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FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY EXPLORING STRATEGIES AND APPLICATIONS

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FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY EXPLORING STRATEGIES AND APPLICATIONS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the educators who support the learning and growth of their students and to the families that work with teachers and schools to strengthen the experience for their children.

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I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Courtney Beers-Dewhirst, who has helped me develop my research and provided support in writing this paper. I would also like to thank my mom and dad who each took time to read my thesis and provided feedback to perfect my paper. Lastly, I would like to thank the teachers and families that participated in my study to better understand what early childhood teachers can do to support and encourage family involvement.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements v

List of Tables viii

List of Figures ix

Abstract x

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review 4

- Involvement 4
- Parent Involvement Outcomes 5
- Parent Education Programs 7
- Program Implementation 9
- Critical Components 11
- Typical Barriers and Solutions 11
- Roles in Education 12

Chapter 3:Methods 14

- Theoretical Framework 14
- Research Design 15
- Participants 16
- Data Collection 18
- Data Analysis 19
- Researcher's Role 20
- Trustworthiness 22
- Ethical Issues 23

Chapter 4: Results 23

- Involvement 25
  - Teacher Involvement Efforts 25
  - Involvement Opportunities 25
  - Amount of Involvement 26
- Communication 28
  - Family Need 28
  - Frequency 30
  - Information 31
- Relationships 32
- Impacts 33
- Teacher/Family Views 35
  - Teacher Perspective 35
  - Parent Perspective 36

Chapter 5: Discussion 40

- Limitations and Future Research 45
- Implications 46
- Conclusion 47

References 48

Appendix A: Interview Questions 52

Initial Interview 52
Mid-Semester Interview 52
Final Interview 53
Appendix B: Survey Questions 54
Beginning of Year Survey 54
End of Year Survey 57
Appendix C: Codes and Themes 60
Appendix D: Subjectivity Statement 61

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Background Information…… 17

Table 2. Results……... 23

Table 3. Family Involvement Participation for Fall 2018……26

Table 4. Teacher Communication Methods……..... 28

Table 5. Number of Communication Methods Selected……. 28

Table 6. Teacher Communication/ Family View..…….. 30

Table 7. Beginning of Year Survey/ Family View…….. 36

Table 8. End of Year Survey/ Family View……..... 36

Table 9. Beginning of Year Survey/ Involvement Activity……..... 38

Table 10. Number of Activities Selected…… 38

List of Figures

Figure 1: Reciprocal Relationship……..... 33

Abstract

Family involvement is an important component of child development and leads to various positive outcomes. There are many programs that exist to provide parents with resources and support but there is a gap in the literature on what teachers are doing or can do in the classroom to promote family involvement and how families view those involvement practices. This study sought to explore and gain a better understanding of what early childhood teachers are doing in their classroom to encourage involvement, the outcomes of involvement, and whether teachers' and families' views regarding involvement are aligned. Five teachers were interviewed from a suburban school district. One was a retired pre-k teacher, two were current pre-k teachers and two were current kindergarten teachers. Each teacher had a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and had been recommended for their family involvement practices. Data were collected throughout interviews with teachers and surveys completed by parents. Qualitative data was transcribed and coded. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The results led to the development of five general themes; involvement, communication, relationships, impacts, and perspectives. This study provides pre-service teachers and teachers seeking to increase their family involvement with more strategies that can be implemented in their classroom. While this research did provide a positive foundation for family involvement, future research should be conducted to gain a more diverse understanding of family involvement and to compare family involvement practices in rural and urban school districts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Family involvement is a critical component in the success of a child both academically and emotionally, especially during the early childhood years when students are gaining their first experiences in school. Children whose families are actively involved in their education by helping out at home and at school recognize the importance of school and will value it more, therefore being more motivated to succeed and do well. Family involvement also plays a huge impact on relationships because it strengthens the relationship with the child's teacher, which then strengthens the relationship with the teacher and student, providing them with a more positive learning experience. Involvement is very important in a child's educational and emotional success but many families struggle to be actively involved because of the time commitment, lack of money to pay for fundraisers, events or supplies in the classroom, and one of the biggest barriers, a lack of knowledge about what they should be doing to be involved.

ChildTrends (2013) defines parent involvement in school as:

> Parent reported participation at least once during the school year in attending a general school meeting; attending a scheduled meeting with their child's teacher; attending a school event; or volunteering in the school or serving on a school committee. (para. 13)

Children of parents who are highly involved with their child's school score higher on achievement tests and have less difficulty with learning academic subjects (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Domina (2005) had similar findings when looking at parental involvement in elementary school. He found that families who participated in various involvement activities at home and at school scored higher on achievement tests and had fewer behavioral problems. Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) focused their involvement towards literacy intervention and found that children whose parents worked with them at home on literacy activities had improved

language skills. Family involvement impacts a student's success in a variety of ways, but student attendance is a key component. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) studied the effects of parent involvement on student attendance and found that daily attendance increased by 72% when schools communicated and kept families informed.

One of the reasons that involvement can be difficult is families and teachers have different opinions regarding how families should be involved. Parents tend to view involvement as keeping their child safe and getting them to school, while teachers see involvement as parental presence at school (Anderson, 2007). Another issue that affects involvement is a parent or guardian's educational background. After distributing a family questionnaire, Fantuzzo (2000) found parents who had completed high school were more involved with their child's school. Child Trends (2013) had similar findings reporting that parents who did not have a high school diploma were about half as likely to attend a school event, volunteer, or serve on a committee compared to parents who had some college, vocational training, or had achieved higher educational attainment such as a bachelor's degree or graduate school. The level of a parent's educational attainment correlated with his/her level of involvement. For example, a parent with a bachelor's degree was more involved than a parent with some college or vocational training, and a parent who had gone to graduate or professional school was more involved than a parent with a master's degree.

Family involvement is clearly an important part of child development, but it also benefits the parents. Park (2013) found parents who were involved in school activities strengthened their social networks. This social network allowed parents to develop relationships and provided them with a community they could collaborate with about school or parent related topics. Parent

involvement is beneficial to both families and children, but teachers need to know what they can do to promote and support that involvement.

Problem Statement

Early childhood teachers need to gain a better understanding of what they can do to encourage parental involvement in the classroom and how they can reach out to those families who are less likely to be involved. Considering there is such a gap in how parents and teachers view involvement, it is important to understand what teachers are doing in the classroom and how parents perceive their classroom teachers' involvement practices. It is also important to consider what can be done to reach out to parents with lower educational backgrounds and to get them more involved. This research study will provide early childhood teachers with information they can utilize in their classrooms to increase their family involvement by better understanding how parents view involvement. Having the parent perception and learning about family involvement practices will allow teachers to provide their students with a more optimal learning environment.

Research Purpose

This mixed-methods research study aims to better understand the perspectives of teachers and families regarding early childhood teachers' involvement practices. Through the process of teacher interviews and family surveys, I hope to close the gap in how involvement is viewed by providing teachers with concrete strategies and ideas that can be implemented in their classroom to promote and increase family involvement. I will use the term parent throughout this study, but this refers to all types of guardians because not all children's primary caregivers are their biological parents. To gain this understanding of family involvement and close the gap in how involvement is viewed, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are early childhood teachers promoting and supporting family involvement in the classroom?
2. What are the perceived effects of the teachers' involvement practices?
3. How do families view early childhood teachers' involvement practices?
4. What do families look for from their child's teacher to encourage involvement?
5. How are families' and teachers' perspectives regarding involvement aligned?

I hope by answering these questions early childhood teachers and all grade level teachers will have more information for strategies to increase and support family involvement in their classrooms, as the ultimate goal is to provide students with more opportunities to grow academically and socially.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Involvement

There are many ways to define parent involvement, especially depending on who you ask. As mentioned in the introduction, parents tend to view involvement as keeping their child safe and getting them to school, while teachers see involvement as parental presence at school (Anderson, 2007). In a study to better understand parent involvement, Anderson found that parents reported more involvement at home than at school. Teachers interpreted a lack of involvement at school as parents not being involved in their children's education.

Research has studied the factors that affect family involvement in the school setting. For example, after distributing a family involvement questionnaire to the caregivers of 641 children, ages ranging from pre-k to first grade, Fantuzzo (2000) found that parents who had completed high school were more involved with their child's school. The study also found that parents who

were married engaged in more activities at home and made more of an effort to contact their child's teacher and school. Perhaps the most interesting finding from this study was that parent involvement decreased as children aged. The involvement effects are also related to socioeconomic status (SES). Feuerstein (2000) found that parent involvement and volunteering were higher for private schools compared to public and that this trend positively related to high SES. Families and teachers may have different views about involvement but, as discussed in the subsequent section, the positive effects that is it has on children is proven by various studies.

Parent Involvement Outcomes

Research has shown that family involvement increases children's academic achievement, behavior and attendance. In a longitudinal study investigating the effects of three different types of parent involvement (PI) (i.e., public good, private good, parent network), Park (2013) found that children whose parents were more involved in private good (PI), which is involvement that benefits their own child, had significant growth in math and reading achievement. Children whose parents were more involved in public good, helping the school as a whole, and parent networks, had higher math scores but not reading. Whereas children whose parents were involved in all three types of school involvement were rated by their teachers as better behaved and reported higher scores in academic achievement. This study illustrates that children who have parents that are highly involved perform better academically and behaviorally.

