

Parental Involvement in Schooling:
Perceptions of African American Parents and Guardians

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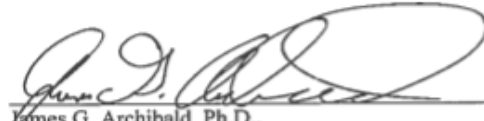
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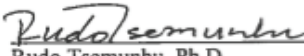
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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is a crucial factor in the success of students, but research shows differing perceptions on the definition of parent involvement (Wright, 2009). The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American parents regarding their role in their child's academic success, the nature of their involvement in schools, and the perceived impact of that involvement in their child's educational future.

Twenty African American parents/guardians were interviewed for this study. All participants attended the same Baptist church in one southern city, were over the age of 18, and had at least one child presently attending elementary school. A basic qualitative research design was used for the study and semi-structured, individual interviews with each of the 20 participants provided the data for this study.

Viewing the results from Epstein's six types of parent involvement, the participants in this study were actively involved in five types, but none of them were involved in the "decision-making" category discussed by Epstein. Using Yosso's (2002) cultural wealth lens to understand the data provided a very different story. It is clear that African American families employ a wealth of communal resources to ensure the academic success of their children. These resources may not be considered when schools talk about the parental involvement of African American parents, yet the wealth of resources in the African American community could provide schools with a critical bridge to increase the academic success of African American students, if school administrators were willing to cross the bridge into the community rather than asking parents to continually cross the bridge and come to school for events and at times that are conducive to schools.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

As the student bodies become more diverse, schools face greater challenges in meeting the needs of all students. One challenge that schools face is ensuring the achievement of all students. Many factors affect the educational success of students. Some researchers have suggested that the missing link in educational equity, regarding educational achievement is parental involvement.

(LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011, p. 115)

Decreasing the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students has been the focus of research and legislation for over four decades, yet the achievement gap for students attending school in high poverty areas still exists (Rowley & Wright, 2011). High levels of poverty among African Americans may account for some of the achievement differences in schools (Stull, 2013).

One of the most important factors affecting parental involvement in schools is the socioeconomic status of the parents. Martin (2015) found that in low socioeconomic areas, educators recognized that the school culture was not inviting to parents, and they did not feel welcomed. According to National Center for Education Statistics, African Americans have higher poverty rates than any other racial and ethnic groups. In 2005, 30% of African-American children under the age of 18 were living in poverty, compared to 10% of Caucasian children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to

raise children in poverty (Kao & Thompson, 2003). In the African American community, poverty has reached an all-time high; accounting for 34% of America's low-income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau (2007) reports, 20 million children living in poverty and 4.1 million (34%) of those children being African American.

Parental involvement in schooling has been shown to increase student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Perriell, 2015; Boncana & Lopez, 2010), and policymakers have created legislation to encourage stronger home-school partnerships (Gallant & Moore, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) became law in 2002 with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB requires that all schools that received Title I funds have a written parental involvement policy developed and agreed upon by parents and educators. It must be given to all the parents and teachers of children who participate in the Title I programs. It must ensure that schools are providing successful strategies to encourage and sustain active parental involvement.

Bower and Griffin (2011) stated that although parental involvement is thoroughly discussed on various platforms, "schools continue to struggle with increasing parental involvement with students of color and students of low socioeconomic status" (p. 77). There is some evidence to suggest that that many ethnic minority parents are not routinely involved in their children's schooling. Wallace (2013) reminded us that "it would be both unsound and unfair to conclude that they do not value education (as some teachers are prone to conclude)," (p. 196). Some parents may feel that teachers are better equipped to make decisions about their child's academic future than they are (Wallace, 2013).

Wallace (2013) reports, "Parents can be involved in some ways and to varying degrees. Some parents, for example, assume a home-based role that includes helping with homework and reinforcing proper school behaviors. Other parents may take on a school-based approach, such as attending school meetings and events, or communicating regularly with their children's teachers" (p. 195).

Marshall (2010) defined parental involvement as parents interacting with the schools and their children to promote success in schools. Parents being involved in school and with their children promotes success. Students have families and those families can be very different (Epstein, 2010). Many low-income families are led by single parents who have low-paying jobs that may not have flexible hours or may not have any benefits regarding paid vacations, sick, or personal leave (Manz, 2012). This could prevent parents from participating in their child's life.

Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and DePedro (2011) stated, teachers in urban schools have a harder time developing a relationship with their students families, due to the higher levels of low income families and single parent households. Also, having good communication between schools and parents (or legal guardians) is important, but is lacking due to technological resources at home or work. Parents need to embrace the educational process actively and to be active in their children school (Perriel, 2015).

One factor that contributes to the involvement of parents is how they perceive parental involvement. The relationship that parental involvement has on student achievement depends on the relationship between the parents, teachers, students, and administrators. When parents are involved students, tend to have a positive attitude towards school, a better outlook of the home-school partnership, higher quality

homework, and higher achievement. Parents benefit from being involved in understanding how schools work and how learning strategies help their children succeed, which leads to confidence and parents developing positive views of teachers and the school.

Epstein (2010) has linked parental involvement to numerous positive outcomes including grade advancement, lower dropout rate, improved graduation retention, and higher levels of academic achievement. When parental involvement is used effectively, relationships among the stakeholders improves, and the school climate will flourish (Epstein, 2010; Hornby & Witte, 2010). Chen and Gregory (2009) explored the effects of parental involvement in grades, behavior, and social outcomes. The results of their study revealed that parents who placed expectations on their children were engaged academically when they were younger.

Many researchers have shown that when parents are involved in their child's school, their influences affect their child's behaviors in the class (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). Boncana and Lopez (2010) concluded parental involvement was a key factor associated with student achievement and that parental involvement increased the success of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, studies have also proven that certain types of involvement have a positive impact (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). One key aspect is helping with homework. This type can also promote student success by creating an environment that expects and requires the completion of homework on a daily basis. Suleyman and Oguz (2013) researched sufficient levels of parental involvement among primary school students. They concluded that parental involvement was most effective

when related to task such as communication, supporting emotional development, and assistance with homework. When families regularly talk about school with their children, the children perform better academically. Wang and Neihart (2015) reported that parents, teachers, and peers influenced students academic achievement.

Parental involvement has shown to have positive benefits, such as goal setting. Kyle (2011) reported when parents set meaningful goals for their children related to high school graduation, children's chances to graduate increased. Goal setting is a way in which parental involvement can have positive outcomes. Parental goal setting has been found useful in promoting graduation rates among students.

School climate is an important element to consider as a benefit to increasing parental involvement. The school environment significantly affects the level in which parents were involved in the education. When schools create a climate that is comfortable and inviting to the parents, they will increase their involvement. Parents are more than just a source for schools to sell fund-raising tickets or called in only when their children are misbehaving (Perriel, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Parental involvement has been recognized as a connection between the home and the school (Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, & Dawson, 2010). Adverse outcomes such as low academic achievement and behavioral issues can result from a lack of parental involvement (Mackell, 2011). Despite research and legislative attempts to increase parental involvement in schools, parents and guardians of minority students and students from low-income families continue to be underrepresented in regular parental involvement activities within the schools (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Previous research indicates that some factors contributing to low parental involvement among African American parents include socioeconomic status and lack of interest (Brandon, Higgins, Pierce, & Brandon, 2010). One of the most stated reasons for parents not being involved in schooling is work commitments (Harris & Goodall, 2008). How a parent views education will critically affect the learning process for the student (Chen & Gregory, 2009). This study will address a gap in the research related to understanding how African American parents/guardians view education and their role in the education of their children, and how they define parental involvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American parents regarding their role in the academic success of their child, the nature of their involvement in schools, and the perceived impact of that involvement in their child's educational future.

Significance of the Study

There has been a national focus on decreasing the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students for over four decades (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Despite numerous legislative mandates, the achievement gap for students attending school in high poverty areas still exists (Rowley & Wright, 2011; Sandy & Duncan, 2010). The No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation specifically highlights the importance of parental involvement (NCLB, Title I, Section 1118).

When exploring how African American students can be successful, it is critical to consider the role of parental involvement (Mackell, 2011). Epstein's (2010) model for developing parental involvement programs in schools has been widely used. It includes

common types of parental involvement such as helping with homework and volunteering at school, but also includes elements that focus on parent-school collaboration, and including parents in decision-making at the school. Understanding how African American parents view parental involvement, and identifying the types of activities they pursue to support the academic achievement of their children may shed light on gaps in parental involvement programs. This study may assist school administrators and teachers in understanding potential differences in the ways that African American parents involve themselves in guiding the academic success of their children.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study relies on Yosso's (2002) Cultural Wealth Model to understand the types of activities African American parents engage in to support the academic success of their children (see Figure 1). Yosso (2005) created the notion of wealths to challenge the traditional interpretation of cultural capital. She proposed an alternative lens to position socially marginalized groups in a way that views them as having wealth rather than being deficient.

