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# Case Study of Parental Involvement for Enhanced Kindergarten Students' Development in Low Socioeconomic Households

Robyn Tresnak  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Robyn Tresnak

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## Review Committee

Dr. Jennifer Smolka, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Gary Lacy, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Christina Dawson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Case Study of Parental Involvement for Enhanced Kindergarten Students' Development  
in Low Socioeconomic Households

by

Robyn Tresnak

MS, NOVA Southeastern University, 2003

BA, MidAmerica Nazarene University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2015

## Abstract

Evidence suggests that parents in low socioeconomic households may have unaddressed educational needs about their children's development. The purpose of this case study was to discover innovative ways parents in a low socioeconomic community engaged in activities with their young children to influence academic and social development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development and Epstein's parental involvement model, the family process model, and the family strength model were used to build the conceptual framework. Parents and educators were asked to describe parent-engagement opportunities that were provided within the kindergarten classroom. Data were collected using a focus group with 13 educators who were involved in early childhood education to discuss parental involvement in the early development of young children and via in-depth interviews with 6 parents who attended classroom events to promote engagement in their child's development in school and at home. Data were analyzed in a cycle with a deductive coding process. Manual coding was completed in each stage. The major themes identified include creating a team of early childhood educators and parents, building 21st century thinking skills, and enabling the community for early preparation using authentic learning. Recommendations were presented for educators and parents as they guide young children in the development of academic, social, and behavioral skills. Positive social change will come to the full community as parents are more prepared to equip their children with 21st century learning skills; in turn, children will obtain higher levels of achievement and enter the work force equipped for success.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to young learners everywhere as well as to all those who are a part of their development. You are encouraged to discover a solid foundation for learning early in life and an excitement to continue learning forever.

## Acknowledgments

Although this dissertation was a growing personal dream, it was not a personal achievement. I am grateful to many people who played roles in the completion of this study.

Thank you to my colleagues who joined many discussions over the last few years as I researched and studied more about how to impact families of young children in new ways. You have helped me grow as an educator and allowed me time to build the dreams that are coming to fruition.

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Last, but first in my heart, thank you to my family. Over the past few years you have studied and worked next to me, listened to me talk about my progress, and shared every moment of this process. You encouraged me when times were tough and you were supportive when I expressed my ever-expanding dreams. As the top of my family tree, I thank my Heavenly Father who gives me the daily strength to get through every task down this path of life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Public education in the United States was once viewed as an event that took place solely in the schools with professional educators rather than in the home with parental input. In the early 1900s, there was a shift that recognized the value of involving parents in the educational process (Barnyak, 2011). Although there are still teachers and parents who sense a separation between the school and the home, many educators and families realize the benefits of parents getting involved in their children's classrooms. In fact, there are numerous possibilities for children, parents, and teachers working as a team (Savas, 2012). This concept took an innovative turn when educators invited parents into the classroom to observe and participate in their children's developmental activities. Even more, the teachers used the time to guide parents to continue working on necessary skills after school.

Early childhood education was the main topic for this research, and the specific topic dealt with the significant issues faced by young students who live in low socioeconomic households. These students often struggle in their first year of school as they begin without basic skills needed to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century kindergarten classroom (Pedro, Miller, & Bray, 2012). From the beginning of the school year, many of these students are identified as needing early interventions to improve their abilities (Schwarz et al., 2012). This study looked into the apparent need in early childhood education for educators and parents to connect for young children to gain higher levels of achievement at this foundational point.

In this first chapter, I explain each element of the research, beginning with the background information that establishes a gap in the recent literature and the reason this study is valuable to the discipline of early childhood education. Then, I describe the problem explored in the research and the purpose of the study along with the research questions. I also explain an important piece of the study's structure, the conceptual framework, as well as basics about the research design such as the nature of the study, the scope of the research, and its limitations. The chapter closes with an explanation of how the study can affect early childhood education and a community in positive ways.

### **Background**

Although there were many studies on early childhood education, I focused on reviewing those that included students at risk and parental involvement with the development of young children. Each study offered beneficial information that created a base for this current study that will potentially lead to positive social changes.

