social status, were absent from the planning process of the current Title I program. It was not surprising that the participants in this study were unaware of how the Title I program was developed and implemented at their school or of their own roles in planning a Title I program because their voices were not heard in the planning process.

Their lack of involvement supports literature reporting their absence within the planning stages of a program at the school.

For example, one study reports how parents operating within lower value system and socioeconomic levels often feel inferior to the school system and therefore, do not involve themselves with the implementation and planning of educational programs at the school (Feuerstein, 2000). In addition, teachers working within these schools adapt to the middle-class value systems present there and expect parents of their students to do the same if they are from a lower SES, differing value system or dissimilar culture (Daniel-White, 2002; Griffith, 1998; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

One way to understand the lack of involvement was that parents within this study were alienated. Therefore, they did not question the Title I program at the school nor did they actively seek to have an active role in changing this program until they became aware that such involvement was appropriate. The adult education literature pertaining to program planning addresses the role parents may play in providing input in planning a Title I program.

Additionally, the theoretical framework for this study, critical theory, provides examples to support parent roles in planning a Title I program especially as it pertains to critical action research. Critical theory asserts the importance of active participation of those marginalized within the planning process of a program. Furthermore, this active participation ensures participants' voices are heard throughout the process. As a result, parent roles change from being almost entirely non-existent to becoming fully immersed in the process.

Another way to understand parents' limited roles and lack of involvement is through a discussion of program planning literature from the field of adult education. Clearly, the school system and the Title I Coordinator in the past planned the Title I program according to their own objectives and professional insights, regardless of parent input or insights. In fact, since active parent participation was not sought, the school system and the Title I Coordinator developed and implemented the Title I program based upon their own stated purposes, content, and measurable objectives. Therefore, the parents' role in planning the Title I program at the school was passive and it's likely the school system emulated the middle-class values, beliefs, and culture when designing and applying the remediation program.

By consciously limiting parent involvement in the process, the school system was able to keep the dominant society's social status in place, thus supporting the hidden curriculum present at the school. An example illustrating how schools consciously reproduce the power structures of the school system is found in the hidden curriculum present at schools. The hidden curriculum, or the unstated dominant values, cultures, and beliefs of the present school system, is also found within the Title I program. For instance, the Title I program is organized and implemented based solely on input from the school system and the Title I Coordinator thus reinforcing the dominance of the school system and ensuring the hidden curriculum is sustained. The hidden curriculum is so entrenched within school systems that often parents don't realize it even exists; therefore, they don't actively seek to understand or change it within the school system (Giroux, 2001). Marginalized parents' roles in changing the hidden curriculum is extremely difficult because these parents do not have the social networks or support of

their peers, unlike members of the middle class, to challenge the system and effectively change their roles in becoming consistently involved at the school (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). In response, a program planning model using the elements of critical action research is appropriate to increase parents' roles in this process and ensure increased participation from parents marginalized by the school system.

In response to this concern, the researcher made a particular effort to use a critical planning model within the group discussions and monthly meetings of this study by following a critical planning model as described by John Forester (1999) and including elements of other critical theorists such as Apple, Giroux and Freire. This model of planning supports the elements found within the field of critical theory by allowing participants' voices to be heard and also by raising participants' awareness. As used within the study, this planning model allowed parents to understand how the Title I program was organized and implemented at the school. Additionally, it enabled parents to have their awareness raised about their own roles in this process. This increased understanding of the Title I program and the parents' roles in planning this program facilitated parents voicing their opinions and taking actions to change the current program at the school for the upcoming year.

One particularly important element in the critical planning model was understanding the importance of each stakeholder, namely the parents and the school system, and their roles in the development of the program (Cervero & Wilson, 1994 ; Forester, 1999). It was essential for the researcher to understand each stakeholder's interest in organizing and implementing a successful Title I program. Naturally, both the parents and the school system agreed that they wanted a program which would meet the

academic needs of the students; however, neither group was clear on the amount of input each group had to decide how this goal would be met.

Since the school system and the Title I Coordinator shared similar interests in developing a Title I program which they believed met the needs of the school and the students, their assumptions were that they knew what program best suited the academic needs of the students; therefore, parental input was not actively sought. Again, this supported the critical theorists' beliefs that the school system was supporting its own dominant structures thus reinforcing middle-class values (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2001). Due to the school system's lack of actively seeking parents' participation or gaining parent input on the development and implementation of the Title I program, parents did not fully understand the Title I program at the school. Also, they didn't understand their own roles in the process and their voices were not heard nor were they made aware of the opportunity they had to change or challenge the existing program at the school.

In response to this concern, the researcher, in implementing this critical action research study, focused on providing parents the opportunity to explore and discuss their desire to understand the Title I program and their roles in planning this program during two group discussions and monthly meetings. The use of dialogue throughout this process also supported the critical program planning model (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). In this study, the researcher explored the parent roles pertaining to Title I with the parents through discussions thus giving the parents an opportunity to gain an understanding of the program and what their roles were in its development and implementation. Once parents were informed about how the Title I program was developed and implemented, they began to voice their displeasure about this program and request changes for the

following year's Title I program. The discussion also allowed parents' voices to be heard and their own awareness about the Title I program and their roles in it, further supporting the use of a critical program planning model within this study. Lastly, by raising awareness among the parents about their right to be involved in suggesting changes for future Title I programs, the parents decided to take action during the group discussions to change the program for next year, which they believed would better meet the academic needs of their children.

Parents Request Increased School and Home Communication

In this critical action research study, parents of students receiving Title I remediation services requested increased communication between the school and home. They found the existing means of communication inadequate, especially when it came to getting information about academic issues concerning their children. Parents did not believe the school contacted them in a timely manner when academic issues arose, nor did the school respond to their phone calls or letters of concern pertaining to their children's academic issues promptly. In addition, parents did not feel the other attempts the school regularly made at communicating with them were effective or adequate. These included: a weekly Thursday Communicators, calendar of monthly events, monthly *Home and School Connection* newsletters, and monthly principal newsletters. They felt that communication between the school and its parents was inadequate and they requested additional methods to increase and enhance their children's educational opportunities.