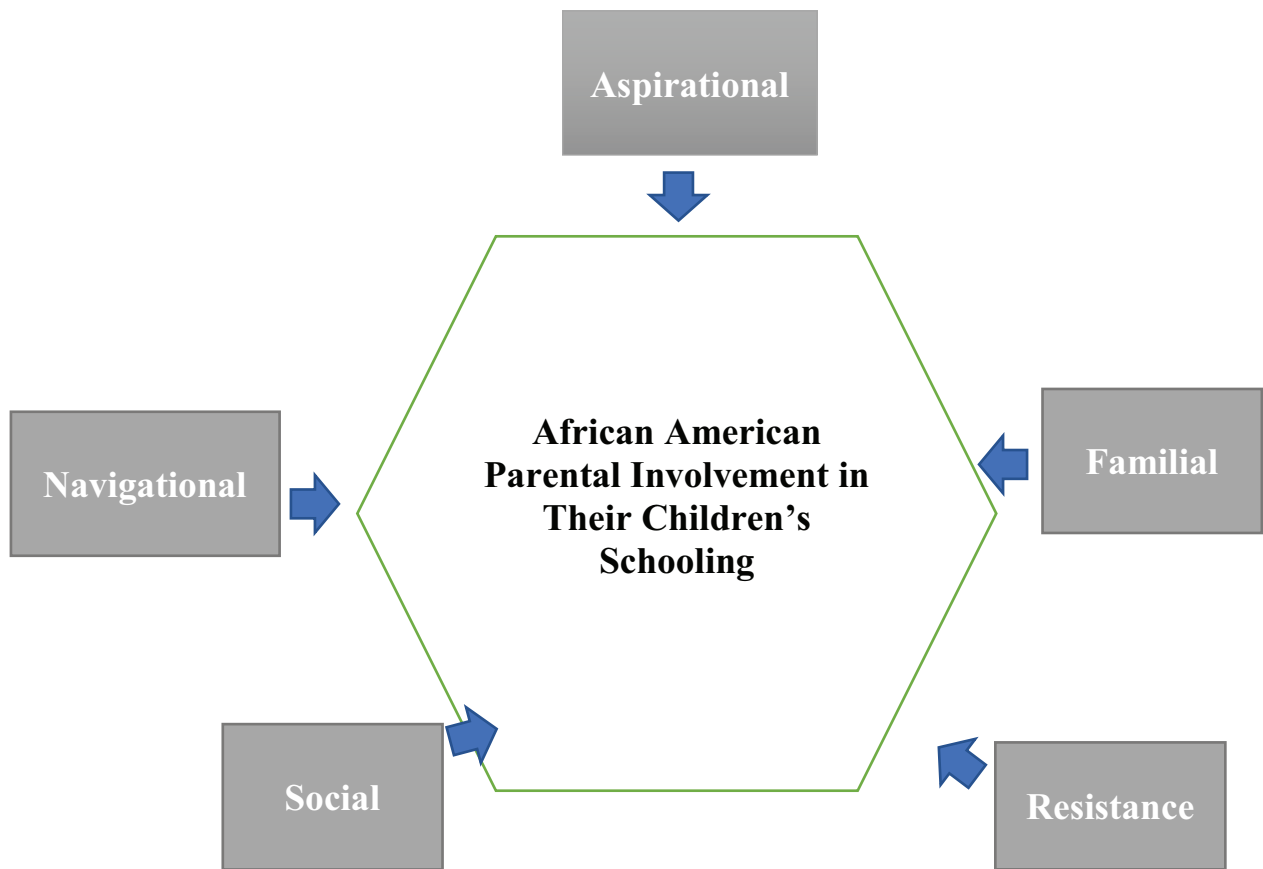


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Adaptation of Yosso (2002) Cultural Wealth Model

Yosso challenged Bourdieu's (1984) argument that students who were not born into a middle or upper class family could access knowledges (cultural capital) through formal schooling. She argued that this type of thinking assumes that anyone who is not in the middle and upper classes are inherently lacking, and that schools who consider marginalized groups as being culturally deficient are missing the fact that these minority families possess cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts. Yosso would contend that when schools view minority students and their families as needing improvement, rather than recognizing the varied capital wealths they possess, they miss the opportunity

to involve and engage families in the schooling of their children. Yosso believed it was important for school administrators and teachers to build on the existing competencies of families and felt this might challenge dominant forms of culture and broaden understandings of cultural capital.

In this study, African American parents shared their perceptions of their role in the education of their children and identified the activities they considered to be parental involvement. Yosso's lens of wealth will enable a discussion of and integration of all of the activities defined by African American parents as being involved in schooling, rather than limiting the view based on traditional definitions of parental involvement based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators.

Research Design

A qualitative interpretive design was used in this study. The African American parents/guardians in the study attended the same Baptist church in the Southeast, were over the age of 18 years old, had at least one child presently attending elementary school, and were willing to participate in the study. Merriman (2002) stated that interpretive qualitative studies are designed to investigate how participants make meaning of a situation. "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2005, p. 4). This study embodied the characteristics of a qualitative study by examining the participants' views on the topic of parent participation in schools and their perceptions of the role they play in their child's academic success.

Research Questions

This following research questions will be explored in this study:

- 1) How do African American parents describe their role in the academic success of their children?
- 2) What factors influence African American parental involvement in their children's education?
- 3) How do African American parents describe the role of parental involvement activities in the academic success of their children?

I used semi-structured, open ended individual interviews, with 20 African American parents/guardians who had children in kindergarten through fifth grade. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 40-60 minutes. Each participant was assigned a number to protect their identity.

Limitations

This research study was restricted to the 20 African American parents from one Baptist church in the Southeast. Thus, results may not be generalized to African American parents in general. Additionally, since data involved interviewing parents, the researcher had no control over whether participants answered honestly during the interview. Finally, I am an African American female school teacher with a family background that differed from most of my participants. Thus, my subjectivity was transparent and the use of memo's and member checks was used to ensure that I was presenting the views of participants and interpreting the data through their eyes.

Definitions of Terms

Academic Achievement.

The definition of academic achievement includes indicators of improved academic performance such as improved test scores and other related markers. (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

African American.

African American: Refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Parental Involvement.

“Parental involvement is established through parents emphasizing the importance of school, having expectations for their childrens progress, assisting with and monitoring homework completion, providing supplies and helping children structure their time, supporting in school, and communicating with teachers and school staff” (Sonnenschein, Stapleton, & Metzger, 2014, p. 152).

Authoritarian Parenting.

Strict parents “attempt to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child by a set of standards of conduct” (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014, p. 294).

Authoritative Parenting.

Authoritative parents “attempt to direct the child’s activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. They encourage verbal give and take, and share with the child the reasoning behind their policy” (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014, p. 294).

Permissive Parenting

Permissive parents “attempt to behave in a non-punitive, acceptant, and affirmative manner towards the child’s impulses, desires, and actions. They make few

demands for household responsibility and orderly behavior” (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014, p. 294).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 includes a brief introduction, statement of the problem and the purpose. In Chapter 2 I will present a review of literature related to the importance of parent involvement, types of parent involvement models, benefits of parental involvement and student success, African American parent involvement, factors contributing to poor academic achievement, policies, and laws that support parental involvement, home-school connection, and parental styles. Chapter 3 includes the methods used in the study, including participants, selection process, instrumentation, research questions, data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 4, I will provide the results of the study. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of results and recommendations for further research and practice.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relevant literature presented in this chapter will include definitions of parental involvement, and parental involvement models. A review of literature on African American parent involvement and parenting styles is also included to provide a context for understanding the data collected from African American parents regarding their perceptions of their role in their child's education and their involvement in schooling. A brief review of legislation mandating parental involvement programs is also included.

Definitions of Parental Involvement

The question of how to get parents involved with their child's education has been asked for over 40 years. Many parents and educators have different perceptions of what parental involvement means. Some researchers have defined parental involvement as home-school partnerships; parental participation; and parents as partners (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010).

LaRocque, Kleiman, Darling, and Darling (2011) defined parental involvement as investments made in educating children. Lawson (2003) states that one standard definition of parental involvement is the perception of the school itself; where educators view parental involvement regarding school-based activities include attending parent-teacher conferences, serving as in-class administrative assistants, attending sporting events, volunteering at after-school events, and chaperoning field trips. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) also mentioned parental involvement activities such as

volunteering, attending school functions, helping with homework, and visiting the classroom.

A slightly different view was shared by Sonnenschein, Stapleton, and Metzger (2014) who stated, "involvement is established through parents emphasizing the importance of school, having expectations for their children's progress, assisting with and monitoring homework completion, providing supplies and helping children structure their time, supporting in school, and communicating with teachers and school staff" (p. 152). Not every parent chooses to be involved in those ways. Also, there are barriers that influence parent involvement include socioeconomic status, work schedule, and parents' past school experiences (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).

Hughes and Kwok (2007) would argue that there needs to be a recognition of school-initiated involvement with parents, and parent-initiated involvement. They point to the pattern of African American parents making informal visits to the school to check on the progress of their child or to ask questions about homework and behavioral expectations. This parent-initiated contact with the school is not counted as parental involvement by most schools and is often viewed as negative involvement by some teachers. They stress the importance of recognizing differences in communication and parenting styles/and acknowledgment that some parents have different beliefs about schooling.

There may be a lack of understanding between schools and parents regarding definitions of parental involvement (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). Epstein reported that there was some confusion and disagreement over the importance of participation how to obtain high participation from all parties involved (Epstein, 2010).

He reported that parents may feel it is the duty of the teacher to provide opportunities for them to participate at school. This can cause teachers to feel inadequate in this area.

Teachers must realize that parents are resources teachers can utilize to share knowledge and to provide feedback and academic support to their children. It should be the responsibility of the school to educate parents on ways to promote parental involvement (Epstein, 2010).

Parents who are not seen at school often, or who do not attend parent meetings regularly, may be viewed as being uninvolved; meanwhile, the parent may be completely involved and providing support outside of school. Porumbu and Necşoi (2013) insist that teachers and family members must take shared responsibility for the success or failure of students. To do this, schools must develop policies, procedures, and strategies for parents and teachers to form positive relationships and shared responsibilities. To establish a healthy relationship, parents, students, and educators should develop a shared understanding of what parental involvement means at their school. Parental involvement may look entirely different depending on the population and demographics of the school.

Models of Parent Involvement

There are two models that are most commonly used in the discussion of parental involvement in schooling. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model focuses on the parents' perspectives, while Epstein's model focuses on the educators' perspectives. Epstein's Model (2010) continues to be widely used by school systems for the development of parental involvement programs.

Epstein Model of Parent Involvement

The Epstein Model (2010) of parental involvement has been adopted by numerous schools. While parental involvement can take on any form, Epstein's (2010) framework outlines six types of parental involvement. Epstein argues that there is a need for schools and parents to engage in a variety of parental involvement strategies in order to increase the chance of student success (Epstein, 2010). Epstein's six types of parental involvement include:

Parenting. Home environments that help support children as students.

Communication. Forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children's progress.

Volunteering. Recruitment and organization of parents to help and support various aspects of the school.

Learning-at-home. Information and ideas facilitated to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decision making, and planning.

Decision-making. School decisions, development of parent leaders, and representatives.

Collaboration. Identification and integration of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2010, p. 84).

Epstein argues that when schools frequently engage parents, they have more successful outcomes because the students benefit from the consistent message generated by their home and the school about the importance of education. Increasing parents' skills and knowledge will help to equip them better to assist their children at home. By

providing the opportunity for parents to collaborate with one another, it makes room for them to share insight on school policies, practices, community resources, as well as approaches to parenting practices. When students see that parents, teachers and the community members working together on their behalf, it will give the child a sense of being cared for. The students, as a result, see the value that the parents, school and community place on education.