Domina (2005) had similar findings in assessing parental involvement in elementary school. He found that children whose parents attended parent-teacher conferences, were members of the PTA, volunteered at school, and helped with homework had higher scores on achievement tests and had lower occurrences of behavioral problems at school. Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) narrowed it down by focusing on the impact that parent involvement has on

children's early literacy skills. The parents in this study participated in a parent education session that modeled how to engage in various literacy activities with their children. Parents were given the opportunity to practice with their child and were provided with literacy activities they could do at home. The study found that literacy intervention improved children's language skills and especially helped students who tested low on language measures in the beginning of kindergarten.

Zellman and Waterman (2005) found that higher parent involvement led to better scores and less difficulty with learning academic subjects, but they also discovered that parenting style plays a significant role in the development of these outcomes. They concluded that how parents interact with their child has a stronger impact on behavior and academic outcomes than parent involvement practices. They compared parenting style with different economic and ethnic backgrounds and found that parenting style is not "enmeshed in a social context," (p. 379) which suggested that parenting style can be taught and changed.

While each of these studies illustrates the significance of parent involvement on child outcomes, another key area to consider is student attendance. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) studied parent involvement effects on students' attendance. School attendance is important because students who are not at school have "fewer opportunities to learn the material that enables them to succeed later in life" (p. 308). Overall, they found that in order to improve school attendance all students, educators, and parents must work together. There are five factors that contribute towards higher daily attendance and lower chronic absenteeism:

1. Targeted rewards for attendance
2. Effective communication with parents of diverse backgrounds
3. Providing parents with a contact person at the school to discuss attendance issues
4. Offering workshops on the importance of attendance
5. Offering after-school programs (p. 315)

These factors are important to be considered when increasing daily attendance and lowering the rates of chronic absences. In order for our students to receive the most of their education, they need to be present and parents need to be involved. Parent education programs are one form of parent involvement but there are many factors to consider when implementing a parent education program.

Parent Education Programs

While there can be many definitions of parent education, the definition provided by Child Welfare (2013) provides a helpful understanding of education programs reviewed in this study:

> Parent education can be defined as any training, program, or other intervention that helps parents acquire skills to improve their parenting of and communication with their children in order to reduce the risk of child maltreatment and/or reduce the children's disruptive behaviors. (p. 2)

There are many programs available that offer additional support to parents and families. One of these programs is Head Start, which is the largest early childhood program funded by the United States government (Ansari, 2016). This program is centered on increasing parent involvement and strengthening the relationships between children and their families. Ansari (2016) studied the effects of parent involvement in Head Start. She found that parent involvement in Head Start led to an improvement in parenting which impacted children's behavior and academic achievement. One way that parents improved in their parenting was by engaging in more cognitive stimulation with their child such as reading books, playing math games, or counting blocks. Greater involvement also led to less controlling behavior and therefore less spanking.

Another parent education program that was researched by Mann (2004) was *The Parenting Life Skills Center*. It is based in Missouri and serves at-risk families. The program

consisted of parent education classes and weekly support groups over a nine-month period. This study used the Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT) and the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) to measure changes in attitude and knowledge. Mann found that parents who participated in the program showed an increase in four of the PAAT subscale areas (i.e., creativity, control, play, and teaching-learning) and an increase in two of the AAPI subscale areas (i.e., parental expectations for the child and parental value of physical punishment). The subscales in which the parents made gains were related to curriculum, while the other areas (frustration, parental empathy for child's needs, and parent-child role reversal) are more connected with an individual's attitude and feelings, and these are more difficult to change.

While many programs focus on face-to-face interactions, some also offer materials for support. Graybill (2014) conducted a study investigating the effects of education materials on parent outcomes. In this study families were presented with a Milestone Moments booklet, which contained information about parenting and child development. Four groups were developed to receive the materials that included a control, child care, brief home visit, and six-session home. Graybill found that all groups who received a Milestones Moments Booklet, reported an increase in knowledge about their child's development, experienced less concern about their child's progress, and felt a positive attitude towards the Milestone Moments booklet. The parents who received the book from their child care reported greater participant outcomes, suggesting that families are more comfortable receiving education materials from a familiar setting.

While these programs and resources are available to all families, Wagner (2002) found that low-income children and parents achieved greater gains from the *Parent as Teachers* program than those from other socioeconomic backgrounds. This gain in low-income can be attributed to less knowledge and background in parenting at the start when compared to their

higher-earning counterparts. Feuerstein (2000) investigated what factors influence parent involvement in schools. He found that higher economic backgrounds were consistent with better grades and more school discussion at home. Another factor to consider is involving fathers in parent training because if the family is working together, there will be better long-term outcomes (Child Welfare, 2013). In a 2016 study, Opondo, Redshaw, Savage-McGlynn, and Quigley explored the relationship between paternal involvement and child rearing on social development and behavior outcomes. Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire that was sent to parents when their children were 8 weeks, 8 months, 9 years old, and 11 years old. It included information about mental health, parenting, behavior, and child-development. Participants included 14,688 children at the beginning of the study, 6,898 at the 9 year follow-up and 6,328 at the 11 year follow up. Their study revealed that the children "were less likely to exhibit behavioral problems" if their fathers had a "positive emotional response to parenting and a sense of security in their role as a parent" (p. 6). They suggest that children experience positive outcomes when their fathers are involved because it provides the mother with "instrumental and emotional support," which leads to emotional well-being that can affect children's outcomes (p. 7).

These studies show how programs and materials impact parents and they highlight the importance of considering income and background in order to make the program effective. While it is clear that these programs benefit children and families, knowing how these programs are implemented can help better understand their effects.

Program Implementation

This literature review has offered information on how involvement and parent education affect both children and parents. It is clear that there is a positive effect and that educators and

community members should make an effort to provide our families with more resources, the question then is how do we do that?

There are a variety of different programs that already exist and each program is structured differently. Below, I discuss factors that need to be considered when implementing a parent education program and barriers or conflicts that may inhibit parents from being able to participate or be involved.

The first thing to consider about a program is how participants will access it and how frequently it will be offered. Child Welfare (2013) found that programs that are either individual or a mixture of individual and group are more effective than just group programs. However, a study conducted by Morawska (2010) in Australia found that parents preferred television or group-based delivery to attain information. While the group dynamic may differ depending on the place or participants and is something to consider when implementing a program, the frequency for which meetings occur also need to be considered.

The *Early Birds* program is a popular early childhood program offered in Oklahoma. It is a service offered to parents with children birth to age five to help them with school readiness. Nation (2015) reviewed the program, which offers three 90-minute classes over the course of a year for five years. This plus a prenatal class that is offered adds up to 16 classes over five years. Williamson (1997) researched another program, *Parents as Teachers of Children Program* (PATCH), which spread the sessions out into different parts. This included two to three assessment sessions of the parents' knowledge and attitudes, which involved videotaping parents and children engaging in a variety of tasks, eight to twelve skills training sessions and four to six generalization sessions to apply what has been learned. Each session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes.

Critical Components

While each program may look different in terms of implementation, there are several recommendations that all programs should consider when implementing a parent education program or that teachers need to consider when looking to increase their family involvement at school. Baker (1997) conducted a qualitative study on parent perceptions about involvement and her research led her to the following six recommendations to increase parent involvement:

1. Be clear about how and why parents can be involved.
2. Build on parent involvement at school programs.
3. Create more opportunities for input from parents.
4. Provide parents with specific guidance about how to oversee homework and suggestions throughout the year for supporting their children's learning.
5. Inform parents of behavioral and academic problems in a timely fashion.
6. Provide parents with positive feedback about their children. (pp. 150-151)

These recommendations related specifically to what teachers could do to aid involvement at school, however they could also be applied to any organization looking to implement parent education programs.

Another critical component mentioned in multiple studies is offering peer support with other parents. In the *Parent Life Skills Center* studied by Mann (2004) parents met weekly for a support group in addition to the educational classes. *The Early Birds Program* also provided networking opportunities for their parents to strengthen their community (Nation, 2015). Offering parents with a parental peer community will strengthen their involvement in the program and allow for long-lasting impacts for their children.

Typical Barriers and Solutions

While there are many recommendations for how to implement successful parent education programs and how to support parent involvement at school, there are also a number of barriers and conflicts that can prohibit involvement. Baker (1997) and Morawska (2010) found

that the greatest barrier to parent involvement was logistical, relating to time, money, scheduling, transportation, and childcare. The financial barrier related specifically to the cost of school events or the cost of the program itself. Another barrier to involvement was the relationship between parents and schools and the lack of information provided about school events (Baker, 1997). This leads us toward another common theme for increasing parent involvement, which is teacher invitation and school contact.

In a study conducted to understand parents' decision making, Anderson (2007) found that one of the strongest factors that led to parent involvement was "specific teacher invitations" (p. 319). This was a common theme across multiple studies. In this study, one parent noted "as long as she was invited to come to the school she was welcomed and warmly received but if she came on her own initiative… she did not feel welcome" (p. 138). Parents' perception about how the school supports their involvement plays an important role in whether parents will become involved. Feuerstein (2000) found that "the more the school contacted the parents, the more parents contacted the school" and school contacts "associated positively with greater volunteerism" (p. 36). A similar result was found in Lloyd's (2002) study on factors that affect parental involvement. He found the methods that were successful or very successful in increasing parent involvement were phone calls from the teachers and principals, scheduling conferences and informing parents about upcoming events. These studies suggest that teacher invitations and regular contact with the parent will increase parent involvement in the schools.