Parents in this study believed adequate communication meant providing them with timely contact, either through written or personal contact, about academic or social

issues their children were experiencing at school. Additionally, parents requested more conferences and open house events to individually discuss these issues with their children's teachers. Without adequate communication opportunities between school and home, parents may not be fully aware of what is happening within the school system. The participants cited many examples during their interviews and group discussions about the lack of communication, especially pertaining to academic difficulties their children were having at school. While the researcher did provide the relevant data retrieved from the participants supporting the school system's appropriate amount of communication among parents at both group discussions, the other participants at the group discussion sessions disagreed and provided several examples of the limited communications between them and the school. These included: non-teacher initiated communication for student academic difficulties, teachers not returning phone calls or letters/notes in a timely fashion, miscommunication pertaining to the grading system at the school, and misunderstanding of the purpose behind failure notices.

Communication is one of the six major categories needed to sustain a successful parental involvement element within the school system (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Clark, 2004; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Supporting the important role communication plays in acquiring and maintaining parental involvement, research has shown that the more communication exists between school and home, the more parents were involved in school-related activities (Feuerstein, 2000). This increased communication enables both the school and its parents to be simultaneously involved in supporting the academic and social well-being of the children at the school. For instance, when parents are kept informed and their input is sought about academic or social

problems their children may be experiencing, it allows the lines of communication to be kept open thus enhancing the process to work together to solve any problems the children are experiencing.

Furthermore, the primary influence of whether or not parents become involved in school-related activities is directly supported by the amount of communication between the school and home (Tett, 2001). Clearly, the participants in this study noted the lack of communication initiated by the school hindered their own involvement in school-related activities and this lack of communication inadequately addressed their children's academic issues as well.

Even though the majority of parents cited a lack of communication between school and home, a few participants did believe the school provided enough communication to its parents. These parents noted the efforts made by the school system to increase their own involvement, such as: written communication (letters, monthly events calendar, monthly principal letters, newsletters), homework books, the homework helpline and personal teacher contact; however, these particular parents were unable to attend the group discussions to defend their position. It's unfortunate the parents who believed the school provided adequate communication between school and home were unable to meet with those parents citing inadequacies within communication between the two entities to discuss the issue collaboratively.

Another way to understand the impact of inadequate communication on marginalized groups can be found in critical theory. For example, educators within the dominant school are often unknowingly supporting the beliefs, practices, and values of the institution by not communicating effectively with parents, thus reinforcing the

middle-class values found at the school. As educators continue to sustain the hidden curriculum at the school, through a lack of communication, they persist in marginalizing the parents whose beliefs, values, and cultures fall outside the dominant system (Giroux, 2001).

Supporting this view, Sharpes (2002) contends that the dominant influence of the school and its educators on students and parents transcends the classroom and also reaches school sponsored and non-school activities outside the school system. Seemingly unaware that this dominant power structure exists, parents may begin to accept the communication between school and home as appropriate and may not question the issue unless they are made aware of their rights and the means by which schools should regularly communicate with them. This transfer of the school's hegemonic beliefs may occur without notice since school's pass information to parents and students which they deem important and thus reinforce their own dominant belief systems (Gramsci, 1985). These beliefs, practices, and values may apply to parental involvement policies incorporated at the school, grading policies, and even issues of communication.

Parents' Perceptions of Involvement Differ from the School System's Perceptions of Involvement

In this critical action research study, parents' of students receiving Title I remediation services explored their perceptions of involvement in school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. Parents in this study believed their participation in both these activities warranted recognition for their involvement with their children; however, the school system's perceptions of involvement centered only on school sponsored activities. Research completed on parent perceptions of involvement focused solely on

the activities middle-class parents identified as parental involvement activities; therefore, the lower and working-class parents' perceptions were not addressed (Daniel-White, 2002; Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith 1998). This is important to note because the middle-class parents' beliefs, values, and cultures align with the school systems and both groups perceived school-sponsored activities such as participation with homework, open houses, conferences, and Family Reading Night, as relevant to parental involvement. Since middle-class parents are familiar with the importance school systems place upon participation in these activities, they are already assimilated with regards to what constitutes suitable parental involvement activities (Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith, 1998). Knowing this, the school system and its educators feel more confident involving middle-class parents in school related activities and perhaps disregarding those parents who fall outside of this dominant social class system.

However, since the Title I parents in this study were mostly from the lower and working-class social status, their perceptions about parental involvement included participation in non-school sponsored activities such as cheerleading, football, soccer, and baseball with less emphasis on their involvement in the school sponsored activities mentioned. One possible explanation for this may be because of the individual and social factors influencing their participation, such as: negative experiences with the school (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999); belief that it's the school's responsibility to educate the children, not theirs (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001); and different cultural backgrounds (Daniel-White, 2002; Olivios, 2004; Pena, 2000). These factors most likely affect the participation of lower and working-class parents at school-sponsored events.

Throughout the interview sessions and group discussions in this study, the parents openly explored their perceptions of involvement and provided the researcher with examples of opportunities for their involvement in both school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. For instance, the participants felt their participation in non-school sponsored activities such as seasonal sports was just as important for the children as being involved in school sponsored activities which included completing homework, and their attendance at Open House, Family Reading Night, and the Book Fair. However, the literature reviewed doesn't support lower and working-class parents' perceptions which include the importance of their participation in non-school sponsored activities. The school system's failure to understand the marginalized parents' perceptions about their involvement with their children in school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities marginalizes them further within the system thus continuing to reinforce the dominant status of the school. For example, research has shown that parents operating within a different value system than the school do not feel confident participating in school sponsored parental involvement activities (Feuerstein, 2000). These marginalized parents may also have had negative experiences with the school system in the past thus limiting their involvement in school sponsored activities as well (Lewis & Forman, 2002). However, parents from the middle class who are already assimilated into the school systems perceptions about what constitutes proper parental involvement activities dictate that homework is an effective and necessary element of parental involvement. Therefore, the school system and the middle class parents support the status of homework as a necessary school sponsored activity. However, some of the parents in this study weren't as supportive of their role in completing homework assignments with their children as a

compulsory school sponsored activity because they believed it was the school's responsibility to educate their children. For example, while most parents agreed that children should receive homework daily, the majority of parents felt that the amount of homework placed upon children was excessive. Also, these parents didn't believe it was their responsibility to teach new material to their children at home; instead they felt that homework should only support lessons previously learned in school.