Bower and Griffin (2011) did a case study on a high-poverty, high-minority elementary schools using Epstein's Model. The study explored parental involvement strategies in urban elementary schools. Bower and Griffin reported that parental involvement continues to be an issue because schools and the teachers are not building an effective relationship with parents, and the school continued to use the traditional definition of parental involvement: inviting parents to school-based activities or helping parents become more involved with academics. These types of involvement practices fail to include an understanding of the culture of low-income families and minorities. The conclusion in this study was that the Epstein Model did not capture how involved the parents are, or wanted to be in their children education. They concluded that there needs to be a new way of working with parents in high-minority, high-poverty schools.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model (2005) is unique in its focus on why parents become involved in their child education, and how their involvement makes a difference. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model includes five levels reflecting parent's decisions to get involved in their children's schooling. Level one focuses on the parental involvement decision, level two includes the parents' choice of participation

activities, level three identifies the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences children outcomes, level four includes mediating variables, and level five focuses on the children's outcomes (Tekin, 2011) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Parental Involvement (PI) Model

Level 1:	What motivates parents to become involved in their child's education?
Level 1.5:	What forms of involvement do families choose to participate?
Level 2:	What learning mechanisms do parents engage?
Level 3:	How do students see their parents' being involved?
Level 4:	What important student learning outcomes are influenced by parents' involvement?
Level 5:	Student achievement (varied summary measures)

Parental involvement is labeled as parents being involved in their child's education, in their home-life, their school, and their community (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) reported that involvement within the home included helping with homework, talking daily with your child, attending after-school activities, and communicating with the teacher (i.e., emails, calls, writing in the agenda, etc.). Involvement within the schools included attending field trips, attending parent-teacher conferences, serving on school parent committees (school council, PTO officer, etc.) attending school events, and volunteering.

In the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model (2007), parents' decisions to become involved is based on three factors: (a) parents' beliefs that participating in their child's learning is their responsibility (i.e., parental role construction) and their capabilities (i.e., parenting self-efficacy), (b) parents' perception of schools and teachers and their

children to be involved, and (c) demands on parents' time and energy on involvement activities (i.e., caring for other children, family responsibilities, work schedules).

Park (2013) applied the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model to parents with adolescent children. The sample for this study included 3,248 parents from diverse backgrounds and socio-demographics. Results suggest that parents' race/ethnicity and income set the stage for certain kinds of involvement within the schools. Cultural, structural, and school based explanations must all be considered to understand which parents are involved in schooling and why they are involved.

Benefits of Parental Involvement and Student Success

Perriell (2015) stated student achievement is based on how involved families are in education. Parents are a crucial aspect of improving schools and have positive effects both directly and indirectly through partnering with the school. The United States Department of Education (2005) concludes that children who have highly involved parents have a better academic future in elementary and secondary schools. As children grow, learn, and develop, it is critical for their parents to be involved. Parental involvement benefits families. The parents are better informed about the teachers learning objectives, the needs of their children, and the development benefits the attitudes toward schools and educators (LaRocque, Klieman, & Darling, 2011).

Parental involvement boosts a child skill level and independence, offers a sense of security and helps them to value education. Parental involvement can have a considerable impact on grades kindergarten through high school (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). When parents get involved, their children take notice. When parents are

involved, it sends a message parents are concerned and wants their children to be successful.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) report that parental involvement also positively impacts parents and teachers by improving their relationships with each other, improving teacher morale, and increasing “parental confidence [and] satisfaction” (p. 37).

“Furthermore, increased involvement has been associated with parents developing higher educational goals for their children” (LaRocque, Klieman, & Darling, 2011, p. 117).

Many researchers have identified parental involvement as being linked to academic achievement (Perriell, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Parental participation in education has led to the greater academic development and retention in children (Banerjee, Harrell, & Johnson, 2011). Perriell (2015) stated that parents who are actively involved in their children’s education are nurturing their child’s academic future.

Homework presents new hardships for children from the beginning of their school career because it takes up a lot of their time that was previously used for playing (Silinskas, Kiuru, Aunola, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2015). Homework requires students, teachers, and parents to invest a lot of time and effort on their assignments (Van Voorhis, 2011). Van Voorhis (2011) reports that students and parents work one to three times a week on their tasks. As the child gets older, asking for help with their homework would decrease.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

There are serious factors that may prohibit parental participation. Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and van Staden (2005) found that the barriers to parental involvement included (a) dual careers of parents, (b) single-parents (specifically female) head households, (c)

negative perceptions and fear, (d) grandparents raising the children, (e) lack of teacher training for effective home-school communication, and (f) language/cultural differences. “Parents may feel that children are the parent’s responsibility while at home, but once they are in school, teachers will have to play their part” (Radzi, Razak, & Sukor, 2010, p. 260). Some parents believe that it’s the schools responsibility to educate their child.

African American Parental Involvement

“Despite the professed intentions of policymakers to boost parental involvement, it is clear that not all parents are able or willing to be involved” (Park, 2013, p. 105). Research points to three main reasons that prevent participation for African American parents. These factors include (a) social class and parent perceptions, (b) teacher and administration intimidation of parents, and (c) lack of knowledge (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Economic status has been consistently recognized as a problem that affects parental involvement for African-American parents.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) examined how social class shapes educational beliefs of African Americans. School types, parental resources, and parents academic expectations have been identified as challenges to parental participation (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Diamond and Gomez (2004) included eighteen African American parents (working and middle-class parents) from seven schools. These participants engaged in semi-structured interviews. The interviews focused on parents’ positions, ideas, and beliefs related to schooling and parents' academic expectations. Results indicated that schools should acknowledge that parent engagement is based on their perceptions of the schools. The socioeconomic structure of a family affects parental involvement in low-income areas. Parents may need assistance with understanding how to participate.

Parents who are faced with financial barriers should still be provided with ways they can help.

Kerpelman, Eryigit, and Stephens (2008) reported parents play a significant role in the life of an African American child. In the African American community, it is crucial for parents to be involved in their children's education. The difficulty of parental involvement among African American parents may exist because there is a need to identify factors that motivate African American parents to become involved.

Parents' attitudes, outlooks, and perceptions directly affect parental involvement. In the African American community, parents may have difficulty becoming involved in their children's school (Lopez, 2011). Many parents do not support parental involvement because they feel shame in their ability to help their children learn. Some parents have memories of being unsuccessful in school and this ultimately affects their involvement in the schooling of their children. The educational background of the parents may influence how the parents interact (Dotterer, Iruka, & Pungello, 2012). African American parental involvement may be limited due to the lack of time, monetary resources, transportation, adverse experiences with school, and not feeling welcomed (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). When African American parents are involved behavior, issues decrease and academics increase (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jenynes, 2005).

Researchers Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, and Efreom (2005) did a survey of 159 African American parents on parental involvement. The parents surveyed were females, low-income, and had a high school level of education. The results indicated that "school reciprocity" was the strongest predictor of parental involvement. Parental involvement increased when the school listened to the parents and sponsored activities for the parents.

Also, African Americans with high aspirations for their children had higher levels of parental involvement. The parents who wanted their children to attend college were more likely to become involved in their children's schooling.

In a single-parent household, researchers have found that "many African American fathers are involved in their children's lives, often regardless of their residential or socioeconomic status, relationship status with their child's mother, and sometimes more often than White or Hispanic fathers" (Doyle, Clark, Cryer-Coupet, Nebbitt, Goldston, Estroff, & Magan, 2015, p. 275). The quality of father-child relationship influences many aspects of child development. Father's involvement helps in developing social, mental, and moral development of their child (Bridges, 2013). Children whose fathers are involved in their lives are emotionally secure and have the confidence to explore their environment and develop stable social relationships with their friends. Father involvement improves children's social abilities and their popularity during early childhood (Bryan, 2013).

Home-School Connections

Numerous research studies have revealed that when families are engaged in school activities, their children learn and develop (Snyder-Hogan, 2010; Perriell, 2015). Perriell (2015) stated that home and school partnership has always been an important part of education. When there is positive parental involvement in school and active parent-teacher interaction, teachers have a positive self-perception and job satisfaction (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Researchers Schonfeld, Adams, Fredstrom, Weissberg, Gilman, Voyce, and Speese-Linehan, (2015) reports, the classroom culture and overall school climate can positively or negatively affect children's willingness to learn.

Teachers play the key role in supporting children learning and their academic development; parents too can be involved in their children academic future (Nurmi, 2014). Parents who take an active role, their children improve in their attitudes, behaviors, and academic success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Swick (2006) discussed the need for parents and schools to work together to create an environment of caring, where educators welcome, honor, and connect with families; where relationships are built; and where modeling of caring occurs. Seda (2007) cited in a study on parental involvement, "children whose parents are involved with the school are characterized by higher attendance rates, positive attitude towards school, positive behavior and increased positive interactions with peers" (Koonce & Harper, 2005, p. 56).

In dealing with education, the teacher is the critical piece in student learning and academic success. Many studies have found that parents, teachers, and peers have influenced students' academic achievement by affecting their motivation and their commitment (Wang & Neihart, 2015). The relationships and perceptions between parents, teachers, and administrators have a substantial influence on parental involvement.

Since children spend more time at school than at home, students are more inclined to learn when there is a positive relationship between the teacher and themselves (Evans, 2004). Teachers are expected to provide students with a high quality education and encourage learning (Jagers & Carroll, 2002; McKinley, 2003). Teachers who display a negative attitude towards parents or make parents feel like outsiders are less likely to build positive relationships with the parents. A study performed by Steh and Kalin (2011) examined how parent and teacher opinions of each other can influence parental

involvement. The researchers surveyed parents and found that a high percentage of parents reported they doubt the ability of their child's teachers. Ironically, a large percentage of teachers also said they doubt the ability of their students' parents. The study concluded that parents and educators' negative opinions of each other could hinder the school-home relationship and decrease parental involvement (Steh & Kalin, 2011). Teachers can only benefit when they learn about their students by learning about their families.

Policies and Laws That Support Parental Involvement

Much attention has been placed on parental involvement over the years. "Parent involvement is a major cornerstone of President Obama's Race to the Top educational initiative. Parent involvement was the foundation of former President Bush's No Child Left Behind initiative, was the cornerstone of former President Clinton's 1996 Elementary and Secondary Act, was the cornerstone of former President Reagan's Goals 2000: Educate America Act, is being touted as an essential element of school reform, and is actively promoted by national programs and initiatives (e.g., Head Start)" (McNeal, 2014, p. 564).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) gives parents new opportunities to make sure their child receives the very best education possible. Under the new law, schools will strive to provide each student with a high-quality education—regardless of income, ability, or background. NCLB defines parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (NCLB, 2002, p. 1) which include: 1.) ensuring that parents play a vital role in their child's education; 2.) encouraging parents to be actively involved

in their child's education at school; 3.) ensuring that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, if appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the child's education.

The key stakeholders in a school's success and student achievement are administrators, teachers, and community members, however, parents are the most vital component in learning. In dealing with parental involvement, NCLB requires that school districts and campuses notify parents about student progress, school report cards and AYP, school improvement, highly qualified staff, and annual meetings. NCLB also requires that parents be consulted in the development of the schoolwide plan, parental involvement policy, and compact.