Roles in Education

Families take on many roles when raising their children. Coleman and Wallinga (2012) review these roles in their article discussing how to connect families and classrooms through the use of family involvement webs. One of these roles is the support role which "provides them

with a nonthreatening way to feel a part of their children's classroom lives" by helping and supporting the teacher with various classroom needs (p. 211). Another important role family members play is the role of students where they learn more about child development and gain new knowledge on how to support their child's educational growth. Families also assume the role of educator helping to teach their children about social skills, life skills, and specialized skills along with age appropriate educational activities. A few other roles they take on include manager, advocate, counselor, and protector. Coleman and Wallinga conclude their article by discussing the importance of letting family members determine their own roles when it comes to involvement so that their "strengths are truly represented in the classroom" (p. 213).

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) also discuss the importance of family roles in their article *Teacher Beliefs about Parent and Family Involvement*. They touch on the fact that many parents' cultural beliefs teach them to not interfere with the teacher's role and that they should only visit the school when invited. This lack of involvement and presence at school led teachers to belief that the families are not interested, but it is in fact their differences socially and culturally that may keep them from being involved. Souto-Manning and Swick encourage educators to "envision paradigms of parent involvement that value diversity" (p. 190) and to "empower all parents to recognize the active role they already play in their children's education" (p. 190). The question then becomes, how can teachers facilitate this type of parental involvement?

This literature review has explored the benefits and outcomes of parent involvement and the effects of parent education programs. I have also discussed the different types of involvement and recommendations for programs and schools to consider when implementing a parent education program or attempting to increase their parental involvement. While this review has

found a great deal relating to why we should involve and educate parents and some of the perceptions surrounding involvement from teachers and parents, the field still lacks information on what teachers are specifically doing in their classrooms to promote and support involvement as well as how families view those involvement practices. The current study seeks to add to the literature in this area.

Chapter 3:Methods

Theoretical Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory serves as a conceptual framework for understanding involvement. Ryan (2001) wrote about Bronfenbrenner's theory explaining that it "looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment" (p. 1). Ryan continues to explain the various systems (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) in Bronfenbrenner's theory and how they impact child development. This study focuses on the Microsystem, which is the direct interactions that a child has with their surroundings at school or at home, and the Mesosystem, which is the interactions between the structures that have direct influence on the child (i.e., parents and teachers). This study will explore how the interactions between parent, child, and teacher impact a child's development and what outcomes they have on parent involvement.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory connects with another theory that can help us better understand parent involvement, which is Epstein's (2009) Framework of Six Types of Involvement. Epstein's theory focuses on the mesosystem by discussing various involvement opportunities that teachers should be utilizing in their classroom to involve families. The first involvement strategy is Parenting, which is teachers helping parents establish positive home environments that support their children's growth. This includes providing parents with

information on their child's growth and development as well as positive parenting strategies. The next strategy is Communicating. This strategy discusses the role that teachers play in developing effective communication practices between families and school. Volunteering is the third strategy that involves teachers providing parents with opportunities to help and support the classroom teacher and school. Next is Learning at Home, which is the teachers role in providing families with activities and ideas they can do at home to increase learning and development. Then there is Decision Making that discusses including parents in making school related decisions. Last is Collaborating with the Community. For this strategy teachers identify and integrate resources from the community into their classroom, school and with their families to increase their students' growth. I explore these types of involvement throughout the study and how teachers use them.

Research Design

Again, to gain this understanding of family involvement and to close the gap in how involvement is viewed, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are early childhood teachers promoting and supporting family involvement in the classroom?
2. What are the perceived effects of the teachers' involvement practices?
3. How do families view early childhood teachers' involvement practices?
4. What do families look for from their child's teacher to encourage involvement?
5. How are families' and teachers' perspectives regarding involvement aligned?

For this study, I used a mixed methods research design. Creswell (2018) defines mixed methods research as

> An approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either quantitative or qualitative data alone. (p. 4)

For my study, I will be interviewing teachers (i.e., qualitative) and surveying (i.e., quantitative) their students' parents about family involvement practices used in the classroom. Creswell also explains that integrating qualitative and quantitative data "provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question" (p. 213). My goal for this study is to gain a deeper understanding of what teachers are doing to support and encourage family involvement and whether families' views regarding those practices are aligned or what they feel needs to be done to increase their likelihood of being involved. Through the use of surveys and interviews I will gain a better insight about family involvement practices in the early childhood classroom.

My mixed methods design is convergent, which Creswell defines as collecting "both quantitative and qualitative data, [analyzing] them separately, and then [comparing] the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other" (p. 217). I will include a side-by-side comparison of the results.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used because the goal of the study is to close the gap between how families and teachers view involvement. Creswell (2018) explains that when recruiting for a study, oftentimes researchers need participants who share similar characteristics or criteria. Table 1 provides background information on my participants. For my study I wanted to interview teachers who are believed to have strong involvement practices and compare that with how

families view their involvement practices to see whether they are aligned. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my study, I reached out to the Early Childhood Director of a suburban school district who recommended two pre-k teachers and two kindergarten teachers she felt had the most successful family involvement practices. I was also recommended to interview a retired pre-k teacher who taught for this district for 22 years. I chose to include her in the study to gain an understanding of how involvement has changed over the last 20 years. I sent a recruitment email to each teacher asking if they would be willing to meet to learn more and potentially participate in the study.

Ashley who was currently in her fifth year of teaching kindergarten in this district was recommended because she had strong family involvement practices in her classroom and within the school. She was the head of the Family Climate Committee, which was tasked with coming up with school events to involve families. This was her second year of being on that committee and she mentioned seeing an increase in family involvement with those events compared to the previous year. Gabriella who was going into her 15th year teaching and her 8th year teaching kindergarten, was a valuable participant because of her extensive experience working with a variety of families as well as her strong educational background with having a Bachelors Degree, two Master's Degrees and also being National Board certified. Tracy was recommended because she had spent her whole educational career working with pre-k. She started as a pre-k assistant teacher and did that for six years while working towards her degree and then after graduating she started teaching pre-k, which she had been doing for 9 years. Lastly, was Sarah who taught kindergarten for 9 years before moving to pre-k. Her involvement practices were unique from the others teachers because she really provided a lot of opportunities for involvement in the

classroom and made strong efforts to establish relationships with her families. Her passion and love for teaching provides a strong understanding of her involvement practices.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

Name (pseudonym)	Years Taught	Current Grade Level	Educational Background
Ashley	5 years	Kindergarten	Bachelor's in Early Childhood
Gabriella	14 years	Kindergarten	Bachelor's in Elementary Education Masters in Instructional Leadership and Technology National Board Certification in Early Childhood Master's in Early Childhood
Sarah	13 years	Pre-Kindergarten	Bachelor's in Early Childhood
Tracy	10 years	Pre-Kindergarten	Bachelor's in Early Childhood
Beverly	22 years	Pre-Kindergarten	Master's in Early Childhood National Board Certified in Early Childhood

Data Collection

Data were collected through a variety of methods. Interviews with current teachers provide the most data for this study. Each teacher signed a consent form before the initial interview. Interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms over a period of three months and lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. Each teacher was interviewed three times: an initial interview to understand her parent involvement practices, an interview to see how she felt her parent involvement practices were proceeding, and an interview regarding the outcomes she had

noticed from her efforts to involve parents. Interview questions were semi-structured and open ended (See Appendix A). Beverly was included in the study because another teacher in the district recommended her based on her family involvement practices. She was retired and I thought it would be interesting to gain her perspective on how involvement has changed over time. I interviewed her once for a duration of 43 minutes.

Lastly, a family survey was created through Qualtrics and a link was sent to each teacher for them to pass on to their parents, along with a recruitment email typed up from me. The survey included questions regarding family perceptions about their child's teacher's involvement practices (See Appendix B). Families gave consent by reading information regarding the study and checking that they were willing to participate and were of 18 years of age. A survey was sent out at the beginning of the year to gain a background understanding of families and their prior experience working with teachers as well as their expectations. A final survey was sent out after the interviews were completed to see how families were involved and whether their involvement increased due to their teacher's involvement practices. For the beginning of the year survey, there were 36 responses and for the end of the year survey there were 27 responses, for a total of 63. It is estimated that at least 91 families received the invitation to participate, which is roughly a 39% response rate for the beginning of the year, a 29% response rate for the end of the year, and a 69% response rate overall.

Data Analysis

I utilized Creswell's (2018) Data Analysis Spiral to analyze and understand my interview data. Through this process "the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (p. 185). I transcribed each interview then began the first part of the spiral, managing and organizing the data, which evolves into reading and

memoing emergent ideas and then describing and classifying codes into themes. The last part of the spiral includes developing and assessing interpretations and representing and visualizing the data (Creswell, Figure 8.1). In summary, I began by reading the data and taking notes while recognizing common ideas or words. I developed codes for words, phrases, or ideas that were said frequently and then organized the codes into common themes (See Appendix C). I represented my data by organizing and grouping it in a two-column table. One column included my codes and themes from the teacher interviews and the other column included the codes and themes from the two open-ended questions that families answered on the survey. By analyzing them as separate groups, I was able to compare them and see where ideas and perspectives were aligned.