Also, parents following different cultural belief systems were not encouraged to voice their concerns relating to parental involvement at this particular school. The school system did not actively seek to understand how the Hispanic culture viewed parental involvement nor did they provide these parents with any additional support to help ease the transition from one culture to the next to make them feel welcome at the school (Olivios, 2004). Instead, the school system held the belief that the Hispanic parents needed to assimilate into the dominant school culture in order to effectively involve themselves in school-sponsored activities (Daniel-White, 2002). Unfortunately, the school system managed to further alienate this particular group of parents at the school causing them to not feel welcome or become involved in school-sponsored activities at the school.

In addition, this lack of research surrounding lower and working-class parents' perceptions about parental involvement speaks volumes about how this particular group of parents is often overlooked by the school system. This had a direct bearing on them not being involved in voicing their opinion on the curriculum implemented at the school or on the amount of homework they believe is necessary for their children. The school system and its educators assumed that the curriculum with its corresponding homework

policies were fairly integrated based on their beliefs, unfortunately the school system never asked the parents of students receiving remediation services whether or not their homework policies were acceptable to them and their children. This study revealed that had these particular parents been asked about homework, the school system may have taken this information into account when implementing the curriculum which includes mandatory nightly homework in the subjects of phonics, math, and reading. Again without allowing the marginalized groups to voice their opinions or concerns, the dominant structures are being reinforced at the school (Giroux, 2001).

Research has shown that the perceptions of involvement and the amount of parental involvement may be directly related to the socioeconomic class system of its parents (Lareau, 1987). For example, the parents in this study were mostly from lower and working class backgrounds which may have contributed to their perceptions of involvement to include non-school sponsored activities while parents in the middle-class from other studies only perceive participation in school sponsored activities as important to parental involvement. The parental involvement literature does not include parents' perceptions of involvement in non-school sponsored activities. In fact, it only presents information pertaining to the correlation between positive test scores and parental involvement in school endorsed activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Feuerstein, 2000; Izzo et al., 1999). This lack of literature pertaining to the perceptions of involvement from the marginalized parents' perspective about non-school sponsored activities indicates the lack of importance school systems, educators, and researchers give to this group of lower and working-class parents.

Parents' Perceptions of Barriers to Involvement

In this critical action research study, parents of students receiving Title I remediation services explored their perceptions of barriers limiting their involvement in school and non-school sponsored activities. Parents in this study identified three barriers that deterred their involvement. These included: temporal constraints, the school's unwelcoming atmosphere, and language and cultural barriers. Literature reviewed for this study indicates that temporal constraints and language and cultural barriers identified by the parents in this study were also identified by parents in past studies as deterrents to their involvement. However, the school's unwelcoming atmosphere identified by the Title I parents in this study but not in past studies, may indicate additional deterrents to parental involvement.

For instance, parents in this study did not believe the school invited them into the school enough to be involved with helping with classroom parties, aiding teachers, and chaperoning field trips. They believed only a handful of parents were welcomed into the school to become involved in these activities each year. Coincidentally, the parents who were welcomed into the school to provide assistance with the above mentioned activities were mostly from middle-class backgrounds and followed the same beliefs, values, and culture systems as the dominant school system. The Title I parents in this study did not immediately recognize this relationship among those parents invited in to participate in the school sponsored activities until the researcher revealed the names of some of the parents she had seen participating at the school. The researcher was able to raise awareness among the parents about how the school invited select parents, who most likely shared the school's dominant ideologies, to participate within the elementary

school. A few participants simply shrugged this off and believed that perhaps these parents were more available to participate; however, the other parents openly discussed their displeasure over the school not providing all parents the opportunity to participate and stated that they were just as available to participate at the school.

In relation to these parents feeling unwelcomed, the parental involvement literature supports the premise that schools invite and welcome parents into the school to participate in school activities who are generally from the same social, economic, and cultural belief systems as the school (Daniel-White, 2002; Griffith, 1998; Lareau, 1987; Pena, 2000). Without school systems making a conscious effort to understand and adapt to parents falling outside the dominant systems of beliefs, values, and cultures, schools will not be able to get these parents to feel welcome at the school, nor will schools be able to increase these parents' participation in school-sponsored activities (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Pena, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

A factor, which contributed to the unwelcoming atmosphere present at the school and was reported by the two Hispanic parents in this study, was the existing language and cultural barriers. These parents were unaware of the yearly parental involvement activities offered at the school such as PTO and yearbook committee, because all information regarding these programs was provided to them in English. Related research supports how this language barrier continues to intimidate and deter participation in school activities by Hispanic parents (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). While Hispanic parents are intimidated and made to feel inferior within the existing dominant school system, it's obvious the school's unwelcoming atmosphere can be addressed by providing these parents with information in their native language, Spanish. The school's decision

not to provide Hispanic parents with information in Spanish clearly supports the dominant systems practice of maintaining English as its official language thus excluding this specific group of parents (Giroux, 2001).