Under parental involvement in NCLB, the students would benefit by achieving more, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or their parents' education level. The students would have higher test grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework assignment. Graduation rates and enrollment in postsecondary education would improve. The disadvantaged students would improve academically. Students would exhibit more positive attitude, behavior improves, and is more confidence. Since parental involvement is connected with student achievement, these factors are relevant to policy makers and teachers. Legislative policies have made it necessary for school districts to involve parents (Gallant & Moore, 2008).

Schools have implemented programs yearly in an attempt to include African American parents. Some programs aim to reach parents who do not usually participate in their children's education. Many schools use workshops and other school-based programs to help parents learn about what goes on in classrooms.

A strategy that has been used to correlate with student achievement is the increase of parental involvement using active participation in PTA/PTO. Traditionally, schools have involved parents in the PTA/PTO, fundraisers, and include them as classroom volunteers and chaperones on field trips. However, most of the parent support opportunities are during the school day and doesn't allow working parents to participate.

Parenting Styles

Parental involvement has impacted how parents relate to raising their children. Nearly 40 years ago, Diana Baumrind created a significant shift in research in the areas of parenting by introducing three primary parenting styles that have been applied to many studies to illustrate a broad range of parenting behaviors and childrearing goals (Rodríguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009). The three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, were developed by Baumrind. These styles are based on different levels of responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy that are linked to parental warmth, parental control, and the ability to allow children to express themselves (Rodríguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009).

Within the African American community, there is a difference in the parenting styles, communication, and educational beliefs (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Since the parenting styles and teaching methods are different, this may be why teachers relate differently to African American students and parents (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Parents play a huge part in their child's life. How parents act, what they say, everything they do largely impacts their child's development. Diana Baumrind's, three types of parenting styles are:

Authoritative. Attempt to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. They encourage verbal give and take and share with the child the reasoning behind their Policy (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014).

Authoritarian. Attempt to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child by a set of standards of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority. They value obedience as a virtue and favor punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will at points where the child's actions and beliefs conflict with what they think is right conduct (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014).

Permissive. Attempt to behave in a non-punitive, acceptant, and positive manner towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions. They make few demands for household responsibility and orderly behavior. They allow the child to regulate his activities as much as possible, avoid the exercise of control and do not encourage him to obey externally-defined standards (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014).

Research has shown that the authoritarian parenting style, which is more restrictive form, parents want obedience and do not give the same type of warm-heartedness and approval, is seen more in many African American households than European Americans (Bradley, Corwyn, Caldwell, Whiteside-Mansell, Wasserman, & Mink, 2000; McLoyd & Smith, 2002). The authoritarian parenting style predicts ideal outcomes among African Americans and other ethnic minorities (Macoby & Martin, 1983; McLoyd & Smith, 2002). African American families that are economically disadvantaged are believed to be more authoritarian, although parents who are highly

educated or professional are more likely to be authoritative (Macoby & Martin, 1983; McLoyd & Smith, 2002).

Summary

This chapter included literature on parental involvement in education in the following areas: the importance of parent involvement, parent involvement models, benefits of parental involvement and barriers to involvement. African American parent involvement, factors contributing to poor academic achievement, policies and laws that support parental involvement, home-school connection, and parental styles are also discussed.

The positive effects of parental involvement and how it can contribute to the reduction of academic achievement gaps of students is unquestionable. Some parents will need support and training in order to be partners in their children's education. It is essential that parents, educators, and administration accept the dual responsibility in striving for student achievement.

Since definitions of what it means to be an involved parent vary, it will be important to understand how the African American parents in this study define involvement. In the next chapter the methodology of the study will be discussed. Included within this discussion will be information regarding the research participants, instruments used, and an account of the processes used to collect and analyze data.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American parents regarding their role in their child's academic success, the nature of their involvement in schools, and the perceived impact of that involvement on their child's educational future. In this chapter I will discuss the research design, participant selection, and data collection and analysis procedures as well as trustworthiness and validity.

Research Design

A qualitative interpretive design was used in this study. Merriman (2002) stated that interpretive qualitative studies are designed to investigate how participants make meaning of a situation. This study embodied the characteristics of a qualitative study by examining participants' views on the topic of parent participation in schools and their perceptions of the role they play in their child's academic success.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do African American parents describe their role in the academic success of their children?
- 2) What factors influence African American parental involvement in their children's education?
- 3) How do African American parents describe the role of parental involvement activities in the academic success of their children?

Setting

This study was conducted at a Baptist church in the Southwest. The church is predominantly African American, was founded in 1849, and has been in operation for approximately 167 years. The congregation has approximately 200 members.

In this African American church, worship service is a popular activity. It is the activity in which most adults participate. In recent years, the church has taken on additional outreach responsibilities, especially for its youth: tutoring, conferences, rites of passages, essay and rhetorical contests, concerts, HBCU college tours, childcare, health education, and employment preparation are just a few of the churches outreach programs.

The city where the Baptist Church is located is predominantly Caucasian. People speak English at home. Approximately 87.4% of the congregation is employed (12.4% unemployed) and people typically have two cars, pickup trucks, or other kinds of personal vehicles available to them. The most common commute method is driving to work, and the average commute length is 30 minutes.

Participants

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to identify 20 African American parents/guardians who have a least one child presently attending elementary school. The African American parents/guardians in the study were over the age of 18 and all of the participants for this investigation were self-identified as African Americans. The pastor of the church provided a list of all church members who currently had children attending elementary school. There were 20 families on the list that met that criteria. I invited all 20 families to participate in the study and all of the families agreed to be part of the study.

Data Collection

Data for this study came from twenty semi-structured interviews with African American parents or guardians of elementary aged students.

Approval to Conduct Study

The study was approved by Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Approval to conduct the research was also obtained from the church (see Appendix B).

Participant Consent to Interview

The consent for research participation form was read to each subject at the beginning of their interview. Their willingness to continue with the interview implied their consent (see Appendix C). This strategy was used to ensure confidentiality, so that the participants names do not appear on any document related to the research. A number was assigned to each of the participants. A pseudonym was given to each child whose parent or guardian participated in the research. Each participant had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Interview Procedures

Twenty participants were interviewed for 40-60 minutes. The participants chose the place and time for the interviews. Before the interviews took place, parents were informed that the interview was confidential, and their participation was voluntary. Parents were also told that they could decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each participant was interviewed using semi-structured open-ended questions with an informal, conversational approach (Dieser, 2006). Interviews were audiotaped using a digital recorder. Each interview question was

designed to inform the three research questions. An interview protocol was used for the semi-structured parent interviews (see Appendix D). The interview questions were informed by research about the nature and type of parental involvement (Epstein, 2010), Yosso's (2005) wealth categories, and barriers to parental involvement (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

Following the introductory overview, and reading of the consent script, the researcher began the semi-structured interview. In addition to the audio recording, the interviewer took notes during the meeting. The researcher's voice will be a part of the audio taped interview—reading the consent statement and assessing understanding. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher reminded participants that no identifying information would be used to link them to this research. Additionally, participants were informed that the transcribed interviews and any data related to the study would be secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office and kept for 3 years after the study, at which time all data would be erased. The researcher advised the participants that they would have an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to make sure that they agreed with what was written. The interview session ended with the researcher thanking the participant for taking the time to help with this research.

Although the interviews were audio recorded, the researcher took notes in a journal during all the parent interviews to describe voice inflections, facial expressions, body language, or other relevant actions. At the end of each week, the researcher listened to the original audio recordings several times to be as accurate as possible in the transcription. When the researcher transcribes the interview tapes, the researcher will need to include the reading of the consent statement, as this will be the only proof that

participants were informed. A laptop computer was used to transcribe the audio recordings for each week's participant interviews. The transcriptions were checked one final time for accuracy against the own sound recording. Needed corrections were made, and the transcription of each interview was saved as a separate word document in a designated research file for this study that was password protected. Additionally, all records were saved onto a flash drive. All interview transcripts were dated and printed with the participant's identifying number. The hard copies of the interview transcripts and the flash drive were secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office that could only be accessed by the researcher.

Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a three-step process including a) open coding- reading the transcript line-by-line, identifying and coding the concepts found in the data, b) axial coding-organizing concepts and making the concepts more abstract through the identification of underlying similarities and differences in participant responses, and c) selective coding-focusing on the main ideas and developing the major themes (Creswell, 2009).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness "refers to the reliability and authenticity of records" (Shento, 2004). Trustworthiness requires the researcher to make every effort to characterize the experiences of the participants being studied as precisely and truthfully as possible. Triangulation, member checks, and memos were used to assure the trustworthiness of the data.

Triangulation

Triangulation for this study was achieved by conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant. The participants in the study were from different family configurations and had children of different ages which provided contrasting experiences for triangulation of the data.

Member Checking

After transcribing each interview, I shared the transcript with the participant to make sure that my transcription and conclusions were consistent with what they were hoping to convey. In this way, I made sure the data were trustworthy and valid.

Memos

I am an African American teacher from a middle class, two-parent family. My experiences with schooling may be quite different from those of my participants and I used memos after each interview, to reflect on how my pre-conceived notions may be in contrast to the views I have read this interviews. I used this process to ensure that I was representing the views of my participants and being transparent and reflective about my own biases’.

Researcher-Interviewer

I am an African American female and the sole investigator of this study. I have taught for 16 years in the elementary school setting including all elementary grades except for second grade, and I am currently teaching third grade in the school where this investigation is taking place. I am not married and do not have any children. My interest stems from a growing concern about the lack of parental involvement.

Growing up both my parents had jobs until they retired. My parents are high school graduates. My mother went on to college to receive her degree in Education. My

father joined the Army after high school. My parents were very involved in my life and my sibling's life, as well. My parents are still very involved in my life as an adult. If my parents were able, they attended many school functions like extra-curricular activities (e.g., cheerleading, sports events, and band competitions) parent-teacher conferences. They helped with homework daily and volunteered when they could. My parents gave rewards for the positive things I did, and punishments were given when I received bad notes and calls from teachers for misbehaving at school.

My family and I always ate breakfast and dinner together, as a family. We would always talk about things that happened during that day (e.g., school, church or in the community). During the summer, my parents would have my siblings and I read for an hour and discuss what we know. We joined summer camps and went on family vacations.