For the surveys, descriptive statistics were performed for all variables. However, since the sample size for the post-test survey was less than 30, normal bivariate statistical tests could not be performed. Therefore, these results should be considered suggestive. However, the results are compared to the perceptions of the teachers where appropriate to offer a triangulation between perceptions about the importance of parental involvement and to also consider how this results in actual parental involvement activities.

Researcher's Role

My epistemological stance guides my theory and research. I identify most with constructionism. I agree with Crotty (1998) that meaning is not discovered but constructed and that in order to construct meaning from objects one has to consciously engage with it. I believe that our experiences and backgrounds shape our viewpoint and that objects only acquire meaning when we interact with it. Crotty explains this by saying that "our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning" (p. 54). I am particularly drawn to the idea of openness to

develop “new or richer meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). As a teacher, I need to be open to new ideas and strategies to best support my students and their learning. My background, educational viewpoint, and willingness to be flexible when it comes to new ideas allow me to be a better teacher because I am able to construct a deeper meaning as noted in my subjectivity statement (See Appendix D). One final idea from Crotty is there is “no true or valid interpretation” (p. 47) with constructionism. This is similar for classroom teachers because each teacher has their own teaching style that they have come to discover and construct over time based on their experiences and knowledge of teaching.

My research study and my constructionist standpoint inform my theoretical perspective of phenomenology. An important component in understanding phenomenology is intentionality, which is the idea that when “our mind becomes conscious of something, when it ‘knows’ something, it reaches out to, and into, that object” (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). Crotty further explains this from the phenomenological perspective, with the idea that as beings living in the world and the world being a human world, they cannot be described apart from one another but must go together because of the relationship we have as conscious individuals with the object, our world (p. 79). Crotty also discusses constructionism when writing about phenomenology because both are centered on the idea that our experiences affect our meaning and that our willingness to be open to new ideas can help us to better understand that phenomenon. Crotty explains this further by saying we have to “let the experience of phenomena speak to us at first hand” and therefore we need to put aside or “bracket” or current understanding of it (p. 79). The goal of my research is to better understand the phenomena I am studying and in order to do that I need to “break free and see the world afresh” (Crotty, 1998, p. 86).

Following my constructionist viewpoint and phenomenological perspective, I believe that individuals develop and construct meaning through their experiences and interactions with objects, and that we have to look at the phenomenon we are studying with fresh eyes in order to better understand its underlying meaning. I value diverse viewpoints and recognize its importance in my study. I believe that family involvement is an important component in a child's behavior and academic success, but in order to fully understand what can be done to increase involvement, I need to step away from my teacher lens and work to uncover the family perspective in regards to involvement. I also believe that I not only need to better understand the family perspective but also the perspectives of different teachers, since each teacher will each have different experiences and backgrounds that shape their teaching practices. My epistemological stance and theoretical perspective are supported by the following research questions: How do parents view early childhood teachers' parent involvement practices? How are early childhood teachers promoting and supporting parent involvement in the classroom?

Trustworthiness

This study focuses on the family involvement practices of teachers in one district, which can limit the transferability of the study's findings. If this study were replicated in another district, the findings may vary depending on the characteristics of that school/district. For example, different areas may not have access to the same resources and materials and may need to use a different approach to promote family involvement. Other schools and districts may be significantly smaller and have more personal interactions with their families, therefore strengthening that relationship. While the family involvement practices may vary in different places, research supports the outcome of the positive effects that family involvement has on teachers, students, and families, therefore strengthening the dependability of the study. In terms

of credibility, member checking was used to validate the researchers' interpretations of the interview data (Creswell, 2018). This was done by sending each teacher a copy of their transcripts for them to look over and provide feedback on. This process strengthens the overall trustworthiness of the study because teachers were given an opportunity to read their interviews and make corrections if needed.

Ethical Issues

When exploring the ethical issues relating to the study, I think the most significant one would be the researcher's role in the collection and analysis of the data. Creswell (2018) discusses reflexivity, which is the role a researcher's background and experiences play on their understanding of the data and could potentially shape the direction of the study. As a kindergarten teacher in the same district, it is difficult to separate your personal perspective and beliefs from that of the participants. Various approaches were used in order to ensure that the data was accurately represented and not impacted by my personal philosophy regarding family involvement. Interview questions were developed beforehand that focused on the participants perspectives and ideas while avoiding leading questions. Also, the findings reported came from multiple perspectives including teachers and families. Participants were also asked to check the data for accurate analysis and were then provided with the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

After analyzing the interviews and surveys, five common themes emerged, that included *involvement, communication, relationships, impacts, and perspectives.* In regards to involvement, teachers discussed the different opportunities they offer for involvement, and the amount of involvement they had from families. Families reported on the involvement activities

they participated in at the beginning and end of semester survey. Communication was perhaps the most discussed topic among teachers and families. Teachers mentioned the various methods they used for communication, how frequently they contact families, and the information that they communicate. Families spoke about what they wanted in terms of communication and answered how frequently and what methods of communication their teacher used. The next major theme was building relationships and working together, which was frequently brought up by all five teachers. This included the importance of including families and showing love and care for their students. The effect of involvement, communication, and building relationships was an important component discussed by each teacher. The final theme that correlates directly with my last research question: How are families' and teachers' perspectives regarding involvement aligned? Teachers and families discussed and reported their perspective regarding family involvement, with major differences coming from the teachers. However, more similarities were found among teachers and families than was expected.

Table 2

Results

Research Question	Theme(s) that answered the RQ
How are early childhood teachers promoting and support family involvement?	Involvement, Communication, and Relationships
What are the perceived effects of the teachers' involvement practices?	Impacts
How do families view early childhood teachers' involvement practices?	Perspectives
What do families look for from their child's teacher to encourage involvement?	Perspectives
How are families' and teachers' perspectives regarding involvement aligned?	Perspectives

Involvement

Teacher Involvement Efforts

Each teacher I spoke with made a significant effort to involve families. The four teachers who are currently teaching all mentioned the importance of having an "open-door policy" and wanting families to feel welcome to come to the classroom. Gabriella mentioned "parent involvement in the classroom as "we invite them, we say we have an open-door policy." That open-door policy was an important component for teachers because three of the teachers mentioned their class was like a family. Sarah stated, "I treat this room like we're a family… I don't want this to be 'this is my room, this is my place' you know, I just want it to feel like ours." Teachers also mentioned that they wanted to reach everyone in their involvement practices including working families, which they did by providing multiple opportunities for involvement.

Involvement Opportunities

Multiple opportunities for involvement were offered to "target" each family. Teachers offered several ways for families to be involved with the classroom depending on their availability. One way that working families were able to help and be involved was by cutting lamination sent home by the teacher or sending supplies to school. This allowed them to feel like they were still a valuable part of the classroom even if they couldn't be present. However, families who were more flexible in their availability were offered various ways to be involved in the class that included working with student groups, leading activities, coming to teach about their occupation or specialty, and helping with class parties. Tracy also mentioned one way that her school involves fathers, which is through the Watch DOGS (Dads of Great Students) program. Through this program, dads come to school during the day and are there to help by providing an extra hand and also offering students with a male role model. These Watch DOGS are not just dads but can also be other male family members or even teacher spouses. One of the

biggest involvement practices offered by teachers was providing families with activities they could do at home, which included various learning activities and games. A couple of the teachers mentioned that families would be more likely to engage in the activities if they were "meaningful and short" and "fun, not stressful." Teachers clearly offered various ways for families to be involved by helping at home and in the classroom, the final way that families could be involved was by attending school events. A variety of school events were offered at each teacher's school. One that each school offered was Back to School night, where families and students can come to the classroom and meet the teacher before school starts to become familiar and comfortable. Gabriella and Sarah's schools took this a step further by offering family "chat" nights, where families sign up for a 10-minute slot to meet with the teacher and have an opportunity to talk about their child, how they learn, their likes/dislikes, or any challenges they may have. This was done the second week of school and was a valuable event for teachers because it provided them with a deeper understanding of their students as well as started to create that relationship with the families.

Amount of Involvement

With a range of involvement opportunities, also came a range of involvement participation for each teacher. When asked about the percent of families that were involved at the mid-semester interview, the lowest amount was from Gabriella who reported she only had 20%, which she felt was because a majority of her students were transfer students who either didn't attend pre-k or didn't attend a school in her district the year before. She also mentioned that this year was a "difficult year" because a lot of issues and needs came up regarding families. In the second interview, she discussed her plans for increasing that involvement, which included continuing to reach out and communicate with her families. By the end of the semester, she

reported that her involvement had increased to 60-70%. Ashley also reported an increase from 70% at the beginning of the year to 85% at the end of the year. The pre-k teachers didn't see a change in their percentage, although Sarah mentioned the involvement was "more directed… more fruitful," because families were given specific feedback and activities to work on with their child. When asked about why there was no change, they both reported that a big component was that many of their families were transfers who were not at their home school and would be going to a different school next year. They mentioned there was a lack of involvement among families who didn't want to get too invested because they were either already involved with another school or would be attending another school next year.