Articles from the past 5 years offered research regarding the needs of young children in their first years of formal education along with their earlier learning experiences in the home. These studies demonstrated the needs of young children as they develop cognitive, behavioral, and social skills. The majority of the literature showed particular needs of young children growing up in low-income communities (Hartas, 2011; Kiernan & Mensah, 2011; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2010).

Some researchers identified the needs of young children in different ethnic groups (Anthony et al., 2011; Farver, Lonigan, Xu, & Eppe, 2013). Children in the studies came from rural and city communities from various locations around the globe, yet each study

focused on the needs of young children that do not change across borders, ethnic groups, or financial means. The children's academic development was one essential element of each study. Research demonstrated that even before formal education, young children need contact with literacy activities on a daily basis (Cadima, McWilliam, & Leal, 2010; Gregg, Rugg, & Stoneman, 2012). The necessity for parents to introduce their child to numbers, counting, patterning, and basic problem solving skills during the child's first years of life was also depicted in the research (LeFevre, Polyzoi, Skwarchuk, Fast, & Sowinski, 2010; Muir, 2012).

As an extension to the concepts of age, academics, and financial status that were found in most of the literature within this research, there were many studies that recognized the impact of Head Start in the educational process. Head Start is a program in designated public schools that is directed to children between the ages of 3 and 5 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013), and it works to teach young children basic skills that serve as a foundation for kindergarten and the entire schooling experience (Zhai, Brooks-Guhn, & Waldfogel, 2011). Head Start organizers recognized the need for families to be involved in the education of young children. The program also offers some health and wellness provisions (Farver, Lonigan, Xu, & Eppe, 2013). Unfortunately, Head Start is not available in a large percentage of schools, even those with high risk factors.

Following concepts from the Head Start program along with other research on the ways parents interact with the education system, Epstein (2005) designed a model for parental involvement with six elements: implementing skills of *parenting* children with a

supportive role, *communicating* clearly and openly, *volunteering* for activities in the lives of the children, providing *home learning* opportunities, cooperating with family *decision making*, and finally *collaborating with the community* to create a better environment for everyone. Overall, this model suggests that parents put time and effort into each element in order for their children to achieve higher developmental capabilities.

Learning occurs in various ways, depicted throughout the recent research. The researchers demonstrated benefits for children to learn through different styles of teaching and learning, as well as with all of their senses (Farver, Lonigan, Xu, & Eppe, 2013; Robins, Treiman, Rosales, & Otake, 2012). This was noted through direct and indirect forms of learning. Each style takes place in the early childhood classroom and includes authentic situations for learning (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). The majority of research considered the ways that parents interacted with their children in reference to academic, behavioral, and social development (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2010). Researchers viewed the schedules that families followed and the way those schedules influenced the daily stress put on families (Harper, Platt, & Pellitier, 2011). There were studies that considered how stress negatively affected the growth of young children (Fluckiger, Diamond, & Jones, 2012; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

Although there are several recent studies that consider the development of young children, there is still a demand for additional research. One area available for research is to explain the perceptions of families with a low socioeconomic status about the needs of preparing their young children for the first years of education. This gap is even more significant regarding understanding of how to assist the families as they become a team in

the developmental teaching of their young children (Robins et al., 2012; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

There is an apparent demand for more parental involvement in the education of young children, and this necessity requires explanations for families in such a way to encourage their participation (Fluckiger et al., 2012). Although some educators and theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Epstein (2005) have researched parental involvement in an individual's development, there is still room for directed research with early childhood children. With more research, educators could identify better ways to reach families and clarify the developmental needs of young children.

The future of early childhood education calls for more parental involvement. If parents do not grasp the modern standards for their children, they will not provide interactive moments that are productive and beneficial. Educators must find ways to connect with parents to bring a more complete learning experience to the lives of the students in their classrooms. This study can provide insight to parents that guide them to a higher awareness of the developmental needs of their young children. Beyond the family unit, this study can influence the community as more citizens are prepared to work and live in productive conditions (Harper et al., 2011; Muir, 2012).

### **Problem Statement**

There is a substantial, ongoing problem in early childhood classrooms of low socioeconomic communities. Children often perform at a low academic level and also show poor social skills (Schwarz et al., 2012). These young children lack of preparation for learning and are often not introduced to the academic, social, and behavior skills that

are necessary for success in formal schooling. In addition, parents do not show confidence in their ability to guide their children in learning (Fluckinger et al., 2012).