Not only is the exclusion of this group of parents solely an issue within the school system, other Title I parents in this study also discriminated against this group and felt the Hispanic parents needed to assimilate into our community's beliefs, values, and cultural systems in order to be welcomed. Regardless of the researcher's attempts throughout both group discussions to present how language and cultural barriers negate Hispanic parents' involvement in school and non-school sponsored activities, the other participants were unwilling change their view and welcome this group of parents into the school. It was interesting to note how the Caucasian parents continually voiced their displeasure with the school system not welcoming them to participate in school activities while they seemed to be doing exactly the same thing to the parents within the Hispanic culture. It seems that Title I parents' were reinforcing the school systems' barriers to parental involvement by demanding parents of Hispanic origin to assimilate to the community's official language, English. In addition, the Caucasian Title I parents did not support the school system being responsible for providing the Hispanic parents with an appropriate support system to learn a new language, such as classes or resource materials; instead, the Caucasian parents believed the responsibility of acquiring English language skills rests solely on the Hispanic parents, not on the shoulders of the school system.

Finally, temporal constraints mentioned by the parents in this study which hindered their participation in school and non-school sponsored activities included issues with work schedules, childcare issues, and time constraints. These temporal constraints

were not uncommon to parents in other economic, social, and cultural systems and were found within the related fields of literature presenting views from school systems, educators, and parents but were not focused upon for this study (Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lewis & Forman, 2002). While the researcher did note these constraints and provide accommodations for them when planning for the group discussions and monthly meetings, Title I parents still did not participate as hoped. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

The Practice of Critical Action Research

Now that this study has been completed using a critical action research paradigm, it seems only appropriate that I reflect upon the effectiveness of this methodology and my various roles in this process. This reflection focuses on exploring Title I parents' perceptions about parental involvement at this school and raising awareness about individual and societal factors influencing their own involvement. As I revisit the process of doing this critical action research study, I'm able to identify both the successes and challenges that arose while this study was being completed and its residual effects on the participation of the Title I parents today.

This study did offer Title I parents the opportunity to explore their perceptions of parental involvement at the school. A successful component of this critical action research study was that for perhaps the first time, Title I parents were given a voice to explore their perceptions of involvement, challenge the system, and provide suggestions to change the Title I program for the next school year. Challenging and changing unfair practices and beliefs of the dominant system are all crucial elements of a critical action

research study that supports the active participation of its participants. Title I parents began their active participation by describing their own perceptions of involvement during the individual semi-structured interviews. Their responses to these interview questions enabled the parents to explore their perceptions and voice their own feelings about their participation in school sponsored and non-school sponsored activities. Also, their responses were composed by the researcher and used to stimulate active discussions about the parents' perceptions of parental involvement during the group discussions.

Furthermore, the voice of the participants was most effectively heard within the two group discussions held at the school. After the researcher aided participants in raising their own awareness pertaining to their roles in providing suggestions about the design and implementation of the Title I program at the school, the participants voiced their concerns during the group discussions about not being actively sought by the school to participate. The group discussions provided a safe and comfortable environment for the Title I parents to voice how they felt about not being invited by the school to participate in school-sponsored activities especially in planning the Title I program. The researcher, acting as the group facilitator, encouraged the parents to share examples of their discontent about being overlooked to participate in these activities. The Title I parents listened to their peers and supported each other's feelings of dissatisfaction citing examples of their own frustration of not being invited to participate. Furthermore, these discussions empowered the participants to take action against what they believed was an inappropriate structuring of the Title I program.

In addition, the group discussions provided cohesiveness for the parents to become active participants in challenging the system. For example, the findings

discussed in the previous chapter highlighted how the parents within the group used me as a catalyst in this process by asking me to meet with the principal to discuss changes they wanted implemented at the school, especially pertaining to the Title I program. I believe this was the turning point for the group because they no longer passively accepted the school system's power over them, instead they decided to take action once they were aware of their own power in affecting change at the school. Additionally, the parents wanted these issues addressed before they agreed to attend the next group discussion. The parents' active involvement in deciding the path in which they wanted to continue supports using a critical action research methodology for this study. In addition, not only did the parents decide how the study would proceed, but also they were very clear about voicing their needs and challenging the system at the same time during the group discussions. This was an essential first step for the marginalized parents in this study to become actively involved in making a difference at the school.

While this critical action research study provided the Title I parents with several successful opportunities for involvement, it also presented me with several challenges. First and foremost, despite the efforts of the researcher to address the issues of concern that were hindering parent participation, Title I participation during the monthly meetings sessions is minimal at best. The Title I monthly meetings were suggested by the parents as a way to get all parents of Title I students at the school involved each month. These meetings are organized around parent needs and suggestions and have included: an overview of the Title I program, use of computers to gain specific resources for their children's academic needs, and reading and math lessons with resource materials provided by their children's Title I teachers.

While I have tried to address the issues reportedly deterring parental involvement, I still was unable to improve Title I parents' participation at the monthly meetings. For instance, I provided parents with childcare services during these meetings, opportunities for flexible times and days for the meetings, and also my phone number and e-mail address for personal contact with me whenever needed. Unfortunately, parent participation has dwindled since the meetings began in September and has caused me to reflect upon the reasons for this lack of involvement. There could be several explanations. For example, perhaps parents believe there is a stigma attached to their own participation at these meetings. Currently, other parents are not aware of whose children are receiving Title I services at the school; therefore if they did attend these meetings, their anonymity would be disclosed and other parents would know that their children require remediation services. This disclosure may deter parents from participating at these monthly meetings as their children's confidentiality about requiring additional academic support is exposed.

Additionally, perhaps because I am a staff member at the school, the Title I parents still view me as belonging to the school system, which they believe is not addressing their needs or concerns. An example of this occurred when I met with the principal to discuss parent concerns about the existing Title I program. During this meeting, the researcher relied on her own experiences as a reading specialist and agreed with the principal's suggestion to provide students in the fourth through sixth grades with remedial Title I services which followed an in-class model, not a pull-out model as requested by the parents. In hindsight, the researcher should not have made that decision

without first consulting and discussing this issue with the parents whose voices she was representing.