While each teacher had a different experience with the amount of family involvement, all four current teachers reported that they had close to 100% involvement at parent-teacher conferences. Sarah mentioned that she talked with families who could not meet in person either through phone or email and Tracy mentioned there were only two that she could not meet with for conferences. This involvement correlates with the survey response from families who selected parent-teacher conferences as the third most important involvement practice and 88.9% of respondents reported that they attended parent-teacher conferences in the final survey.

Table 3

Family Involvement Participation for Fall 2018

Involvement Activity	Percentage
Helped with homework/reading	74%
Volunteered at school	44%
Participated in school fundraisers	62.9%
Helped my classroom teachers (copies, Thursday folders, party planning, supplies)	40.7%
Attended school events (parties, performances, fall festival etc.)	74%
Attended parent-teacher conferences	88.9%
Communicated with school and classroom teacher	77.8%

Note: 27 participants answered this question

Communication

Family Need

Beverly discussed how at the start of her career it was rare for families to be divorced or for children to not be living with their parents; however, by the end of her career she saw more diversity in family dynamics, including blended families, foster parents, or children living with grandparents. She said, "The communication had to change because I could not reach everyone with a paper newsletter." Each teacher mentioned the importance of knowing your families and their communication needs. Sarah said that:

> Every year there's somebody that needs something special, there's always going to be a parent that needs things double copied, two Thursday folders… there's always going to be a family that needs that, and that's our job.

This is connected with what the other teachers reported too, mentioning that you have to take each family into consideration, whether they are divorced and need multiple copies or if they are grandparents who have limited access to technology and need those paper copies or phone calls instead.

Methods

Teachers utilized various methods of communication to reach every parent. Ashley said, "I'm trying to target each way of communication, that I can at least target them at least one time." These methods included paper announcements and newsletters, which were also sent digitally by most teachers, phone calls, technology, and face-to-face. Families verified the variety of communication methods, with 55.5% reporting that their teacher used 2-3 types of communication with the most frequent being email, newsletters, and technology.

Table 4

Teacher Communication Methods

Communication Method	Percentage
Email	66%
Phone	37%
Newsletters	59.2%
Mobile App	51.9%
Other: please type in	10% (in person)

Note: 27 participants answered this question

Table 5

Number of Communication Methods Selected

Amount	Percentage
0	3.7%
1	25.9%
2	25.9%
3	29.6%
4	14.8%

Ashley also mentioned using Facebook to communicate with families. She did this by creating a group where she could post pictures, classroom news, and announcements. The Facebook group also allowed her to communicate with families individually and directly or for families to contact her. Her use of Facebook is very similar to the app SeeSaw, which was used by Gabriella and Tracy for the same purpose of communicating with families about what is happening in the classroom by posting pictures and having that direct, instant line of communication. Sarah used email to send classroom pictures or share information about classroom news and events. The most important method of communication that was brought up by all of the current teachers was face-to-face communication, which occurred primarily at pickup and drop-off. This type of communication was brought up consistently by each teacher in

every interview with high frequency and intensity. Gabriella mentioned that face-to-face was their "critical piece" in communicating and getting those families involved. Tracy mentioned that face-to-face and phone calls were essential for communicating important information that could be misunderstood in an email. Phone calls were only used when teachers felt it was necessary or needed to speak with a guardian during school, which is reflected in that only 37% of families reported their teacher called them.

Frequency

Ashley and Sarah brought up openness and consistency of communication. Gabriella also mentioned that it is important to have that "open-line of communication." Ashley mentioned that consistency was important because it would otherwise confuse families. This was also brought up by one family member who said they would feel more encouraged to be involved if their teacher had "clear and consistent communication." Each teacher communicated regularly, with Ashley and Sarah communicating daily either through posts on the Facebook group or at pickup and drop-off. Every teacher communicated at least weekly with their families through email and newsletters and one sent a newsletter every month. The survey results reflected this consistent communication with 96.3% of respondents agreeing that their teacher communicated with them on a regular basis.

Table 6

Teacher Communication

My child's teacher communicated with me on a regular basis about my child's progress.	
Choice	Percentage
Strongly Agree	77.8%
Somewhat Agree	18.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	0%
Somewhat Disagree	3.7%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Mean	1.27
Standard Deviation	.66

Note: 27 participants answered this question; Mean and Standard Deviation Scale (Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neither = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5)

Information

Communication was mostly used to keep families updated and informed on what was happening in the classroom, the curriculum they were working on, and about upcoming events or ways for them to be involved. However, communication was also used to address academic concerns or behavior issues, both negative and positive. Gabriella and Tracy mentioned that their principals would do "positive phone calls" for students who had a great week or needed some special recognition. Also, Sarah and Tracy mentioned providing education materials to families that included parenting tips and information about their child's learning and development. Resources in the school and community were among the most unique types of information provided by teachers. Gabriella said:

> I will say that we do a really good job of meeting our parents' needs. I think that it is difficult because um a lot of people are like 'well you're a teacher, you teach but a lot of time I feel like a social worker… We kind of assume that in the classroom is

more about academics and stuff where as several of our school; it's more about the social side and how to get those resources.

Every teacher brought up providing families with resources they may need, however, Gabriella and Sarah brought up how it was more of a need this year than it ever has before because of their family dynamics in the classroom.

Relationships

Building relationships with families and students and working together was a very important topic brought up by every teacher in each interview. When asked how family involvement has changed the relationships in the classroom, Sarah said:

> When I first started teaching I was so scared of parents and I was terrified that they were going to come into the room and think that I was doing something wrong or think that they could do something better than me or question what I was doing or not trust, you know and so I never, I wanted to… keep them out. I just wanted them to not come. I think that changing that mentality has just really made an improvement in my teaching, it's improved what we're doing as a team and now I see it more as opportunities for us to teach together, for them to bring in their expertise and teach and um for them to feel like they're contributing to their child's education where in some instances they don't feel like they have that ability. So, I just feel like that has been so beneficial and I think that has improved my teaching because… I think that knowing that just because I'm a teacher doesn't mean that I'm the only teacher.

Being scared to involve families initially was also brought up by Ashley and she mentioned how including them has changed her classroom dynamic. Teachers discussed that in order to build those relationships you have to show that you love and care for their child, which Ashley said is done by starting with positive feedback about their child instead of first talking about the issues

or concerns. Also, each teacher mentioned the importance of working together. When asked about her philosophy of family involvement, Tracy said, "I want parents to be involved… this isn't just a one-man show… it takes our village here, our community and I want them to be a part of it." Ashley also referred to working with families as being a part of a village, which reflects a community coming together for a common good.

Impacts

Teachers utilize a variety of practices and strategies to involve, communicate, and build relationships with families, however their reasoning for doing these and making that extra effort lies in the effects those practices have on the families, students, teacher, and classroom. Teachers mentioned the effects of each but many of the outcomes were brought up multiple times, making it easier to discuss them all together instead of within each section. Building community within the school and classroom was one of the most significant outcomes of involvement. One form of community established was parent networks, which was done through interaction at events and communication online. Teachers reported that families felt more comfortable and welcome knowing the families of other students, which led them to be more involved. Another way that community was formed was through the relationships that were developed between teacher, parent, and student. Teacher efforts in involving families, communicating with them consistently, and making an effort to build those relationships, led to stronger relationships between the student and teacher in the classroom. Tracy said that a student in her class was "more comfortable, more relaxed" knowing that their teacher and parent were working together. Each teacher mentioned how students developed more trust and comfort in the classroom knowing their teacher and family interact with one another. The strengthened relationship that students and teacher had with one another led to a stronger relationship with the family and

teacher because the family saw that the teacher cared for their child and that the child loves school. Sarah mentioned that it was a "reciprocal relationship," which can be seen in Figure 1.

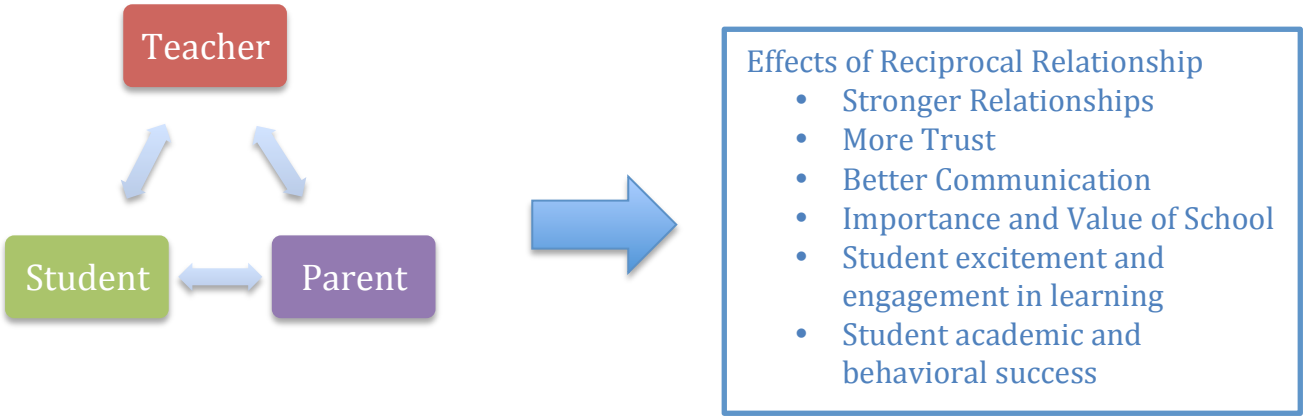

Figure 1. Reciprocal Relationship

This reciprocal relationship also impacts student learning and engagement. Teachers mentioned that as they communicate and work hard to involve families and build those relationships, that families begin to understand the importance of school, which increases their involvement at school, at home, and in the classroom. This increased involvement is noticed by students and one teacher reported that they are "proud" to see their families involved and that students see more value in school and are more likely to be engaged and work hard when they see that it is also valued by their families. The biggest impact of involvement noticed by teachers is in students' academic and emotional growth. When asked about the impact that involvement has, Ashley said, "you can see the difference in [student] learning, behavior, everything." She went on to provide a comparison by explaining that her student of a family who was very involved does great academically and has no behavior issues, however, another student she had of parents who weren't as involved was struggling with being where he needed to be

academically and couldn't focus or sit still. These academic and social differences were brought up by every teacher, which illustrates the importance of communication, involvement, and building relationships.