Due to their own low levels of education and experiences in life, many parents in low socioeconomic households demonstrate a need to learn more about their child's developmental requirements (Epstein, 1995). Once the children enter school, their parents often have the perception that the teachers will provide all of the education for their children, when in reality the teachers and parents should form a team to help educate the young students. These factors lead to a problem of low achievement that continues, and often grows, as the children further their education (Cadima et al., 2010).

Early childhood development creates a foundation for future learning that will take place in school and throughout life. Without a solid foundation, children are likely to struggle each year in school. A national study of children in kindergarten showed that students who lived with economic disadvantages scored 10% lower on reading tests and 9% lower on math tests than their peers who lived above the poverty level (Mulligan, Hastedt, & McCarroll, 2012). Demonstrating more substantial differences, a study of children who had not entered kindergarten showed that children living with economic disadvantages scored 17% lower in literacy skills and 27% lower in numeracy skills than their peers who live over the poverty level (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). More significantly, it is probable that the children will continue a cycle of less proficiency, a lack of higher education, lower paying jobs, and more stresses in adulthood (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010).

With proper preparation for primary school, children in lower socioeconomic communities are more likely to learn on grade level and at a higher rate than children who are not prepared with literacy and numeracy skills (Kiernan & Mensah, 2011). This allows the students to continue developing skills with their peers and require less intervention throughout the elementary years. Once children reach formal school, parents and teachers can make connections between the home and school learning environments to enhance the growth opportunities for the children. Of course, this learning could then continue over the years of the child's life, into the teenage years and even adulthood.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to discover innovative ways parents in low socioeconomic households engaged in activities with their young children to influence academic and social development. This study was designed to open classrooms for more parental involvement, which would extend into personal homes. More significantly, this study guided parents in helping their young children find higher levels of success in their academic and social development. It is critical for young children to begin early childhood education with a foundation that is strong in basic skills and a motivation to learn (Weigel et al., 2010; Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010).

I used an advocacy paradigm that works with individuals to bring social changes where needed. I talked with people who live within the realm of the given need. In this case, there was a focus group and interviews completed with parents who took part in classroom events arranged by their children's teachers.

The concept for this research was to assist early childhood learners in forming a stronger foundation for their long-term education. This is more feasible with a team formed between teachers and parents (Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzo, & Pituch, 2010). Parents can give their children instructions in the home that follow the developmental standards of young children. They can also offer support to the children in regards to learning; this support appears in the form of encouragement and enthusiasm for gaining new skills (Barnyak, 2011).

### **Research Questions**

To fill a void in current research and bring positive social changes to early childhood learners, specifically those living in low socioeconomic communities, this study was designed to assist parents in guiding their young children in developing foundational skills.

### **Central Question**

In a low socioeconomic community, what influences on early child development will parents and educators describe about parent-engagement after parents participate in the kindergarten classroom?

### **Subquestions**

1. What are the parents' perceptions of their role in early childhood development?
2. What are the educators' perceptions of a parent's role in early childhood development?

3. In what ways does the kindergarten classroom engagement of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten students, and their parents influence the development of young children?
4. What are the parents' perceptions of their child's academic and social abilities following their engagement in the kindergarten classroom activities?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development formed the basis of the conceptual framework for this study. The main point of this theory is that an individual's environment is significant in the way a person develops. Considering the lives of young children, the main interest of this study, the most influential environments are the home and school (Cantin, Planter, Coutu, & Brunson, 2012). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) explained that the elements of an individual's environment will push them to greater accomplishments and high motivation levels or cause them despair and incompetence. It is valuable for individuals to find a way to make their personal environment one that promotes growth. For young children, parents and educators can make the choice to present an atmosphere that is advantageous to the development of children.