Or maybe the parents are content knowing that they changed the Title I program for this year and are satisfied with the results. It would be in the school's best interest to follow up with the original study participants about their participation in parental involvement activities and the challenges which may still be affecting their involvement. In addition, if the school takes a proactive role in trying to gain the participation of its marginalized parents by listening to and supporting their needs, these parents may view this favorably and participate more in school sponsored activities. After all, regardless of the researcher's efforts, the school is still operating within a middle-class system and is not attempting to involve parents from the lower and working classes in the planning or decision-making process at the school. In fact, the results of this study have not been sought by the administration to increase parental involvement at the school.

In closing, I feel that I have developed a strong bond with several parents who participated in my study. They call me at school when a problem occurs with their children or whenever they feel I can provide them with the necessary information or support to help them when they need it. Sometimes they even contact me to offer my advice on academic and social issues which arise regardless if it pertains to the Title I program or not. Overall, I am pleased that I had this opportunity to work with the Title I parents in this study. Their involvement has opened up my own awareness to those marginalized by the school system and this process has enabled me to grow both as an educator and as a parent.

In retrospect, if I have another opportunity to provide the school system with suggestions to increase parental involvement, I might do it differently. First, I would get the parents involved from the very beginning to find out what types of activities they wanted to be involved in and what their roles would be in the process. I've learned that if parents do not see the relevance in what you are providing them, then they probably won't participate. Therefore, the school must be open to listening to the parents' needs before planning a program; otherwise the results will not be beneficial for either group. Also, the school must provide parents' with an active role in planning and developing a new program. Parents must see that their suggestions and ideas matter and that the school is using the information they provided. Parents will not continue to participate if they feel that their voices are not being heard by the school and that their input is not affecting how the school is organizing and implementing the program. Finally, once the program is put into practice, the school system must periodically invite parents to reflect on the effectiveness of the new program. If the program is not meeting the needs of the parents or their children, then the school should provide parents an opportunity to be involved in changing the program accordingly. Through this collaborative effort, schools, parents, and children will ultimately benefit from increased parental involvement.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer several implications for practice. First, the implications for parental involvement in elementary education are discussed and then the implications for adult education practices follow.

Parental Involvement in Elementary Education

The findings are significant to the field of elementary education in that they provide insight about parents not typically heard from when exploring perceptions about parental involvement issues. Specifically, the Title I parents voiced their ideas and concerns to the principal at the school, through the researcher, about changes they wanted implemented into next year's program. This study connected the parents and the school system in the process of planning a program at the school; something that hadn't been accomplished at the school in the past. The parents' involvement in this process encouraged the school to reevaluate the Title I program at the school and to use parent observations and suggestions to examine its effectiveness. The school did use parent input to change the upcoming Title I program thus benefitting from the parents' involvement in the process. The school implemented a more effective program for the Title I students receiving remediation in reading and math.

Another way parents and the school system can benefit from this study is for both entities to understand the importance of maintaining adequate communication between home and school. The findings in this study did not support the school's belief that it was providing enough communication between itself and its parents; in fact, most parents reported inadequate communication measures were taken to keep them abreast about educational issues at the school. Title I parents were particularly distressed about the lack of contact made by educators to address the academic issues of their students.

The parents in this study requested more measures for increased communication from the school, such as: more frequent scheduled conferences, earlier notification of student academic difficulties, a better understanding of the grading policy, and monthly

Title I meetings. The researcher did discuss these issues with the school's principal, as requested by the Title I parents, and the principal agreed to incorporate more teacher conferences at the primary level. Also, the Title I monthly meetings were incorporated into the curriculum and these meetings have helped to inform parents about the grading policy and the Title I program at the school. Schools working with parents of Title I students needs to be aware of their responsibility to provide adequate communication to its parents about school issues and policies which affect their children. When parents remain informed, the school has a better chance to acquire their participation and provide parents with the support needed to remain involved at the school.

Additionally, this study increased awareness among parents about the school system's dominant positionality and its negative effect upon their own participation at the school. While the parents' awareness about their own marginalization at the school increased, the school system's attempt to change its dominant social structures was minimal. The administration did use parent input to change the Title I program; however, the school system did not encourage additional input from parents about other curriculum or academic issues at the school. Schools should not wait until they are challenged by parents to allow them to be involved in informing important academic decisions at the school. Schools need to openly and aggressively provide parents with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions on school issues. This can be accomplished by offering parents resource materials and having open discussions with educators and administrators about educational issues at the school. Schools also need to be aware of the Hispanic parents within the community and supply materials to them in Spanish as well. If schools welcome parents and support them with knowledge about the school

system and its programs on a regular basis, parents will then be more likely to stay involved and make informed decisions pertaining to the education of their children. More accurately, school inclusion of Title I parents will result in increased parental involvement, a greater understanding of educational programs at the school, improved communication between the school and home, and a clearer understanding to the barriers affecting participation.

Finally, the findings in this study highlight the necessity of involving parents in making decisions at the school. The implications of this study showcase the importance of acquiring and maintaining parental involvement to improve the quality of education at the school. These findings are applicable in every elementary school wishing to provide its students with the best education possible by welcoming parent participation. Schools and parents need to form a partnership with one another to create an effective atmosphere for learning. As the school system, parents, and students work together to achieve success, all stakeholders will benefit from this collaboration.

Adult Education

The findings in this study also contribute to the field of adult education. As the Title I parents explored their perceptions of parental involvement while increasing their own awareness of the dominant ideology of the school system, they were empowered to make changes at the school. This was able to occur because this qualitative, critical action research study gave the marginalized parents an opportunity to voice their concerns and create changes to the existing educational system at the school. Had this study not been completed, the Title I parents would have remained in the same oppressed

position and their children would have received the same remediation services that the school system had declared were successful. Fortunately, the parents were able to become more actively involved to challenge and to create a positive impact on the educational system at the school by requesting changes to the Title I program which ultimately benefitted their children.

Additionally, the findings in this study supported the ideas within the theoretical framework of critical theory. Gramsci (1971) contends that organic intellectuals, individuals who were once marginalized but have since become members of the dominant class, may influence the work of those oppressed. In this study, the researcher may be considered that person because she built a trusting relationship with the parents in this study to assist them in raising awareness and providing the participants a voice to challenge and change the system. While the researcher remained a part of the dominant school system because of her employment, she still understood the plight of those marginalized because she was raised in a working-class background in this particular community and can relate to the issues facing parents today.