The church was where I conducted my research which includes parents and guardians. Some of the parents and guardians are involved in education, and some are not. Some parents or guardians in my study have one job, others have multiple jobs, or no jobs. I have no way of knowing how these circumstances impact their perceptions of schooling and their ability to get involved in their child's life. I feel that it is critical to hear from them to understand how they might be able to get involved in their child's life and help them be successful.

My belief is that parents need to take an interest in their child's education. Parents being involved can have a great impact on their children's life and can also be one of the most influential factors in their child's success. Children need to feel recognized for their hard work so they can feel good about themselves. I believe that teachers are

more effective when parents are involved; the schools succeed, when there is involvement. It is this concern that resulted in a heightened interest in this phenomenon. As a consequence, this is why I selected this topic to investigate to shed some light on establishing and improving parental involvement in the African American community.

Summary

This basic interpretive study was designed to gain insight into factors influencing African American parental involvement in their children's education, the role of the extended family in the child's school experiences, and whether traditional definitions of family involvement are consistent with the way African American parents define their involvement in schools. Semi-structured interviews with 20 African American parents/guardians provided rich, descriptive data that answered the research questions. Interviews with parents who come from a variety of family structures and have children in a range of grades assisted in triangulation of the data.

This chapter provided details of my study including research questions, settings, participants, data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 4, I will provide the results of the study. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of results and recommendations for further research and practice.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American parents regarding their role in the academic success of their child, the nature of their involvement in schools, and the perceived impact of that involvement in their children's educational future. In this chapter I will provide brief profiles of the participants, and present the themes that were generated from the semi-structured interviews. The participants for my study were members of the same Baptist church in the Southeast. The pastor identified 20 families who met my criteria of having children currently enrolled in elementary school, and all 20 of these parents/guardians agreed to be interviewed. The participants in this study had a child or children in grade levels that ranged from kindergarten through fifth grade. The participants included 17 African American females and three African American males. All the participants had full-time jobs. Each participant was given a number to protect their identity.

In Table 2, I provide information on the gender, race, marital status, and children's grade level for each of the participants.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of African American Parents Participating in the Study

Participants	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Grade Level of their child
1	Female	African American	Widow	K
2	Female	African American	Divorce	4th
3	Female	African American	Married	K
4	Female	African American	Married	4th
5	Female	African American	Single	K
6	Female	African American	Married	4th
7	Male	African American	Married	5th
8	Female	African American	Single	3rd
9	Female	African American	Married	2nd
10	Male	African American	Married	K
11	Female	African American	Single	5th
12	Male	African American	Married	3rd
13	Female	African American	Married	3rd
14	Female	African American	Single	4th
15	Female	African American	Single	5th
16	Female	African American	Divorce	3rd
17	Female	African American	Married	2nd
18	Female	African American	Married	4th
19	Female	African American	Married	4th
20	Female	African American	Married	5th

Brief Profiles of the Participants

Participant 1. She is a widower, with four children, and has a full-time job. She and her family are very involved in her daughter's life. She believes she is the decision-maker for her daughter. She is her child's life teacher. She sets the expectations for her child. She makes sure that her daughter is taken care of, should something happen her. She helps her daughter with homework, gives her child school supplies as needed, and makes sure she is at school on time. She participates in school events and volunteers at the school.

Participant 2. She is divorced, with three children, and has a full-time job. She believes parents influence their children. She attends PTO meetings and other school events. She talks with her child's teacher because she feels teachers can't do it alone. She believes that principals need to be open to suggestions that are given by the parents. Teachers should be stern but be caring for her child. She believes that she is responsible for her child's education because it starts at home. She is her children's first teacher. She participates in school events and volunteers in the community.

Participant 3. She is married with two children and works full time. She feels that parental involvement and teacher relationships are necessary for her child's success. She helps her son with homework and communicates with her son's teacher. She reads her child's agenda, as well, as monitors his behavior. She attends school events, PTO, and conferences. She believes parents are their child's first teacher; learning starts at home. Families that are involved help children be successful. She believes parents should participate in school events and volunteer within the community.

Participant 4. She is married with three children and works full time. She believes that parents are involved because they want the best for their child. She encourages her child to be great and holds her accountable for her learning. She thinks that parents are responsible for their child's education and should be in constant contact with their child's teacher by asking questions about their learning. Children need outlets other than school. She doesn't participate in afterschool events, but helps with sports events. She believes that children are happy when parents are supporting them.

Participant 5. She is a single parent with one child and works full time. She believes that teachers and parents should hold their children accountable for their

learning. She is involved and feels that it's important for teachers to challenge her child in his education. Her son works on educational computer games. She feels that parents are responsible for educating their child. Parents are their kids first teacher; they should always interact with them. Parents should ask teachers for help and extra resources for their child's learning. Parents should participate in school events, volunteer at school, and in the community.

Participant 6. She is married with two children and works full time. She does pop-ups at her child's school. She helps her child with homework and reads her child's agenda every night. She made sure her child has tutors because "the school isn't helping her." She feels the teacher doesn't communicate well with her. She believes that parents and educators are responsible for education and need to work together. Having families and the community involved in my child's life is important. Principals need to be open to what the parents have to say; parents can't make every school event or PTO meeting. She believes that teachers who are kind bring out the potential in her child. She is involved in the church because it helps her children to know how to act and be successful.

Participant 7. He is married with one child and works full time. He believes his guidance has the most impact on his child's education as well as having a good relationship with the teacher. Participant 7 thinks parents should be involved, but not overly involved. He reads with his son and helps him with homework every night. He believes whoever interacts with the kids are responsible for educating that child because of how his parents raised him. He is not able to participate in school events a lot, but

helps in the community by mentoring and interacting. He communicates with the teacher and attends field trips to interact with other students and the teacher.

Participant 8. She is single with three children and works full time. She buys educational computer games and books to help with learning. She believes that parents being involved in school is important because peers can have an adverse impact on her child's education. She feels that she is responsible for educating her child because learning starts at home. She feels that principals need to be visible within the school and meet with the parents. When the programs start at the school, she will have her child participate in the programs. She participates within the community by sending her child to tutorials at the church and the local community center.

Participant 9. She is married with two children and has a full-time job. She makes sure her child has the needed school supplies, and helps with homework. She does not hover over the child or teacher. She reads the agenda daily, and holds her child accountable for her learning. She is responsible for educating her child because education starts at home, but she still expects the teacher to teach. She thinks parents need to push their child to do well and keep motivating them to be successful. She participates in school programs and helps in the community.

Participant 10. He is married with two children and has a full-time job. He believes that learning starts at home and thinks that when parents are involved, it cuts down on children misbehaving in school. He thinks that being in constant contact with the teacher is vital. He has his child reading at home and reinforces what is learned at school. He believes that parents are responsible for their child's learning.

Participant 11. She is single with two children and has a full-time job. She doesn't communicate with the teacher, but she feels that parents should hold their child accountable. She thinks that parents are responsible for their child's education because she feels they are the foundation. She participates in the programs at school and volunteers. She believes that the school needs more extra-curricular activities.

Participant 12. He is married with two children and has a full-time job. He interacts with his child and attends school events. His wife has the biggest influence on him because she works at the same school his son attends. He believes families must be involved in education. He feels that since teachers only have the children for half of the day and parents have them the other half; he is responsible for educating the child. He can participate sometimes in school programs and also in the community at sporting events.

Participant 13. She is married with two step-children and has a full-time job. She helps with homework and provides tutors for her child. She believes in it takes a village to educate children and that kind teachers make her child want to succeed. She believes that having her family involved and attending school events encourages great success in her child. She can participate in school programs and school events.

Participant 14. She is single with one child and a full-time job. She participates by knowing the assignments, helping with the homework, and checking her child's work. She believes that mothers are their child first teacher. She believes that parents should be given different options to be involved and that parents should communicate with the teacher about their concerns. She does not participate in the activities at school because there is not a lot, but she does participate within the community.

Participant 15. She is single with two children and has a full-time job. She stays connected with the teacher. She believes that home and school are responsible for educating her child. She feels that families need to stay informed about their children. She mentioned that teachers should be concerned about children no matter their race. Participant 15 believes that being able to know what is going on at school and asking questions is crucial to her child's success. She does participate most of the time in school events and within the community.

Participant 16. She is divorced with two children and has a full-time job. She goes on the State Standards website daily to see what her children are learning. She talks with her child's teacher daily. She feels that parents are the first teachers and teachers are the second. She feels that no one will want as much from their child than the parents. She believes that parents need to give more supplies to the teachers and that parents are their child's biggest advocates. She thinks parents need to ask for help if they need it. She works, so she can't make all the school programs or school events but does participate in the school field trips. She also is involved within the community.

Participant 17. She is married with two children and has a full-time job. She makes sure her child has supplies for school and helps with homework. She also finds extra resources to help with her child's learning. She feels that parents should raise their children, and teachers should teach their children. She believes that parents need to be involved and communicate with the teacher and that principals need to encourage the parents and give the parents the needed resources to help their children succeed. She believes it takes a village to raise a child. She is not able to participate in school events because of work, but does volunteer within the community.

Participant 18. She is married with three children and has a fulltime job. She checks homework daily. She helps her child in whatever area he is struggling in. They read to one another every night. She feels parents and teachers are responsible for educating her child. She knows that children learn from their parents. She believes that principals need to train the parents so that they can help their children. She is not able to participate in school programs because of her work hours and the school programs aren't after hours. She does participate in the community by helping with the sports games.

Participant 19. She is married with two children and has a fulltime job. She is very active in her son's education. She attends conferences and other school events. She communicates with the teacher. She helps with homework and visits the school and asks the teachers for help with her child's assignments. She feels everyone (i.e, parents, children, and community) is responsible for educating her son. She believes that learning starts at home. She is her child's first teacher. She believes her child has to care about his education. She likes it when teachers give extra resources to help parents help their children. She believes that parents want the best for their children. She is not able to participate in the school programs because of work. She does feel that parents should become involved in PTO.

Participant 20. She is married with one child and has a full-time job. She makes sure that her child is on task daily and homework is done. She goes over her child's study guides daily. Her child is accountable for her education and has the determination to want to learn. She believes that children can push and challenge themselves to do better. Parents who communicate and are involved with the teacher and their child, helps

their child be successful. She is not able to participate in school events because of work issues, but she can volunteer within the community.

Results

I used a basic qualitative interpretive design for my study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 African American parents/guardians. Interviews ranged in length from 40-60 minutes each. After each interview I listened to the digital recordings several times, and completed reflection memos at the conclusion of each interview. I transcribed the interviews, and began coding the interviews by doing a line-by-line analysis. The codes were used to develop categories that were placed in a matrix used to condense the data. Themes were then constructed as a result of studying categories in relation to the research design and conceptual framework. I developed a brief profile for each participant, based on information from their interview.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the interview data were analyzed to answer the research questions:

- 1) How do African American parents describe their role in the academic success of their children?
- 2) What factors influence African American parental involvement in their children's education?
- 3) How do African American parents describe the role of parental involvement activities in the academic success of their children?