To complement this theory, I used the parental involvement model as part of the framework for this study (Epstein, 2005). Within this model, Epstein explained six modes of involvement that will help form a secure learning environment for students:

1. Parenting,

2. Communicating,
3. Volunteering,
4. Home learning,
5. Decision making, and
6. Collaborating with the community.

This model is a system from which parents can choose elements to use at appropriate moments in their lives. To enhance learning, schools may assist with parenting tools, communication skills, offering areas for families to volunteer, giving parents an opportunity to make decisions with and for the organization, and providing opportunities to work with community services (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

As a natural supplement to the ecological theory and parent involvement model, two additional models in recent studies concerning the development of young children and the involvement of their parents are the family process model (McLoyd, 1998) and the family strength model (DeFrain & Assay, 2008). Both models describe a need for parents to join in developmental activities with their children to strengthen the lessons that the children learn at school and expand their children's potential. They note that children often struggle with academic, social, and behavioral growth when the stresses of life are not dealt with in a positive way with family members (Cooper et al., 2010). However, when life situations are addressed with affirmation and assurance, even negative situations can be dealt with productively. This will help young children progress in an expected fashion through each stage of life (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

The ecological theory of human development maintains, in regards to young children, that the level to which children grow and development is determined, to a great extent, by the environment in which they are raised (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This idea also informs the six types of parental involvement, which offers precise suggestions of ways for families to engage in the school community (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). These concepts are suggested within the two complementary family models as well. In order for young children to learn and grow in a productive environment, it is important for parents to understand positive ways to guide their children. Alternatively, they can be willing to learn these needs and find ways to make changes in their environment that help children development in an appropriate manner. It is most beneficial if this occurs within the first 5 years of a child's life (Crosnoe, Leventhal, Wirth, Pierce, & Pianta, 2010). Once parents form a home environment and include their children in other safe, knowledge building environments, the parents and children can work together in order for the children to learn new concepts.

### **Nature of the Study**

In the data collection stage of a qualitative case study, the conversations frequently bring descriptive answers and comments from the participants (Patton, 2002). For that reason, I chose this design for an opportunity to talk with parents involved in the developmental events of their children's kindergarten classroom. I developed questions that encourage the parents to share their thoughts in an open forum and searched for consistencies between the participants. This research allows educators and other parents

to learn more about perceptions and ways to help children build their developmental skills.

The single case study approach calls on past situations that encompass one similar issue in a given environment. For this research, the issue was a lack of preparatory skills for young children to begin their formal school experiences. Researchers can gather materials from interviews and classroom observations to describe the cases and define answers to the research questions. In this case study, parents and educators shared their words and experiences, and I was able to present suggestions to help other families. This research will help educators and parents find ways to provide necessary interventions that guide the children to the appropriate skill levels. In addition, it is probable that educators will discover ways to enter the community and share parent engagement suggestions with families to help young children prepare for future years in school.

Educators and parents of young children will be able to use this study to discover ways to create additional and enriching learning opportunities for the children, resulting in a connection between the home and the school (Rodger, O'Keefe, Cook, & Jones, 2012). There are many times, especially noticed in communities with families of a low socioeconomic status, that the children do not have the background knowledge for teachers to introduce a new concept in a meaningful way (Kierman & Mensah, 2011). In these situations, teachers have to spend additional time in the school day teaching introductory skills, with less time available for instruction and practice time mandated for the yearly objectives. Children often require additional opportunities to work on the skills in order to be able to apply them independently. It is apparent that in addition to a lack of

time and energy, the parents have limited knowledge about how and what skills should be taught to their young children (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). By working with teachers in the classroom, parents can learn ways to assist their children when they are home from the school day. As a result, student will be better prepared for school, and teachers will be able to present the actual lessons required for the grade level rather than adding various interventions throughout each week.

This qualitative case study included educators and parents in a single school setting that implemented a kindergarten parent involvement program during the 2013–2014 school year. A focus group of 13 educators participated in a group discussion, and six parents participated in detailed individual interviews to provide insight on their experiences. Together both types of data provided ample information for me to form answers to the central and supplemental questions of the study.

### **Definitions**

Within this study, educational terms arise throughout the literature as well as the data collection and analysis. As a specific field of education, early childhood education has particular vocabulary that is unique to the development of young learners. Key terms that are mentioned within this study include:

*Development:* Appropriate levels of growth, in this case for young children, including growth in social, physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

*Direct instruction (teaching):* Teaching that the educators accomplish through structured lessons where they talk about the new skills, present how to achieve the skill, and display ways to apply the skill (Farver et al., 2013).