However, even though the researcher may have considered herself to be an organic intellectual, the parents may not have recognized her in this role because of her positionality at the school. The researcher still held a position of power at the school in her roles as a teacher and future Title I Coordinator and regardless of her desire to provide parents with the opportunity to challenge and change the dominant system, the researcher still represented the dominant school system. In fact because the researcher was involved with this study, she was expected to increase parental involvement at the school by the school system itself. Therefore, not only was the researcher representing

the parents throughout this study, she was also providing the school with more parental involvement participation thus assisting them in meeting the parental involvement requirements of the NCLB Act. In retrospect, this dual representation of the parents and the school by the researcher may have unknowingly impacted on the critical aspect of this study thus affecting participation and future involvement at the school.

In addition, this research uncovered the importance of raising awareness among marginalized groups about what is oppressive and provided them with the voice needed to challenge and change the system as supported by critical theorist Freire (1970). In this case, the parents at the school were made aware of their roles pertaining to their involvement in changing the Title I program at the school. The school system and parents benefitted from this involvement because each group was able to be involved in the planning process of the future program. Since all stakeholders' voices were heard, both the school and the parents developed a program that met each of their needs and created a remediation program most beneficial for the children at the school.

The findings challenge those in the adult education field to involve marginalized groups in the planning process of any new program. This research provided a successful example of how marginalized groups do have relevant information to offer; however, they need to be sincerely invited by the dominant school system to share this knowledge. This study provided this opportunity to Title I parents at this particular school and the results were effective.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study offers various opportunities for future research in the fields of education, both elementary and adult. This section outlines four recommendations for future research in these areas. First, it would be beneficial to explore the voices of those marginalized within the school system because of their differing beliefs, values, and cultures when planning educational programs at the school. This study only involved thirteen parents of Title I students however, there are many other groups marginalized at the school. What are some ways the school system can identify those groups and present them an opportunity to become more involved at the school? The researcher in this study had a difficult time garnering participation from this specific group of parents; therefore, additional research needs to be completed offering support and suggestions that would increase involvement at the school level. Furthermore, additional research about this topic could also be completed at the high school level as well, where parental involvement dramatically decreases among marginalized parents.

A second recommendation for future research is to further study why the school system has adopted the beliefs, values, and cultural systems that they have, and whether or not these need to be changed. Future qualitative studies need to be conducted which focus on allowing parents' perceptions about school related issues, academic programs, and their own beliefs, values, and cultures to be shared with the school system. While much research has been done highlighting the perceptions of parental involvement showcasing the viewpoints of the school, educators, and middle-class parents, not many studies have been done addressing the same issues with lower and working-class parents. Also, the school, educators, and middle-class parents follow similar belief systems thus

the qualitative studies completed with these groups have yielded the same results. Unfortunately, the missing literature is from the marginalized groups' perceptions. Also, when these future studies address the issues and learn the marginalized groups' perceptions, it is imperative that these results are shared with the school system, otherwise nothing will be gained and the dominant system will be sustained.

A third suggestion for future research is to focus on the benefits marginalized parents gain when they take an active role in participating at the school. Studies completed on parental involvement have focused on understanding the benefits students gain from having their parents participate, both academically and socially; however, research needs to be completed showing parent gains as well. Would more parents benefit from participating in school related activities if they were also able to take something from this participation such as expanding their own social networks or increasing their self-esteem?

The final recommendation for future research is to study why marginalized parents tend to participate more readily in non-school sponsored activities than school-sponsored activities. The findings in this study revealed that parents perceived extra-curricular activities as an important element of their parental involvement while the school usually did not label these types of activities favorably. By examining this issue through a sociological lens, researchers can begin to understand why lower-class and working-class parents seem to participate more often in these types of activities. In addition, this topic can be studied both at the elementary and high school levels.

Summary

This chapter outlined the four relevant findings of this research which included: parents' desire to understand the Title I program and their roles in planning this program; parents' request for increased communication between home and school; parents' perceptions of involvement differ from those of the school; and parents' identified barriers to involvement. Additionally, the researcher included her reflections on using a critical action research to explore Title I perceptions about parental involvement and raising awareness of these participants about individual and societal factors influencing their own involvement. Next, the implications for practice were discussed within the fields of elementary education and adult education. Finally, recommendations for future research concluded the chapter.

In closing, it is this researcher's hope that this information will be helpful to those studying marginalized parents in elementary and high school settings. In addition, this researcher believes this information will be useful for educators involved in planning educational programs for parents at both levels. Finally, it is this researcher's belief that if school systems choose to listen to marginalized parents' voices, bonds between the two entities will form, enhancing increased opportunities for parental involvement to flourish.

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APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

The Pennsylvania State University
Office for Research Protections
Approval Date:
Expiration Date:
Social Science Institutional Review
Board

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Fostering Parental Involvement: A Critical Study of Title I Parents' Participation in Public Elementary School Activities

Principal Investigator: Jodi Piekarski Loughlin
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[School's address]
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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore your perceptions about parental involvement at the elementary school.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to share your perceptions about parental involvement at the elementary school during an interview with the principal investigator and also to participate in two to three group sessions to discuss parental involvement issues with other Title I parents. A Spanish interpreter will be available if needed.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.
4. **Benefits:** You might learn more about your own parental involvement and what may be affecting your participation in school-related activities. This research study may also help you increase your own participation in these school-related activities.
5. **Duration:** It will take about 1 to 2 hour to complete your interview session and approximately 1 hour for each of the group sessions (2-3 sessions).