The interview questions generated a range of responses that provided rich data to code and analyze. Transcripts of the interviews for the 20 participants were analyzed by

identifying categories, central ideas, quotes, and phrases that were at the core of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Categories and central ideas were compared across participants and themes were developed.

Research Question 1

How do African American parents describe their role in the academic success of their children?

The 20 participants were each asked to describe what role they played in the academic success of their child. Five themes emerged from the data first teacher, reinforce school learning, being seen, being there, and parental expectations.

First teacher. All of the participants mentioned that they were the child's first teacher and thus had responsibilities for the academic success of their children. They believed the school is responsible for educating the child while the child is at school, but that parents take up that responsibility once the child returns home. As the first teacher, many parents said it was their responsibility to ensure their child got the education that they needed to be successful.

Reinforce school learning. One role that all participants spoke about was the need for parents to reinforce what was being taught in school. They accomplished this role in a variety of ways including, checking homework, attending programs at the school that showed them how math or reading were being taught, and by keeping track of their child's assignments and grades.

Being seen. Over half of the participants spoke about the importance of having their children see them participating in school events. They spoke of the pride their child

would feel when he/she saw his mom or dad doing something with the teachers at school. The motivation for showing up at school was to make their children proud.

Being there. All of the participants discussed the importance of being available to help teachers, and attending school events. This discussion was different than the previous one, where parents were discussing the importance of being seen. In this category, they inferred that it was important that school personnel saw them as actively engaged parents. They believed this helped their child in several ways including improving communication with the teacher, and giving teachers a good impression of both the family and the child.

Parental expectations. All of the participants spoke about their expectations for their child including expectations for behavior, school performance, and being successful at school. Several parents said they speak to their child on a regular basis about the importance of setting goals and being successful in school. This is a role that parents saw as crucial to the academic success of their child. In Table 3, I provide quotations that represent examples of participants' responses that were linked to the themes that were constructed.

Table 3

How Do African American Parents Describe their Role in the Academic Success of their Children?

Theme	Quotes
First Teacher	“Education always starts at home. I am the Mom. I am their first teacher. Yes, they are at school six

hours of the day but when they come home. It is my job.”

(Participant 2)

“We are the foundation for our kids, helping them learn and teaching them to want to learn. I can’t depend on someone to educate my child, who doesn’t know my child.”

(Participant 11)

“I am his first teacher. I have to make sure that he is getting the appropriate education he needs.”

(Participant 14)

“Education starts at home. When she goes to a teacher we expect her teachers to do their jobs.”

(Participant 9)

“I go on field trips, you interact with him and all his classmates. Also, you can see who are the bad apples in the class. You can point out things to your child that you don’t want to happen.” (Participant 7)

Reinforce School Learning

“I have seen that no matter how much the teacher is there for the student, if the student doesn’t get that reinforcement at home nothing will happen. A teacher can’t teach if there is no drive at home. If there’s no push at home, it’s going to be pointless.”

(Participant 4)

“Knowing his assignments, helping with homework, and checking his work. Making sure he understands the importance of homework and checking his work.” (Participant 14)

Being Seen

“Stopping by the classroom checking on your child or even volunteering is important. Once your child sees you helping, it will make your child feel very proud.” (Participant 5)

“They do have festivals and PTO. I do get involved. Not for the school, but so my children can see I will always be there for them whether they want me to or not.” (Participant 2)

“Just being seen. Having the parents come in a volunteer their time (making copies at school). Being visible at school helping in the classroom. Letting your child see you are there at school, helps the kid stay on track.” (Participant 4)

“I make sure I attend all parent-teacher conferences. I attend all Math, Reading, and Science Night. I attend all parent involvement nights. If I am unable to attend, my husband will attend. I chair a couple of those events, to make sure he sees Mommy.” (Participant 3)

“Asking the teacher, “What can I do.” Can you send extra thing home that will help my child? Stopping by the classroom checking on your child or even volunteering is important. Once your child sees you helping, it will make your child feel very proud.” (Participant 5)

Being There

“I let the teachers know I am an available parent at any time they need me to talk to me on the phone. I try to go to all the PTO meetings. Whatever events are at the school I try to make them, especially his IEP meetings.” (Participant 2)

“I attend parent-teacher conferences. I try to attend events they have at school. The teacher communicates with me through Remind 101, emails, and phone calls.” (Participants 19)

Parental Expectations

“I hope that she finds something that she is very passionate about. I don’t want to outline a career path or school plans for her, but I do want her to be ambitious and stay focused. To always strive for the best.” (Participant 4)

“I expect him to be successful. To be himself and not follow the crowd. To set goals and hopefully live up to them.” (Participant 7)

“With that child, I hope he is able to finish his education. Finish high school and be able to take care of himself. College would be wonderful. But

I'm just hoping he finishes high school. He has an IEP. We have had a rough journey in school."
(Participant 2)

"It is my hope that she is able to choose the career of her choice. That she has the educational background to support any career she chooses."
(Participant 1)

Research Question 2

What factors influence African American parental involvement in their children's education? The 20 participants were asked to report what they believe were their factors in influencing parental involvement in their child's academic success. Three themes were identified: it takes a village, being on same page, and time.

It takes a village. All of the participants discussed the importance of having multiple people who are available to help them support the academic success of their child. Participants identified family members, siblings, neighbors, church, and the community as being influential in helping them stay involved in their child's education.

Being on the same page. According to 17 of the 20 participants, being on the same page is essential for building school-home partnerships. Parents spoke about the importance of two-way communication; some of the participants were satisfied with their relationship with educators and administrators at the school, however five of the participants discussed their frustrations saying it was difficult to know what was going on, and that lack of information/communication influenced their ability to be involved with their child's education. Some of the parents expressed that their ideas and questions were not welcome at the school, and this influenced their willingness to participate in school initiated events.

Time. The participants spoke about being actively involved in school-initiated programs, and how they would send a family member or neighbor to the event, if they were unable to attend. They said they wanted to ensure their family was represented. Some parents work in or near the school and spoke about the importance of proximity to allow them to be involved in the school. Several participants said they were not able to go to most of the school events because many were scheduled during the school day, or on nights and weekends when they were working. Table 4 consists of representative quotes from participants that were linked to the themes.

Table 4

What Factors Influences African American Parental Involvement in their Children's Education?

Theme	Representative Quotes
Its takes a Village	<p>“Her tutors and step-father help me with her educational needs” (Participant 6)</p>
	<p>“Her father, grandparents, girls scout leaders, dance teachers, and her church.” (Participant 9)</p>
	<p>“The grandparents will Skype in and ask questions about school and homework.” (Participant 18)</p>
	<p>“Neighbor that is my child’s mentor, his father, older siblings and people in the church.” (Participant 19)</p>

“My husband, my mother-in-law. She gets her off the bus in the afternoon and helps her with the homework assignments.”

(Participant 20)

Being on Same Page

“It is essential to be in your child's education daily; even if it means just checking the folder. It also holds the child accountable. It lets the child know my mom and teacher are on the same page. I cannot fool them. They care about me.”

(Participant 9)

“I talk with his teacher to see what he is struggling with so I can help him at home. No one will want more for my child than I do, other than God.”

(Participants 16)

“My child’s teacher is great. She shares information about what is going on in the classroom. I greatly appreciate that. I have a very strong relationship with her, it keeps me involved.”

(Participant 20)

“It’s an open-door policy at the school. We can go in at any time: during planning, before and after school. The teacher uses Dojo to communicate with me. The school is set-up on Robo Call.”

(Participant 3)

“I have a very good relationship with his teacher. We communicate often about his behavior and academics. She gives me a lot of extra resources to help my child learn in the areas he is struggling in.”

(Participant 19)

Checking in

“The teacher was not available when I needed her. When I reached out to her, she rarely responded. We do not have a good line of communication. My child's success is not her top priority.”

(Participant 6)

“Currently, she has teachers that I have to stay on top of. I make sure I email them. I want to know what you are teaching so I can make sure I am

helping her at home. I constantly stay on them checking emails, checking grades.”
(Participant 4)

“Principals and teachers need to be open to suggestions. I may not have a PhD, but be open to listen to what we have to say. It makes you feel unwelcome at the school if they don’t listen. Even the smallest suggestion could be helpful.”
(Participant 2)

“The teacher does not communicate well. But I always check-in. It was going great until last week. I think I checked-in with the teacher too much. She sent a rude email to me.”
(Participant 14)

“I don’t know what his grades are all the time because nothing is coming home. I may get an email to let me know that a test was given today, but I never knew that a test was coming that week.”
(Participant 16)

Time

“Because of where I work and the time that I work, I can’t always attend programs at school.”
(Participant 11)

“Most times, if I can’t the curricular night activities at school, I will send other family members.”
(participant 15)

“I have a Full-time job, so I can’t participate in most of the school-based activities.”
(Participant 17)

Research Question 3

How do African American parents describe the role of parental involvement activities in the academic success of their children?

The 20 participants were asked to report what parental involvement activities supported their children’s academic success. All 20 participants expressed a belief that

they could have a positive impact on their child's academic success. Viewing this positive impact as cultural wealth led to themes based on five types of cultural wealth capital (Yasso, 2005): aspirational, navigational, social, familial, and resistance capital. Although Yasso identifies a sixth type of cultural wealth, linguistic capital, the responses from participants did not indicate that the school provided many opportunities for them to use their linguistic capital (i.e., storytelling, and other forms of communication) as a means of parental involvement.

Aspirational wealth. Parents believe it is their role to help their children fulfill their educational dreams. Yosso (2005) discusses aspirational capital as the resiliency necessary to hope for the future despite the reality of the grave inequalities communities of color face. Each of the participants shared their aspirations for their child and talked about the importance of helping their children fulfill their educational dreams.

Navigational wealth. This theme includes parents' efforts to negotiate systems that were not created for communities of color to prosper in. In this study, it was clear that parents understood the importance of "being an available parent," knowing this would translate into a more favorable response to their child. When they were not able to come to school events the majority of parents enlisted a family member to attend and represent the child and the family. This also refers to parents' recognition that they would need to supplement instruction to get the desired results for their children. They did this in a variety of ways, including accessing tutoring.

Social wealth. This theme involves parent's use of their social networks and community to provide support for them in the education of their children. Communities of color have long created and maintained deep social networks to support one another.