*Early childhood education:* The teaching and learning of children from infancy until 8 years of age (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

*Indirect instruction (teaching):* Teaching that the educators accomplish through setting up activities in the classroom where the students can explore and interact with one another. They learn by asking questions and discovering new concepts (Farver et al., 2013).

*Interventions:* Programs offered by educators to assist children in academic and social development areas where they are not achieving at the expected standards. The assistance usually is attained through small group teaching settings and is geared to the exact weaknesses of the students (Manz, Lehtinen, & Bracaliello, 2011).

*Literacy:* Elements of education related to language; this includes instruction and application of speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Lindley, 2013).

*Low socioeconomic (economically disadvantaged):* A standard of living that falls below the national poverty line. In the public education system families that fit this category qualify for programs such as Head Start, the free or reduced breakfast and lunch program, free or reduced after school care, and parenting services (School District, 2013).

*Numeracy:* Elements of education related to math skills; this includes, but is not limited to patterning, numerical awareness, sorting, and problem solving (Lindley, 2013).

*Social skills:* Elements of education related to the emotional, behavioral, and the skills necessary to be a productive part of a community (Lindley, 2013).

*Standards:* “Desired outcomes and content” that are recognized for a grade level or even a specific student in order for students to fulfill a comprehensive education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

To begin, there was an assumption that parents would share personal perceptions about their children’s development in an authentic and candid manner. There was another assumption that educators who volunteered to be a part of the focus group would share their thoughts openly.

The information discovered in this study can be transferred to other schools to assist parents and whole families in other communities. Educators from schools across the school district of the given school often participate in professional development with one another. During those meetings, the teachers share ideas from their campuses that may bring accomplishments to other schools. Throughout the school year, teachers from communities that are similar in demographics to the research campus communicate through e-mail and in person during staff development days to discuss innovative ideas that will help reach the families in their neighborhoods. This research will easily transfer to those schools.

In addition, the information can be used to guide parents in the research school who are not yet attending the classroom events. Whether the parents have kindergarten students at this school, older students in the school, or even students in another school,

there is a likelihood that parents will talk with their friends and family about the experiences. This will drive others to join in their children's classrooms in order to learn innovative ways to help their children progress in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was chosen due to a need noticed in communities where families generally do not have a high level of education. Young children must be more prepared for formal schooling. The scope of the study included parents of young children who are prepared to discover modern learning methods to be used in the home. It also included early childhood educators who can provide innovative ways for parents to help their young children at home and in the neighborhood.

This study was delimited to only parents who attended the kindergarten events in the classroom; these parents participated in one-on-one interviews. This study did not include a separate case with interviews from parents who did not attend the events for comparison. Due to the focus on families with a low socioeconomic status, there was no comparison to the ways parents and children engage if they are a part of affluent communities or early childhood programs.

This study was conducted in a school where there is a high Hispanic population; in addition, the majority of families fall into a low socioeconomic category. This presented a boundary in ethnicity and culture of the case for the study. Another boundary of the study was in the timing for the research. The scheduled events in the kindergarten classrooms took place once a month throughout the 2013–2014 school year.

### **Limitations**

Language barriers presented a possible limitation for this case study. Though the interviews were completed in English, some participants speak Spanish as a first language. A translator was available if needed. Before potential participants agreed to take part in the research, the interview process, including language situations, were explained to the parents. There was a risk that questions could be difficult to understand or that answers may be challenging to make clear. However, there was a high probability that all parents would be able to complete the interviews in English. Within the same school, parents are offered translators for conferences and other meetings, but the majority of the time parents choose to take part in the events in English.

As a teacher in the school where I conducted this research, I took ethical precautions. I worked to keep personal views, based on parental involvement and student achievement, out of the study. To protect against any bias in the study, no participants had children in my classroom (Patton, 2002).

### **Significance**

This qualitative study offers a tool to guide parents and educators as they work together to benefit the development of young children. Educators can invite parents into their children's classroom to observe the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational process and join in the modern activities with their children. During these moments, teachers can demonstrate ways for parents to extend the learning activities at home. Through these experiences, educators can convey suggestions with colleagues so that other families profit from knowledge about teamwork in the schools. Then on the other side, there is a strong

likelihood that parents will share their thoughts with other families in the neighborhood, which will promote positive actions in the community so that suitable, developmental skills are produced.