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the person in charge will know your identity. The data will be stored and secured at the principal investigator's home in a locked file cabinet and also in a password protected computer file.
7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contact Jodi Piekarski Loughlin at [(**) ***-****] with questions. You can also call this number if you have complaints or concerns about this research. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have concerns or general questions about the research, contact Penn State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.
8. **Payment for participation:** Participants will not receive any payment for their participation in this study.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

ORP USE ONLY: IRB# Doc.#
 The Pennsylvania State University
 Office for Research Protections
 Approval Date:
 Expiration Date:
 Social Science Institutional Review
 Board

Formulario de Permiso para la Investigación de Ciencias Sociales

La Universidad de Penn State

Título del Proyecto: “Fostering Parental Involvement: A Critical Study of Title I Parents’ Participation in Public Elementary School Activities” / “Promoviendo la Participación de los Padres: Un Estudio Crítico de la Participación de los Padres en las Actividades de Sus Hijos en la Escuela”

Investigadora Principal: Jodi Piekarski Loughlin
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10. **Propósito del estudio:** El propósito de este estudio de investigación es para explorar las percepciones sobre la participación de los padres en la educación de sus hijos en la escuela.
11. **Procedimientos:** Compartirá sus percepciones sobre la participación de los padres en la escuela durante una entrevista con la investigadora principal y también participará en dos o tres sesiones con otros padres o guardianes para discutir los asuntos del programa Title I. Un traductor de habla española será disponible si es necesario.
12. **Inquietudes y riesgos:** No hay ningún riesgo de participar en esta investigación además de los que se experimentan en la vida diaria.
13. **Beneficios:** Se puede aprender más sobre su propia participación o por qué no se participa en las actividades de su(s) hijo(s) en la escuela. Este estudio de investigación también puede provocar que participe más en las actividades de su(s) hijo(s) en la escuela.
14. **Duración:** La entrevista personal durará una o dos horas y las dos o tres sesiones de grupos durarán una hora aproximadamente.

15. **Declaración de confidencialidad:** Su participación en esta investigación será confidencial. Sólo la investigadora sabrá su identidad. La información se guardará en la casa de la investigadora dentro de un archivo cerrado con llave y también en una computadora protegida por una contraseña.
16. **Permiso de hacer preguntas:** Se puede hacer preguntas sobre esta investigación. Póngase en contacto con Jodi Piekarski Loughlin a [(**) **_.**] con sus preguntas. También se puede llamar este número si tiene problemas o inquietudes sobre esta investigación. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en esta investigación o preguntas generales, llame a la Oficina para la Protección de la Investigación de Penn State a (814) 865-1775. Se puede llamar este número si no puede ponerse en contacto con el equipo de investigación o si quiere hablar con otra persona.
17. **Pago por participación:** Los participantes no recibirán ningún pago por su participación en este estudio.
18. **Participación voluntaria:** Su decisión de ser parte de esta investigación es voluntaria. Se puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento. Tiene la opción la contestar solamente las preguntas que quiere. La negación de tomar parte en o retractación de este estudio no causará pena o pérdida de beneficios recibidos.

Hay que tener por lo menos 18 años de edad para participar en este estudio de investigación. Si le gustaría participar en este estudio de investigación y comprende toda la información como se indica más arriba, por favor firme su nombre e indique la fecha abajo.

Recibirá una copia firmada y fecha de este formulario de permiso para su récord.

Firma de Participante

Fecha

Persona que Obtiene Permiso

Fecha

APPENDIX B
PARENT PARTICIPATION LETTERS

Jodi Piekarski Loughlin
[School's name]
[School's address]
[(***) ***_****]
e-mail: jml303@psu.edu

Dear Parents/Guardians of Title I Reading Students,

I am currently working on completing my doctoral degree at Pennsylvania State University and I would like you to participate in a research study I will be conducting about parental involvement issues at [school's name]. As a Title I Reading Specialist at [school's name], I am interested in interviewing parents of Title I reading students about your perceptions relating to parental involvement at our elementary school. I would also like you to meet with other Title I parents to discuss these issues and perhaps find ways to increase Title I parents participation in school-related activities.

In order for you to participate in this study, you must meet the following requirements: have a child/children receiving Title I reading services in grades kindergarten through second; participate in two or less school-related activities a year; and have an interest in exploring your own participation in school-related activities. Additionally, this study requires that you be interviewed by me and participate in 2 to 3 group sessions with other Title I parents to discuss parental involvement issues. A Spanish translator will be available if needed.

Your participation in this research is confidential. Your interview and group discussions will not be shared with any other teachers or administrators at the elementary school. Finally, your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not affect the Title I services your child/children receive at the school.

I look forward to meeting with you and discussing your perceptions about parental involvement in the near future.

If you are interested in participating in this study about parental involvement, please return the enclosed informed consent form to school in an envelope labeled: Jodi Piekarski Loughlin, PSU research study or you may contact me directly at [(***) ***_****]. Also, if you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sincerely,

Jodi Piekarski Loughlin

Jodi Piekarski Loughlin
 [Nombre de escuela]
 [Dirección de escuela]
 [(***)***_****]
 correo electrónico: jml303@psu.edu

Estimado(s) padre(s)/guardián(es) de los estudiantes del programa de Lectura Title I:

Estoy en el proceso de terminar mis cursos de doctorado en la Universidad de Penn State, y me gustaría mucho si participara en una investigación que haré sobre la participación de los padres o guardianes en los asuntos de la escuela de [nombre de escuela]. Como especialista de leyenda del programa de Title 1 en [nombre de escuela], tengo mucho interés en hacer entrevistas con los padres o guardianes de los estudiantes que reciben asistencia del programa para saber más de sus opiniones y pensamientos del programa en la escuela. También me gustaría que conociera a otros padres o guardianes del programa Title I para discutir estos asuntos y tal vez buscar maneras de aumentar su participación en las actividades de la escuela.

Para poder participar en este estudio, hay que satisfacer los requisitos siguientes: tener un(a) hijo(a) que recibe servicios del programa Title 1 desde el jardín de infancia hasta el segundo grado; participar en por lo menos dos actividades escolares durante el año; y tener interés en explorar su propia participación en las actividades de la escuela. Además, este estudio requiere una entrevista personal conmigo y la participación en dos o tres sesiones de varios padres o guardianes de hijos del programa Title I para compartir sus ideas. Un traductor de habla española será disponible si es necesario.