At this level, everyone helps each other out. Friends play an important role in providing that emotional support when needed.

Familial wealth. The familial wealth theme refers to parental knowledge about schooling and student success that is nurtured through kinship and an expanded sense of community beyond that of a traditional family. All of the participants talked about having family members assist in the education of their children. One participant talked about having grandparents use SKYPE to help with homework. These hard-working families relied on their kin and their extended family, including neighbors and friends to assist with the educational support needed for their children. They also attended school events and did research to ensure that they understood what was being expected of their child.

Resistance wealth refers to parent’s awareness that negative stereotypes may be present in teachers and administrators. Rather than accept this reaction, some of the parents used this as fuel to resist the dominant narrative, overcome obstacles, and fight to make changes in the system so that their children were successful.

In Table 5, I have provided quotations that represent examples of participants’ responses that were linked to the themes that were constructed.

Table 5

How do African American Parents Describe the Role of Parental Involvement Activities in the Academic Success of their Children?

Theme	Quotes
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Aspirational Wealth

“We push her to do well, having those talks with her during the day and night, so she can have that mindset what she has to do and working toward a goal to be somebody.”

(Participant 9)

“I hope that she will continue to be active student, a positive role model for her peers and when she grows up to be a strong leader.” (Participant 20)

“I expect her to become an independent woman. Be able to take care of herself. Know how to go after the things she wants, and to have that confidence.”

(Participant 9)

“I want him to have a good education and be able to take care of his family.” (Participant 12)

“That he is very successful, attends college, has a great career that makes him a lot of money, and that he will be self-sufficient.” (Participant 3)

“To be well established young man. To be an independent young man. To be a professional in this world.” (Participant 11)

Familial Wealth

“I am her first teacher. Before she enters the schoolhouse, she has a set the expectations from me on to conduct herself. The purpose of her schooling; I explain that to her very clearly.”

(Participant 1)

“Well he has his own desktop computer. There are certain programs we have at school (iStation, Study Island) that I have downloaded that he can work with them at home on his computer. He goes on those programs to help him with Reading and Math. They are like games, but he is learning. Also, we do flashcards, we work on word problems on tablet paper. He practices writing the Problem of the Day. That is something they do at school as well. I always ask him what he learned at school day. He always says, “We did Problem of the Day.” He will even tell me the type of problem and tell me how to solve it. So, I know he is learning.” (Participant 5)

Navigational Wealth

“Also, I try to find extra resources for him when he doesn’t understand a lesson I will Google or YouTube to help my child or myself understand better. The curriculum is more challenging. It’s not what I would have for my child. They are going too fast and skipping something. I have to help him navigate it.” (Participant 17)

“Currently I have frequent drop ins at her school. I have her currently enrolled in the tutoring program because I feel like she is not getting everything she needs at school so I am getting supplemental help.” (Participant 6)

“Asking the teacher, “What can I do?” Can you send extra things home that will help my child?” (Participant 5)

“I make sure that I am always looking at the State Standard Website to see what he is working on. I talk with other parents. I talk with his teacher to see what he is struggling with so I can help him at home.” (Participant 16)

“He has been going to a therapist for 3 years and she has been amazing at helping him and getting the school to understand his issues in his IEP and following it.” (Participant 2)

“I try to be actively involved with my child. I attend parent-teacher conferences. I try to attend events they have at school. I do pop-ups at school.” (Participant 19)

Social Wealth

“I volunteer in the community and my 4th grader loves to volunteer. She loves giving back to the community. If there are things that need to be donated she loves doing that and bring to other families. She has a passion for helping others. She’s good to get her out in the community.” (Participant 4)

“We attend church because they need that foundation. It will help them know how to act and be successful in school. They should be active in

leisure activities. Which will help them be well-rounded students.” (Participant 6)

“Mentoring, going out, and helping other kids that don’t have what he has. Help the ones that don’t have what you have.” (Participant 7)

“Dance, Girl Scouts, & Church. Girl Scouts helped her a lot, it helps her know she is important and how to work towards goals.” (Participant 9)

“Boys Scouts, its helps him with learning to be social.” (Participant 14)

“We also do a lot of community service. My kids go to nursing homes where they make cards and do other things for the elderly that live there. I believe that community service is very important for him.” (Participant 16)

Resistance Wealth

“In 1st and 2nd he really didn’t have teachers that cared. If he acted up, they just sent him to the office. He wasn’t really learning anything because he was being sent to the office. I was fighting to get the IEP. I was told verbally by the principal he wasn’t going to get one. By the end of 2nd grade his IEP was in place. None of the teachers have been rude to me. But they seem like they didn’t understand my child. If your child is not normal, they don’t get it.” (Participant 2)

“I think the principal has to be open. Some principals are really stuffy and don’t want to listen. Maybe you should make that house call or phone call, to see why this parent isn’t involved, especially when we know this child is having this problem or that problem. I feel they need to be more accessible.” (Participant 6)

“I may not have a PhD but be open and listen to what we have to say. Our last principal was closed, he knew everything. He made it clear that you didn’t know anything. Even the smallest suggestion could be helpful.” (Participant 3)

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of data gathered from the interviews of 20 African American parents having a least one child presently attending elementary school. The data was enriched by the participants' ability to candidly communicate about their individual experiences with their children's respective schools and teachers. In Chapter 5, I will discuss these results and provide recommendations for teachers, policy makers and administrators regarding ways to define parental involvement and increase the number of parents involved in the education of their children.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American parents regarding their role in the academic success of their child, the nature of their involvement in schools, and the perceived impact of that involvement in their children's educational future. The findings of this study were based on the responses of 20 African American parents during individual semi-structured interview sessions.

No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation highlights the importance of parental involvement (NCLB, Title I, Section 1118). In fact, parental involvement has been the topic of discussion on various platforms for over 30 years, yet schools continue to report a gap in their ability to increase the involvement of African American parents in schooling (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Previous research has identified barriers to the participation of low-income, minority parents in schools and it has been acknowledged that there are numerous definitions of parental involvement, although most definitions are based on viewing involvement from the lens of school administrators and teachers. Epstein (2010), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2013) and others have developed models to assist school administrators in understanding how to create parental involvement programs.

It was the intent of this study to understand parental involvement through the lens of African American parents.

Discussion of Research Findings

Two over-arching themes frame this discussion of the results from this study: One-way street and building a bridge. These themes provide a picture of traditional ways of viewing the involvement of African American parents and guardians in contrast to a strengths-based view of their involvement.

One Way Street

Epstein's Parent Involvement model (2010) is widely used by school administrators in the construction of parent involvement programs. Epstein identified six types of parental involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaboration, but his categories of involvement are more representative of school administrator and teacher views of parental involvement as opposed to parental views of involvement. However, the last two categories in Epstein's model reflect the importance of reciprocity, where parents are included in decision-making and as collaborative partners with schools.

Participants in this study provided examples indicating they were involved in at least five of six parental involvement types discussed by Epstein (2010). The 20 participants reported:

Involvement Type 1: Parenting. Epstein (2010) defined parenting as home environments that help support children as students. Fourteen participants reported that they were involved in their child's academic success by helping with homework, making sure homework was completed, and ensuring that their child understood the importance of doing their homework. Participant 4 stated, "I have seen that no matter how much the teacher is there for the student, if the student doesn't get that reinforcement at home

nothing will happen. A teacher can't teach if there is no drive at home. If there's no push at home, it's going to be pointless.”

This view was expressed by a majority of the participants in this study contradicting research (Brandon, Higgins, Pierce, & Brandon, 2010) suggesting that African American parents are not interested in being involved in schools.

Involvement Type 2: Communication is defined as forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children's progress (Epstein, 2010). Fifteen participants reported they communicated through parent-teacher conferences, reviewing their child's homework folder (i. e., newsletter, messages, and school events), Class DoJo, phone calls, and/or emails. Participant 3 reported, “The teacher uses Dojo to communicate with me. The school is set-up on Robo Call.”

In general, participants reported that the communication was initiated by the school, and often targeted problems, and/or requests for involvement in school activities, suggesting a preponderance of one-way communication initiated by the school.

Involvement Type 3: Volunteering is defined as recruitment and organization of parents to help and support various aspects of the school (Epstein, 2010). Nine of the participants reported they volunteer at school by helping make copies, attending school field trips, helping a school events, and helping in their child's classroom. Participant 5 reported that “Asking the teacher, What can I do? Can you send extra things home that will help my child? Stopping by the classroom checking on your child or even volunteering is important. Once your child sees you helping, it will make your child feel very proud.” Interestingly, the participants who reported volunteering, shared that the reason they did this was to demonstrate their love and commitment to education to their

child. They did not speak about feeling like a collaborative partner with the teacher, nor did they talk about having a special relationship with the teacher. Their behavior was focused on the needs of their child.

Involvement Type 4: Learning-at-home is defined as information and ideas for helping students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decision making, and planning (Epstein, 2010). Ten of the participants stated they seek ways to educate their child at home other than asking their child's teacher. Participants mentioned the need to buy study aids, hire tutors, and find resources on Goggle or YouTube to reinforce or teach what their child is learning at school. They also attend school events (i.e., Curriculum Night, Reading Night) to ensure they know how to help their child at home. Participant 16 reported "I make sure that I am always looking at the State Standard Website to see what he is working on. I talk with other parents. I talk with his teacher to see what he is struggling with so I can help him at home."

Involvement Type 5: Decision-making is defined as school decisions which include parents, development of parent leaders, and representatives (Epstein, 2010). This type of involvement is discussed as ensuring that parents have a voice in the school decisions that impact their child. There was only one participant who reported, that she shared in the decision making at her child's school. Participant 3 reported, "I am very active. I chair a couple of those events."

Although Epstein urges administrators and teachers to include parents in decision-making and stressed the need for developing parent leaders, no-one in this study spoke of being asked to participate in decision-making or parent leadership activities.

Involvement Type 6: Collaborating with the Community is defined as identification and integration of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Eighteen participants stated they rely on the community to give support (i.e., Church, Girl Scouts, mentoring programs, etc.), however, they did not indicate that the schools played any role in helping parents access these community supports or that these community resources were coordinated with or integrated into the school.

Examining the participant responses through the lens of Epstein's model of parental involvement resulted in the conclusion that parents are trying hard to conform to school expectations about their involvement. The Epstein model did not provide insights into the wealth of resources parents were accessing to create a net of academic success for their children. Instead, it became clear that most of the parent involvement activities initiated by the school did not take into account parental resources, but focused instead on a parent's ability to conform to the school expectations for involvement, in short, parental involvement was a one-way street leading parents to adopt school based definitions of parental involvement with little or no reciprocity.