Students in their first years of education benefit from connecting their knowledge between school and home. This study will help educators and parents discover manageable ways to assist young learners in making those necessary connections. As education adapts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are new ways to present lessons and new concepts to children (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). Once families learn about new teaching and learning methods, along with the standards for learning, they will have a greater capability to help the children reach their full potential in education.

This study is especially practical and advantageous to families in lower income communities. Too often parents simply do not find the time to work with their children on developmental progress. By opening the doors of the school, parents have opportunities that were not afforded to them previously. They are also likely to increase the time and energy that they put into their children's practice at home. As for early childhood education, this parent involvement influences the lives of the students and the teachers. Students will be more prepared for each school day, which will help them with their academics and their attitudes. Teachers will be able to educate more students at the appropriate level, rather than trying to create interventions to help students catch up with others who are working on grade level (Robins et al., 2012). This case study was created to promote a social change in early childhood education, specifically for families living with economic disadvantages.

This study took place in a community where the parents demonstrated a great need to know more about the education system and developmentally appropriate pursuits for their children. As educators guide parents in a way that builds a team between the young child, the parent, and the teacher, a higher level of development is expected for the children (Guhn & Goelman, 2011). Parents will learn more about current, educational expectations for their children. At that point, the early childhood students are likely to show more success in school. Of course, as the children move through the grade levels, they are expected to continue learning the objectives and even set goals for higher education or other forms of job training (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). Their skills will bring success to both their families and the community as a whole.

### **Summary**

In low socioeconomic households, children have the potential to learn in more profound ways with their parents' engagement in their education. This involvement can produce more accomplishments and abilities for the young children, their families, and the communities as a whole. New methods for teaching and higher standards of education in this 21<sup>st</sup> century require parents to understand innovative methods for assisting their children in developmental activities. Educators can help parents discover those modern learning methods in order to help the children progress in their accomplishments.

In the next chapter, there are details about recent literature that set a foundation for this case study. At the beginning is a description of the search strategies and the theory, along with three models found within the literature. The largest portion of the chapter is devoted to explaining four foundations noticed in the articles. Those elements

of early childhood education are the Head Start program, family circumstances, family involvement, and methods of learning. In each case, there are specific remarks about innovations that are necessary for children and parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education process.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this case study was to describe innovative ways that parents in a low socioeconomic community engage in activities with their children that influence the academic and social development of their young children. This issue was noted following the parents' attendance in kindergarten classroom events where they were given an opportunity to observe and take part in activities with their child. Early childhood educators have noticed a need for parental involvement in the developmental lives of young learners. Stylianides and Stylianides (2011) explained that children whose parents worked with them on basic skills necessary for academic learning obtained higher scores in school than children who did not work with their parents on literacy skills. Researchers have also found that the children of parents who remained involved in the homework, conferences, and overall knowledge of school events continued to succeed in academics (Karakus & Savas, 2012). Research further demonstrated this necessity in specific capacities. Still, there was an additional need to help parents get involved in the educational process. This required suggestions of new initiatives from educators.

Some researchers specifically looked into the literacy development of young children and saw that the time spent in reading, writing, and conversational activities with parents was directly related to the interest level and achievement level of the students (Barnyak, 2011; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2010). Evidence showed that when parents did spend time with their children on academic preparations, the subject area was usually language. However, research noted a need for families to spend time together with math activities (Muir, 2012). There are beginning math competencies that children should learn

before the age of 5 in order to develop their numeracy skills to the furthest extent. In many communities, again at a higher rate in economically disadvantaged areas, young children show a lack of abilities with numeracy (Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Thiel, 2012).

Still other studies have focused on the value of parental support with the behavioral choices of young children. Researchers have described situations when this support from parents often led children to make better choices and learn self-discipline, which has a positive influence on each child's progress in school (Altay & Gure, 2012; Carrasco & Fox, 2012; Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). While studies were completed in this area, there are still questions to answer.