Su participación en esta investigación es confidencial. Los resultados de su entrevista o de sus discusiones no serán compartidos con cualquier maestro o administrador de la escuela. Finalmente, la decisión de participar o no en este estudio no afectará los servicios que recibe(n) su(s) hijo(s) del programa Title I en la escuela.

Me daría mucho placer de conocerlo y discutir sus ideas y percepciones sobre el programa Title I.

Si tiene interés en participar en este estudio, por favor devuelva el formulario adjunto en un sobre a: Jodi Piekarski Loughlin, "PSU research study" o me puede llamar directamente a [(***) ***_****]. Si tiene preguntas sobre el estudio, por favor póngase en contacto conmigo.

¡Gracias por su cooperación!

Su Atto. y S.S.,

Jodi Piekarski Loughlin

APPENDIX C
PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY

[School's name]
POLICY FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The [school's name] is committed to the belief that all children can learn, and recognizes that the education of children is a responsibility shared by parents, families, school staff, and community.

The [school's name] defines parent and family involvement as an ongoing process that will assist parents and families to meet their basic obligation as their child's first educator, and promotes two-way communication between home and school.

To this end a written plan will be developed by parents and school staff at each building level where a Title I program is ongoing, to enhance parent involvement and reflect the needs of the students.

The plan will provide for staff development for both school staff and parents on how to help our children learn, and how to work with parents. Implementation of the plan will be a priority of the school staff that will exhibit behavior, which reflects a genuine interest in, and support for parent involvement.

PÓLIZA PARA LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LOS PADRES EN LA ESCUELA [nombre
de escuela]

La escuela [nombre de escuela] cree que todos los niños pueden aprender y que la enseñanza de los niños es una responsabilidad compartida entre los padres, familias, personas de la escuela y la comunidad.

La escuela [nombre de escuela] define la participación de los padres y de las familias como un proceso corriente que ayudará a los padres y a las familias a satisfacer su obligación básica de ser el primer educador de su hijo y a promover la comunicación entre la casa y la escuela.

A este fin un plan escrito será escrito por los padres y las personas de la escuela en cada nivel de enseñanza para los estudiantes que reciben asistencia del programa “Title I”. Este plan mejorará la participación de los padres y reflejará las necesidades de los estudiantes.

El plan incluirá nuevos métodos de enseñar mejor y desarrollar una mejor comunicación entre los padres y los educadores. La implementación del plan será la prioridad de los educadores de la escuela, la que reflejará un interés verdadero en y apoyo para la participación de los padres.

APPENDIX D**PARENT INVOLVEMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what parent involvement means to you.
2. What do you see as the parents' role in school, if any?
3. What are some things you enjoy while being involved in your children's education and school-related activities?
4. What opportunities of involvement do you think parents are most suited for?
5. Based on your own experiences what do schools do to get parents involved?
6. What are the most positive outcomes of your involvement in these activities?
7. What barriers, if any, keep parents from getting involved at school?
8. Are there any suggestions you could make to the school that would enable other parents to be more involved in their children's education and school-related activities?
9. As a parent, what are some challenges you face in trying to be more involved?
10. What are some suggestions you could make to the school which would allow you to be more involved in your children's education and school-related activities?
11. What is your reaction to this statement: Our school projects a welcoming atmosphere for parent involvement. Explain.
12. Describe some ways your school gets parents involved.
13. Would you be willing to meet in a group with other Title I parents to discuss ways to foster parent participation at your school?

Preguntas para la entrevista con los padres

1. En su opinión, describa lo que quiere decir “la participación de los padres” en la enseñanza de sus hijos
2. ¿Qué papel tienen los padres en la escuela?
3. ¿Qué cosas le gustan del sistema de enseñanza de sus hijos y de las actividades de la escuela?
4. ¿Qué métodos de participación hay para los padres en el sistema de enseñanza?
5. ¿Qué hacen las escuelas para atraer la participación e interés de los padres en la enseñanza?
6. ¿Cuáles son los resultados más positivos de su participación en estas actividades?
7. ¿Qué barreras existen que impiden la participación de los padres en las funciones de la escuela?
8. ¿Hay algo que puede sugerir a la escuela para que los otros padres participen más en las actividades de la escuela?
9. Como padre, ¿cuáles son algunos retos que existen que causan la falta de participación de los padres?
10. ¿Hay algo que puede sugerir a la escuela para aumentar la participación suya en la escuela?
11. ¿Cuál es su reacción a esta frase? - Nuestra escuela proyecta un ambiente de bienvenida para todos los padres en la comunidad.
12. Describa las maneras en que la escuela obtiene la participación de los padres.

13. ¿Le gustaría ser parte de un grupo que contiene otros padres que tienen hijos en el programa “Title I” para discutir maneras de aumentar la participación de los padres?

VITA

Jodi Piekarski Loughlin

Prior to her doctoral studies, Jodi earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and her Elementary Education certification from Moravian College in 1993. She then earned her Reading Specialist certification and a Master's of Education degree in Reading from Bloomsburg University in 1996.

Jodi has been employed as an elementary teacher at the Shenandoah Valley School District since her graduation from Moravian College. She has taught kindergarten and first grade students in self-contained classrooms, Title I math students in third grade, and Title I reading students in second, fifth, and sixth grades. Currently, Jodi is the district's Federal Programs Coordinator and she supervises the district's Title I program and its staff. In addition, she is the Title I Reading Specialist for the fifth and sixth grades. She also serves as a reading curriculum coordinator at the school.

Within the field of education, Jodi is a member of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, the National Education Association and Pi Lambda Theta International Honor Society and Professional Association in Education. She has written papers and presented at the Parent Awareness Training Conference and the Pennsylvania Adult and Continuing Education Research Conference.