Teacher/Family Views

Teacher Perspective

This is the last major theme that answers how families view involvement and how those views are aligned with teachers. The first perspective that we need to discuss is the teacher perspective regarding their views and how they understand families. One thing that was overwhelmingly found among the teachers was a love for their jobs and recognition of how important their job was. Sarah discussed the importance of teaching when asked about her philosophy of involvement:

> I always tell [parents] it's not lost on me that your sending me the person, the thing that means the most to you in the world… and so my philosophy is these are not my children, these are other people hearts that they take out of their chest and bring to my classroom and I have to honor that.

This illustrates that teachers can understand the parent perspective and respect how important their job is. Ashley and Sarah explained that they choose their involvement practices based on what they would want to see from their own child's teacher. Understanding the parent perspective was also mentioned by Gabriella and Sarah who did the parent chat nights because by talking with the parents they were able to better understand the family dynamics at home and how to build a relationship from there. The last important level of understanding mentioned by teachers was family backgrounds. This was brought up in reference to involvement by Gabriella who said, "parents only know education based on their background." She continued by

explaining that if parents have had negative experiences with school that they will bring those feelings to their child's classroom and would not see involvement as important. Tracy mentioned that many parents think pre-k is just play and so showing them that they are actually learning helps to get them more involved. Ashley said her dream was for parents to be on the same page and "accept what you're saying and follow through with it." By recognizing family backgrounds and their experience with education, teachers were better able to individualize their involvement efforts and help families to be on the same page.

Parent Perspective

Sarah and Ashley mentioned that it is important to show families how they can be involved because parents/caretakers think they have nothing to offer or have no value to their child and that it's the teacher's job to teach. This comes from the teachers understanding of families but in the initial survey one parent said:

> Sometimes I'm not sure what to ask, how to ask it, or fear my questions will add even more to the teacher's already full plate, so I don't seek to question or address it.

This was related to seeking out help to address academic needs for their child, which was brought up by other parents too who stated that they would be more encouraged to be involved if the teacher communicates about what they can do to at home to reinforce what they are learning at school. Another parents said:

> Letting me know what is needed is very helpful. There is a lot I can do, but I want to make sure that I am solving the problems the teacher is actually facing.

Communication was something that was brought up by a majority of families in the surveys. They said they look for open and regular communication from their child's teacher relating to what they can do, what their child's academic needs are, and how they can help in the classroom.

In regards to the impacts of involvement, 100% of families who took the initial and end of the year survey agreed that being involved helps their child's growth academically and socially.

Table 7

Beginning of the Year Survey

Being involved is an important part of my child's academic and emotional growth	
Answer Choice	Percentage
Strongly Agree	86.1%
Somewhat Agree	13.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0%
Somewhat Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Mean	1.08
Standard Deviation	.21

Note: 36 participants answered this question; Mean and Standard Deviation Scale (Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neither = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5)

Table 8

End of Year Survey

Being involved is an important part of my child's academic and emotional growth	
Strongly Agree	100%
Somewhat Agree	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0%
Somewhat Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%

Note: 27 participants answered this question; Mean and Standard Deviation Scale (Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neither = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5); Mean and Standard Deviation were not calculated since Strongly Agree was chosen by every participant.

Differences and Similarities

Gabriella said that there is a "different dichotomy" when it comes to teacher and family views. This was discussed by Sarah who said:

> I feel like parents, there's a discrepancy as far as what they think is helpful and what they think of school being and what I think is helpful.

Gabriella further explained by saying that an important component of learning is play but that that is a hard concept for families to understand because they think of learning as "paper-pencil tasks."

There was limited data on teacher and family differences regarding their view of involvement, however the data to support the similarities was much stronger. One thing that was consistent among both teachers and families was the importance of communication and what was communicated. In the initial survey families responded that what they looked for from their classroom teacher was communication about their students' progress/ needs, being told what they can do to help, and having an open line of communication. All of these areas were mentioned multiple times by teachers as is discussed in the previous themes, signifying the value of communication for teachers too. Another thing that families mentioned was wanting more activities and opportunities to reinforce learning at home. Sarah spoke in regards to reinforcement at home by explaining that she wanted "the time that they spend with their kids to be focused on the right thing," which she did by offering those meaningful and short activities that connected with what the child was learning at school. Other teachers also mentioned providing families with those opportunities through the year.

Perhaps the most important similarities in teacher and family views was regarding what they think are the most important involvement practices. In the initial survey, families were asked to rank various involvement opportunities by level of importance. The most important involvement practice for families was 'communicating with the school and classroom teacher," the second most important was 'helping with homework," and the last was 'attending parent-teacher conferences.' When looking at the final survey of activities that families actually

participated in during the semester (see Table 2), 88.9% reported attending parent-teacher conferences, 77.8% reported communicating with the school and classroom teacher, and 74% reported helping with homework and attending school events. This connects with their initial views on what they felt were the most important (see Table 9) but this also aligns with teachers. When asked what teachers felt were the most important family involvement practices, 4 of 5 mentioned working or reading with their child at home. However, the importance of communication and school events was also mentioned throughout the interviews by the teachers and is represented in the previous themes. Overall, family and teacher views had more similarities than differences.

Table 9

Beginning of Year Survey

Involvement Activity	Percentage
Helping with homework/reading	88.9%
Volunteering at school	52.8%
Participating in school fundraisers	55.5%
Helping my classroom teacher (copying, Thursday folders, party planning, supplies, etc).	33.3%
Attending school events (back to school night, parties, performances, jog-a-thon, fall festival)	86%
Attending parent-teacher conferences	86%
Communicating with the school and classroom teacher	58.3%

Note: 36 participants answered this question

Table 10

Number of Activities Selected

Amount	Percentage
0	0%
1	11.1%
2	0%
3	5.6%
4	33.3%
5	19.4%
6	8.3%
7	22.2%

Chapter 5: Discussion

Mixed methods is used when a researcher is collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in order to gain a better understanding of the research topic. My research design was convergent because I collected the data, analyzed them separately, and then compared them together to see the results and implications (Creswell, 2018). The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of teachers' involvement practices, why those practices are important, how their student's families view those involvement practices, and whether teachers and parents' views are aligned. The results provided various practices that teachers are utilizing in the classroom as well as the effects of those practices on family and student involvement in the classroom. While the study did provide some differences in teacher and parent views, their views were more closely aligned than was expected.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecologicaly Systems Theory (1979) provided a theoretical framework for this study. This study explored how the direct influences that make up a child's microsystem (parents and teachers) interact with one another making up the mesosystem. Each teacher had a different interaction with families based on their families' background, education, and experience with school. This required them to make accommodations to meet each families' needs and to develop that positive relationship with families. While they each had different experiences working with families, this study helped show the importance of working with families and the impact that their involvement has on students' growth and development.

Epstein's *Framework of Six Types of Involvement* (2009) made up the second part of my theoretical framework. She discussed in detail the different types of involvement and how teachers can support that involvement. The first involvement type was *Parenting*, which is helping families establish a home environment. *Communicating* with parents on a regular basis

about their child was the second. Next was offering parents opportunities to *Volunteer*. The fourth type of involvement for teachers was offering *Learning at Home*. Finally, she discussed including families on *Decision Making* for the child and school and *Collaborating with Community*, which included connecting families with services and resources in the community. The classroom teachers who participated in this study utilized all six of these involvement types. They talked extensively about wanting to provide opportunities so that everyone could be involved whether that included coming to the classroom to teach, read or help with small groups or helping at home by cutting lamination or sending supplies and materials to school. Every teacher wanted their families to feel like they were also a part of the classroom, which they did by having an open-door policy. Teachers also provided families with various learning activities they could do at home, articles and information on their child's development and a couple even discussed the increased need of putting families in touch with school or community resources. Overall, Epstein's framework provides teachers with a strong foundation of involvement strategies to consider when wanting to increase family involvement and takes every component of family involvement into consideration.

One form of involvement that was discussed by Child Welfare (2013) and Opondo et al. (2016) was the importance and impact of father involvement. Each teacher discussed that they wanted to reach everyone, but Tracy mentioned one way that her school targets father involvement was through the Watch DOGS (Dads of Great Students) program. The discussion about how specifically fathers were involved was brief, and the researcher did not collect data on what percent of family involvement was women versus men. However, Opondo et al. (2016) mentioned how father involvement can lead to an increase of family involvement overall, suggesting that providing more specific opportunities for fathers to be involved should be

something teachers and schools should consider. Teachers clearly understood their role in implementing these various involvement practices and had multiple approaches for meeting their families needs.