Hughes and Kwok (2007) argued that parent-initiated contact with the school is not counted as parental involvement, and is often viewed as negative involvement by some teachers. Several participants in this study reported a similar phenomenon indicating that teachers did not appreciate them "showing up at the school." My study overwhelmingly aligns with Wallace's (2013) conclusion that "it would be both unsound and unfair to conclude that they (ethnic minority parents do not value education as some teachers are prone to conclude)" (p. 196). It was clear that the parents interviewed for

this study were actively involved in their child's schooling, but their involvement may have been invisible to the schools, since much of it occurred at home and in the community.

Building a Bridge

Looking at the data in this study through Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth lens provides a significant contrast to Epstein's (2010) approach, by recognizing the numerous (often unseen) examples of how these African American families are actively involved in the academic achievement of their children. Yosso (2005) believed that schools are failing at parental involvement because they are not using the 'wealth' that minority families bring to the school. Yosso's Model captures the talents, strengths, and experiences of minority children and their families. Five of Yosso's (2002) wealths were prevalent in participant's discussions of parental involvement in schooling.

Aspirational Wealth involves families dreams and hopes for their children's future. The African American parents involved in this study were overwhelmingly drawn to the belief that their children could succeed, and that it was important to nurture those dreams of success. So parental involvement necessarily included the frequent activity of expressing and nurturing dreams for a child's success. Participant 9 expressed, "We push her to do well, having those talks with her during the day and night, so she can have that mindset what she has to do and working toward a goal to be somebody." This is a type of parental involvement that is unseen by teachers and school administrators but it is a powerful motivator.

Familial Wealth makes reference parental knowledge about schooling. Ten of the participants reported they attend different school events (i.e., Math, Reading, or

Curriculum Night) so that they have clear expectation about what is expected at school, that they talk with their child about. Some researchers found that African American parents may have had negative experiences with schools and thus, are less likely to participate in parent involvement activities. Although this may be true, in this study, parents reached out to extended family and neighbors to fill-in any gaps related to knowledge about schooling and/or time to assist with school related activities. Participant 8 said, “My mother, my brother, and my boyfriend are involved in my child’s education, as well as me.” Thus, it may be necessary for teachers and administrators to cross the bridge from school-to-home, identify the members of the extended-family team of educational supports, and find ways to include them as resources as well as count their activity as parental involvement.

Social Wealth refers to the network of programs and people in the African American community that are providing educational resources and familial support to parents. In this study, 18 participants stated they rely on that community support (i.e., community-based organizations, churches, and culturally-based cultural, and sports) to help support the academic success of their child. These social resources exist in most African American communities but are often not included as partners in the goal of educating children in the community. Ensuring that these community resources are known to all families, and that schools cross the bridge and assist these programs in a collaborative alignment of efforts would likely increase the understanding of parental involvement and more importantly lead to increased academic success.

Navigational Wealth is measured by one’s ability to make sense of and navigate social institutions where people of color are underrepresented. The majority of

participants identified several ways that they navigate the school system including using neighbors and friends to tutor or mentor their child, using the internet to assist in understanding the expectations of certain school-based assignments, and relying on community agencies to support their efforts to educate their children.

Resistance Wealth refers awareness of negative stereotypes. Five of the participants reported that principals weren't opened to parent suggestions and that the teachers didn't care about their child. Thirteen of the participants discussed, "drop-ins" or "checking-up" as ways to ensure that schools and teachers were doing what they were supposed to for their child.

Parental involvement is clearly linked with academic success for all students, regardless of income level (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Perriell, 2015; Boncana & Lopez, 2010). The traditional definition of parent involvement is based off the school's definition. The schools see parents as uninvolved if they are not at the events at school and/or conferences and are not visible at the schools. All of the participants from my study are involved more at home than at school because of work hours or transportation issues.

My study supports LaRocque, Kleiman, Darling, and Darling's (2011) definition of parental involvement as investments made in educating children. When viewed through the eyes of African American parents and guardians, it is clear that these families are making investments in the education of their children and are thus involved parents.

Recommendations

The results of this study indicate there is a wealth of community resources that African American families frequently utilize to support their children. They did not

report that the school recognized their use of these resources as parental involvement, and more importantly, did not attempt to partner with families to ensure these resources are validated as parental involvement and shared with all families.

Parent centers. Many schools have parent liaisons and even have space for parent-education in the schools. It is recommended that existing centers and the role of the liaison be examined to determine how they might serve as bridges to the unseen resources in the community, and the familial resources of the children their schools. Rather than viewing parents as having deficits, it should be the goal of these centers to capitalize on the “wealths” of parents. It would also be important for parents to determine what types of programs and outreach would be the most beneficial for their families.

Coffee with the Principal. It is recommended that school administrators implement regular informal meetings with the principal (i.e., coffee with the principal) at a variety of times, to provide opportunities for parents to meet and greet the administrators, and share stories about their family and how they view the efforts of the school to educate their child. The principal could hold the meeting monthly and alternate the meeting times (before and after-school).

Provide Transportation and/or Child Care. It is recommended that schools partner with community agencies to provide transportation and/or child care to enable families to attend school-sponsored events and family-involvement events.

Community Partnerships. It is recommended that administrators ask families where they are getting additional support for the education of their children. Partner with those agencies providing tutoring, or mentoring, or family recreation opportunities and

find ways to link those resources in ways that create a curricular alignment so that everyone is on the same page.

Create an Aspirational Program. It is recommended that administrators create a parent-led mentoring group called “Achievers.” Let the parents create inspirational programs for the students and engage families in opportunities to work with their children in setting their annual academic, college and career goals.

Operationalizing Family Capital. It is recommended that schools establish formal mechanisms for families to communicate to administrators and teachers as needed (e.g., direct phone numbers, e-mail addresses, weekly hours for families to call or meet). Also, create a “suggestion or comment” box for families to anonymously provide their questions, concerns and recommendations. Finally, form a parent committee to discuss the suggestions made in the “suggestions or comment” box and vote on the items.

Teacher Preparation Programs. Finally, it is recommended that universities ensure teacher candidates have courses and experiences that increase future teacher’s understandings of the cultural wealth that families may possess.

Conclusion

Schools will have better success involving parents and encouraging them to support their children when they recognized the “wealth” that every family brings to the table. Helping parents feel good about what they do to encourage their children’s growth will increase their participation more than criticizing them for not attending school events.

Parental involvement varies considerably from family to family. Parental involvement is supporting the whole child academically (homework, parent-teacher

conferences, etc.), socially (knowing where they are), behaviorally (modeling responsibility) and emotionally (praising them). It is likely that parental involvement would increase when schools recognize the efforts families are making to assist their children. Creating true partnerships will mean creating a bridge instead of a one-way street.

The results of this study are intended to be a guide to aid in the approaches promoting parental involvement. It is known that parental involvement has a powerful impact on student success. Therefore, there should be an effective plan to promote parental involvement.

Parental involvement has a powerful impact on the success of our children; therefore, everyone who works with the kids will have to establish the best way to promote parental involvement. Parental involvement is not just an in-school activity. Some parents can come to school events and meetings, but they may be involved in other ways. Some parents cannot participate, but it may not mean they do not participate. Many of the participants stated that they are involved, but have job conflicts, which will not allow them time for their children. They acknowledged that they have to choose between paying bills and spending time with their children. Due to the level of information given, many parents have difficulty understanding the content.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board



APPENDIX B

Approval From the Church to Conduct Study



APPENDIX C

Consent Script

Consent Statement Read to the Participant's Prior to Beginning Interviews.

My name is Ruthea Martin and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. The title of the study is: Parental Involvement in Schooling: Perceptions of African American Parents & Guardians. I will ask you a variety of questions about your thoughts regarding parental participation in children's schooling. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. All information obtained will be used for research only, and will be kept on a password protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. The data will be kept for three years, at which time all files will be deleted and any paper copies will be shredded.

There are no direct benefits to you or your child by participating in this study, but hopefully, this research study will help principals and teachers understand what parents think about parental involvement and may help them plan more effective programs for parents.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. If you choose to continue with the interview today, this will serve as your agreement to participate in this research study and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

If you choose, you may decide not to be in this study or to quit at any time without any punishment.

I am giving you a paper with information on who you can contact if you need to discuss any part of this research process.

If you have question about your rights as a research participant, concerns about the research process, or you'd like to discuss an unanticipated problem related to the research, please contact my committee chair, Dr. Karla Hull at khull@valdosta.edu or myself my.martin.ruthea@gmail.com.

This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or [**irb@valdosta.edu**](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Date:

Beginning Time for Interview:

Ending Time for Interview:

Participant's Number for Research:

Pseudonym to Replace Child's Name in Interview Transcription:

Introduction to Interview Process.

1. Introduction of Researcher (name, student at VSU, former 3rd grade teacher)
2. The purpose of my study is "To understand the views of African American Parents related to parental involvement in children's education."
3. I appreciate your time; this interview will last approximately one hour.
4. I need to read this form to make sure you understand aspects of this research project. Please stop me at any time, if you have questions or concerns. (consent for research participation script),.
5. Would you like to proceed with the interview?
6. May I have your permission to record this interview, as was stated in the document that I read, this interview will be kept in a secure place, and no identifying information will be included in any of the written material for this research project.

II. Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me a little bit about _____ (name of child).

- 2) What are your hopes and dreams for this child?
- 3) What do you think has the most impact on your child's success in school?
- 4) Describe your child's experience in third grade?
 - (a). In what ways is third grade different from the experiences your child had in first and second grade?
- 5) Describe your experiences with your child's teachers?
- 6) What kinds of things do you do to support your child in being successful at school?
- 7) In addition to you and your child's teachers, who else has an active role in your child's academic success?
 - (a) Are there any people in your child's life, that have a negative impact on his/her success in school? If yes, please describe.
- 8) Describe the school activities and/or programs that you believe would make a difference in your child's success at school?
 - (a) Were you able to participate in any of these activities/programs?
 - (b) If yes, tell me about them and the impact on you and your child.
 - (c) If no, what made it difficult for you to participate in these activities.
- 9) Please describe any community activities that you think are important for your child's educational progress?
- 10) In your opinion, who has responsibility for educating your child?

a) Tell me why you believe this?

- 11) If you were giving advice to parents, what would you tell them about being involved in their children's education?
- 12) In your opinion, what type of parental involvement opportunities at your child's school are the most successful? Why?
- 13) What advice would you give a principal who wants to encourage parents to be involved in their child's education?
- 14) Is there anything else you would like to share regarding factors that contribute to your child's academic success?