Teachers have a valuable role in promoting involvement but Coleman and Wallinga (2000) discuss the various roles that families play in supporting their child. One role is the *Educator* role, which is interacting and helping their child at home to continue their learning. Another role is the *Support* role, which is done through assisting the classroom teacher in any way by helping in the classroom or providing materials. It also includes involvement at school events and communicating with the classroom teacher. The activities that families reported being involved in the most on the final survey of this study were helping with homework, attending school events/parent teacher conferences, and communicating with the school and classroom teacher. These practices are aligned with the *Support* and *Educator* role and also led to a theme of communication.

Baker (1997) found in her study that parents wanted more "personalized and individualized contact with their child's teacher" (p. 143). Jordan, Park and Snow (2000) and Anderson (2007) further discussed communication in the forms of teacher invitations. Their studies found that parents welcomed the opportunity to participate and were more likely to be involved if they were invited. This study supports these findings because families who completed the initial survey brought up communication and said they would feel more encouraged to be involved if their teacher communicated with them more consistently about the needs of their child as well as how they could help at school and at home. The teachers addressed their parents' concerns by discussing their communication strategies which included various types of communication from using technology or face-to-face, as well as how frequently they

communicated with families and what they communicated about. A couple of the teachers who were interviewed also mentioned that an important component of involvement was inviting families to the classroom. These efforts were positively viewed by families who reported that their teacher communicated with them on a regular basis and used multiple methods to reach out, which they appreciated. Teachers also reported an increase in their family involvement by the end of the semester as a result of their communication and their increased communication also led to strengthened relationships between students, teachers, and parents.

The literature review focused primarily on types of involvement and the impacts, however relationships were not mentioned in the studies as a component of involvement. This was a major theme brought up by teachers in this study who discussed the importance of building relationships with not just their students but also their families. The idea of a reciprocal relationship was brought up and how the relationship between the student and teacher becomes stronger when the teacher and parent work together, which also leads to a strengthened relationship between the child and parent. Teachers discussed various ways they worked to build those relationships through their involvement practices. Those strengthened relationships lead to various benefits.

One of the themes was impacts, which included the effects of teachers' involvement practices. Park (2013) discussed in her study how family involvement led to better academic scores and better behavior in the classroom from students. Zellman (1998) also mentioned an increase in reading levels when families were involved. Each teacher in the present study discussed how involvement impacts student learning and growth. One teacher mentioned that she could tell which students had parents who were working with them at home because she could see by how the child performed academically or how they behaved in the classroom. These

academic and behavioral impacts suggest how important it is to involve families and work to reach those families who are less likely to be involved. Gabriella specifically discussed her continued efforts to get families who were hard to reach involved by increasing her communication and working to build that relationship, which supports what Feuerstein (2000) reported that more contact with families leads to more involvement. Also, each teacher, with the exception of one, reported an increase of involvement or that the involvement remained the same but was more meaningful because families were provided with clearer opportunities for how to be involved. Another impact that teachers mentioned was that parents developed social networks with one another through the technology or seeing each other at school/classroom events. Teachers reported that families felt more encouraged to be involved because they knew other families. Parent networks were also discussed by Nation (2015) who mentioned one result of the program was families made connections with other families, increasing their parent network. Having other families to reach out to helps them to feel like they are part of a community. One final impact discussed by Domina (2005) that this study supports is that parent involvement illustrates the importance of school. Teachers in this study mentioned that when children see their families involved at school, interacting with the teachers, and working with them at home, that they see the value of school and are more likely to be engaged and participate in the classroom. Involvement clearly plays a vital role in the impact of a child/student both behaviorally and academically, signifying the importance of encouraging involvement with families.

The last major question this study sought to answer was how families viewed their teacher's involvement practices and whether teachers' and families' views were aligned. Anderson (2007) explains that teachers and families view involvement differently with teachers

looking for a presence at school and parents thinking they are involved if they are helping at home and getting them to school. Teachers in this study briefly mentioned that there can sometimes be differing opinions on what parents think is helpful and what teachers find helpful or that parents may not recognize that school is not only focused on learning, but that play is also a fundamental part of development. However, teachers continued to speak about how they just had to communicate with families about why play is important and what happens at school, because many of them had very different educational experiences. While there were slight differences in perspectives between teachers and families, these differences were more related with what was taught and not the importance of involvement. The surveys clearly illustrated that families felt their involvement and communication with the school and classroom teachers were vital for the success of their child. Their beliefs were supported by the amount of involvement activities they participated in throughout the semester. Families clearly see involvement as important but they need to be provided with those opportunities, which each teacher did by communicating with them and offering various forms of involvement at school and at home.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a lot of important information regarding family involvement, there are some limitations. The first is that the study was limited to teachers in a suburban school district who may have very different involvement practices based on the resources they are provided from the school and community and also the types of families they serve. Future research could replicate this study in rural or urban districts to compare how the characteristics of each setting impact the involvement practices of teachers and families. Another limitation is the low involvement from families completing the surveys. While it did provide with some meaningful findings, it could also be the case that the majority of families who completed the

surveys are the ones who are already involved compared to those who are not. It is hard to say that the findings from the surveys reflect what all families feel when there was such low participation in survey completion. Another limitation of the surveys is that we were not able to know which parents completed the surveys at the beginning and end of the semester. It would have been beneficial knowing who completed the surveys to see how their individual views changed over the course of the semester based on their teachers' involvement practices. Further research could focus more on the families' views by including them in interviews as well as trying to reach a more diverse group of families. The last limitation is that this study focused on teachers with good involvement practices in order to understand the impact and how families viewed those practices. This study provided us with more knowledge on those impacts and clearly showed that parents had positive views about their child's teacher's involvement practice. However, it would be interesting to compare these views with families who have teachers that are believed to have average or poor involvement practice. While there are further things to be explored, a lot was also gained from this study that has meaningful implications.

Implications

A major implication of this study is that it provides current and future teachers with strategies and ideas they can directly implement in their own classrooms to increase their family involvement. Families want to be involved but as mentioned, are not sure how to be involved or they do not want to ask for help because they know teachers are busy. It is our job as teachers to make sure we reach out to our families by inviting them and encouraging them to be involved.

One thing that was brought up by almost every teacher was how meaningful this study was for their own teaching practice. They mentioned that the study allowed them to reflect on their practice and reminded them how important family involvement was, which motivated them

to make more of an effort to involve families and communicate consistently. Ansari (2016) mentioned that when teachers and staff are trained on how to involve families, there is an increase in parent involvement. This is an important implication for teachers and schools because teachers may be overwhelmed with what needs to be done at school in terms of grading or other responsibilities, and they may forget the importance of family involvement. By providing opportunities for reflection and collaboration through regularly scheduled meetings to discuss family involvement, teachers will have a constant reminder of its value and will continue to make it a priority in their teaching practice.

Conclusion

Family involvement is essential to a child's academic and behavioral success. This study helped to illustrate its importance by providing us with a better understanding of specific practices teachers are doing in the classroom that lead to stronger family involvement outcomes. It has allowed us to see the direct impacts of involvement and has provided an insight into the views of teachers and families. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed the various systems that impact a child's development, two of which are the teacher and the family. These two systems must work together in order for a child to have the most success. School and home should not be separate entities but instead should be enmeshed with one another to provide the child with the most nurturing environment. When teachers and schools understand the value of family involvement and make various efforts to include families in their child's education, it leads to multiple benefits for the child, teacher, and families. This study helps provide a strong foundation in understanding family involvement, however, continued research should be done to keep teachers up to date with evolving practice and provide a deeper insight into the views of families.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Initial Interview

* Initial interview questions were used for Beverly as well but were changed to past tense.

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What was your degree in? Have you done any additional training or program in early childhood?
3. What got you interested in wanting to be a teacher?
4. What led you to teaching K/ Pre-K?
5. What grades have you previously taught? In student teaching?
6. What communication methods do you use to contact parents? (email, call, app, newsletters, blog, folders)
7. How do you decide which communication tools you use?
8. Has there been a time where you had to specialize communication for parents? Can you describe the situation? (Grandparents, split parents)
9. How frequently do you contact parents?
10. What is your philosophy regarding parent involvement?
11. What are the impacts you **expect** from parent involvement?
12. What are the impacts you **see** from parent involvement? Are there some memorable experiences?
13. What opportunities do you offer for your parents to be involved in your classroom?
14. What other resources do you use to keep parents informed?
15. Explain parental involvement in the three domains (Home, school, classroom). Ask them to give examples? *(If haven't already!)
16. Do you offer your parents any extra support or do you let them know about services available outside of school? (For example, monthly parent education classes?)
17. What plans do you have to involve your parents this school year

Mid-Semester Interview

1. How is your year going?
2. What percentage of your parents would you say are highly involved (help at home, help at school, participates in school activities, regular communication)?
3. What regular practices do you have in place to help parent be accountable for helping their children at home?
4. What parent involvement practices have you implemented so far this year?
5. What changes have you noticed in children's behavior due to parent involvement?
6. What changes have you seen in parent involvement due to an increase in communication?
7. How has parent involvement changed …
    - Relationships
    - Reinforcement at home
    - Classroom Culture
    - Student engagement

8. Are parents more or less involved this year compared to previous years?
9. What obstacles or challenges have you faced in regards to parent involvement?
10. Have you made any changes to your parent involvement practices? Why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about parent involvement and communication?

Final Interview

1. How has the rest of your year gone?
2. How are you feeling about your parent involvement in the classroom?
3. Would you say your percentage of parent involvement has changed since we last spoke?
4. What level of involvement would you say parents had with…
    - Helping with homework
    - Volunteering at school
    - Participating in school fundraisers
    - Helping my classroom teacher (copying, Thursday folders, party planning, supplies, etc.)
    - Attending school events (back-to-school night, parties, performances, jog-a-thon, fall festival)
    - Attending parent-teacher conferences
    - Communicating with the school and classroom teacher

5. Out of the list we discussed, what do you think are the most important parent involvement practices?
6. Have you made any changes to your parent involvement practices since we last spoke? Please describe
7. What impacts have you noticed on your students and your classroom because of your parent involvement practices?
8. Has your philosophy on parent involvement changed at all this year?
9. What plans do you have to continue or increase your parent involvement after winter break?
10. Compared to previous years, how has you parent involvement changed? What led you to make those changes?
11. Do you plan to do anything differently next year in regards to parent involvement? Why?
12. When I surveyed parents, they said they would be more involved if the classroom teacher communicated consistently about the needs of the classroom and their student and if they made an effort to get to know parents so they felt welcome to be involved. Would you agree? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Beginning of Year Survey

Q2 What is your age range?

- ○ 18-23 (1)
- ○ 23-30 (2)
- ○ 30-40 (3)
- ○ 40+ (4)

Q3 How many children do you have?

- ○ 1 (1)
- ○ 2 (2)
- ○ 3 (3)
- ○ 4 or more (4)

Q4 I have a lot of experience working with classroom teachers.

- ○ Strongly agree (13)
- ○ Somewhat agree (14)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (15)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (16)
- ○ Strongly disagree (17)

Q5 My past experience working with teachers has been positive.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q6 Being involved helps my child's academic and emotional growth.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q7 Being involved helps my child's educational success.

- ○ Strongly agree (18)
- ○ Somewhat agree (19)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (20)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (21)
- ○ Strongly disagree (22)

Q8 What school activities do you do? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Helping with homework/reading (1)
- ☐ Volunteering at school (2)
- ☐ Participating in school fundraisers (3)
- ☐ Helping my classroom teacher (copying, Thursday folders, party planning, supplies etc.) (11)
- ☐ Attending school events (back to school night, parties, performances, jog-a-thon, fall festival) (12)
- ☐ Attending parent-teacher conferences (13)
- ☐ Communicating with the school and classroom teacher (14)
- ☐ Other (please type in) (22) _____

Q9 What do you think are the most important parent involvement practices?
You can drag and drop the rows, with 1 being the most important.

_____ Helping with homework (1)
_____ Volunteering at school (2)
_____ Participating in school fundraisers (3)
_____ Helping my classroom teachers (4)
_____ Attending school events (5)
_____ Attending parent-teacher conferences (6)
_____ Communicating with the school and classroom teacher (7)
_____ Other (please type in) (9)

Q10 What can your classroom teacher do to help you be involved?

_____

End of Year Survey

Q2 What is your age range?

- ○ 18-23 (1)
- ○ 23-30 (2)
- ○ 30-40 (3)
- ○ 40+ (4)

Q3 How many children do you have?

- ○ 1 (1)
- ○ 2 (2)
- ○ 3 (3)
- ○ 4 or more (4)

Q4 Parents involvement is an important part of my child's academic and emotional growth.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q5 I felt welcomed and encouraged to participate and be involved by my child's school and classroom teacher.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q6 My child's teacher communicated with me on a regular basis about my child's progress.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q7 My child's teacher communicated with me about how to be involved in my child's educational experience.

- ○ Strongly agree (11)
- ○ Somewhat agree (12)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (13)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (14)
- ○ Strongly disagree (15)

Q8 My teacher communicated with me through the following methods.

- [ ] Email (1)
- [ ] Phone (2)
- [ ] Newsletters (3)
- [ ] Mobile App (4)
- [ ] Other (please type in) (5) _____

Q9 I participated in the following parent involvement activities from August 2018-December 2018. Please check all the things that you did.

- [ ] Helped with homework/reading (1)
- [ ] Volunteered at school (2)
- [ ] Participated in school fundraisers (3)
- [ ] Helped my classroom teachers (copies, Thursday folders, party planning, supplies) (4)
- [ ] Attended school events (parties, performances, fall festival etc.) (5)
- [ ] Attended parent-teacher conferences (6)
- [ ] Communicated with school and classroom teacher (7)
- [ ] Other (please type in) (8) _____

Q10 Please describe anything you wish your child's teacher would have done differently.

_____

Appendix C: Codes and Themes

Involvement	**Efforts** Open door policy Reach everyone Invite families Class family Teacher presence Event Publicity Student involvement/Ownership	**Opportunities** School events At home activities Help in the classroom Parents as teachers PTA Provide supplies Helping teacher	**Amount** Family Situations High in Pre-k Mid Year (low, med) End year (increase, no change) High for PTC
Communication	**Family Need** Family Struggles Split Families Grandparents Family Dynamics Whole Family	**Frequency/ Methods** Frequent Consistent Daily, weekly, monthly Open Variety Paper Newsletters Phone Technology Face to Face	**Information** Academic Needs Curriculum Involvement Emergencies Behavior/Problem Positive Resources Learning and Development Learning at home Parenting Tips
Relationships	Initial Feelings Love and care for students Home Visits Make connections Focus on positive Make parents comfortable	Conversations at pickup Recognize unique family situations Open to families Teamwork Partnership “It takes a village”	
Effects	**Involvement** Creates community Importance of school Students learning and behavior Parent follow through Parents reaching out Parent network	**Communication** Develops trust Build relationships Parents feel welcome Parent network Creates Community Parents reach out Increases involvement	**Relationships** More involvement Encourages parents Stronger relationships Parents understand value of school Reciprocal Relationship Increases student confidence Classroom Community
Perspectives	**Teacher Perspective** Understand parents Academic and Social More than one teacher	**Parent Perspective** No value Nothing to offer Open communication Student needs	**Differences/Similarities** “Different dichotomy” Views on what is helpful Play vs. paper/pencil Academic concerns Communication

Appendix D: Subjectivity Statement

The first couple years of school are important for students because it lays the foundation for their future learning and success. While teachers play a significant role in their growth and development, parent involvement is also key because it helps with the transition process and signifies the importance of school. There are many different approaches to parent involvement and what I have found is that parents and teachers have very different views of what involvement looks like. I would like to close this gap by learning more about what teachers are doing in the classroom to help parents be involved and what parents are looking for from their teachers to encourage their involvement and feel welcome at school. To help understand this, I interviewed two pre-k and two kindergarten teachers in a suburban school district to learn more about their parent involvement practices and their beliefs regarding parent involvement. I interviewed them three times over the course of the fall semester to learn about their parent involvement practices, their philosophy regarding parent involvement, the impacts they are seeing in the classroom, and what things they would like to change in the future. The other component of the study is surveying the families at the beginning and end of the semester to gain their perspective on parent involvement and what they look for from their classroom teacher to encourage involvement. Lastly, I interviewed a retired pre-k teacher to gain her perspective on how parent involvement has changed over the last 20 years. My hope is that the results will show when parents are highly involved then teachers can see benefits in the classroom with student engagement, as well as with academic and behavioral success.

Parent involvement has impacted me in my personal and professional life. I moved to Norman, OK from the Netherlands when I was six years old. I primarily spoke Dutch so I took a

transition year to provide time to become fluent in English. My parents support, help, and involvement both at home and school made this transition much easier. I also could not have done it without my teachers those first couple of years that inspired me to become a teacher. While I knew that parent involvement was an important component in a child's education, it was not until my first year teaching kindergarten for Norman Public Schools, that I directly noticed the impacts. That year I had a handful of students who struggled both academically and behaviorally compared to my other students. I began to question why this was and realized that most of these students' parents were young and not as involved in the classroom or at home as the other parents. I wanted to learn more about what I could do as the teacher to help these parents be more involved in their child's education and provide them with resources to support their child's development. I am currently in my third year of teaching kindergarten at Lakeview Elementary here in Norman and one of my top priorities is encouraging parents to feel welcome and be involved. However, I feel this study will help to answer some of the questions I still have.

As mentioned in the methods section, I feel that my background as an educator provided me with a strength for the study because of my understanding of the system and the teaching practices that were mentioned by the teachers. I also had developed a trust among the teachers when starting the interview process and they felt open to answer questions from the beginning instead of my having to work to spend that time gaining their trust and building that relationship. I feel that my position allowed me to gather strong data supporting my research questions. While I feel that a lot of information was gathered in this study that will be useful for future teachers as they enter into the profession, I do think a major limitation of the study is the fact that it

consisted only of participants and perspectives from one district and that a greater understanding could have been achieved had teachers from multiple districts been involved.