In recent years, some researchers have demonstrated connections with these noticeable issues in early childhood education, yet there is room for more studies. Early childhood teachers have commented that children frequently require more preparation for kindergarten. Teachers' perceptions are that parents often do not know the objectives covered in kindergarten in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (LeFevre et al., 2010). Other parents simply did not show knowledge of ways to help prepare their young children for school. This was especially observed in communities where the socioeconomic status was low (Cooper et al., 2010; Lynch, 2010; Robins et al., 2012). There was a belief, in previous studies, that families would benefit from learning about the early developmental needs of their children. In fact, this understanding would also encourage continued parental involvement in each child's progression throughout many years of school (Meyer, Mann, & Becker, 2011; Fluckiger et al., 2012).

In order to create a foundation for a new study, there were valuable concepts to identify in past research. One such topic was Head Start programs located throughout schools in the United States. Researchers have used Head Start as a main topic of study (Zhai et al., 2011) and as an identification marker to note a characteristic in some children within a study (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2012; Gregg et al., 2012). Numerous researchers detailed the levels of family involvement in the educational lives of young children as a topic of interest in the studies (Carrasco & Fox, 2012; Muir, 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Still dealing with families, many studies dealt with the circumstances that bring families positive or negative moments in their lives (Hartas, 2011; Kiernan & Mensah, 2011; Weigel et al., 2010). Finally, the inclusion of ways that children learn was another foundational tool for the current research such as studies that focused on learning through play (Lillemyr & Aram, 2012) or learning in an authentic environment (Torppa, Eklund, Bergen, & Lyytinen).

This study was built on past ideas for parent involvement to generate innovative plans to help parents participate in the development of their children. This study will also help children succeed in school and grow at higher rates in the academic, social, and behavioral skills needed throughout life. These topics were apparent in the literature discovered through an online search in Walden University's library.

### **Search Strategy**

I used specific strategies to locate literature that contained research about parent involvement in early childhood development. First, I chose library databases and search engines. The online library at Walden University provided ample materials that covered

research on parental involvement in the development of young children. Within the library, there were certain databases that pertained to education. I used the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) to find articles related to the given topic area. Another database I used in this library was Education Research Complete.

In the search process within the database, I used a choice of words selected for the search fields and dates for the search: *early childhood education, parental involvement, academic awareness, cognitive development, young children, reading with children, and kindergarten readiness*. I searched each database only for articles within the years of 2010 through 2014. Once the library presented a number of articles, I read the abstracts and narrowed the choices of literature to reflect the needs of this research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development was directly implemented in previous studies, and the overall concept of the theory was present throughout additional literature. This theory describes that an individual's environment serves as a substantial role in that person's development. For children, this environment includes their home, culture, neighborhood, and school. Of course, it is the family members, friends, neighbors, and teachers within each environment who are influential to the child's development. Connections between each entity help form the child's progression; families are encouraged to work together with school personnel to prepare a secure and optimal learning environment (Cantin et al., 2012).

Each part of an individual's environment has specific attributes that help the person move forward or remain stagnant with academic, social, and emotional

development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Those characteristics comprise family stresses, medical issues, or living conditions. In each situation, people in the child's life can make alterations to each element in order to provide an environment that is more conducive for growth. For those changes to take place, parents have to grasp the developmental needs of their children (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Modern forms of training should be offered to parents to give them guidance in practical, straightforward approaches to encouraging their children's development. These positive changes in a child's life are more beneficial when created at an early point in the child's life (Crosnoe et al., 2010).

As mentioned, other researchers have implemented concepts from this theoretical base, though they did not always directly mention Bronfenbrenner or Epstein by name. Some authors focused on families in low socioeconomic communities, where the environment is filled with numerous hardships. These researchers used conceptual frameworks that explained the struggles that occur in academic growth when there were evident struggles in the environment (Carrasco & Fox, 2012; Hatcher et al., 2012; Tu & Law, 2010). Similarly, Cadima, McWilliam, and Leal (2010) as well as Crosnoe and Cooper (2010) recognized that as the stresses in a child's life increased, the child's academic achievement actually decreased. The family process model (Cooper et al., 2010) and the family strengths model (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012) describe the necessity for parents to engage in school activities with their young children in order for the students to increase their abilities. Rather than simply stating a need, it would be helpful for these

models to guide educators in launching approaches for parents to participate in their child's education.

To build on those frameworks, another concept presented in past research was the need for teamwork among students, teachers, families, and community members as a way of bringing higher cognitive growth to children (Muir, 2012; Nwokah, Hsu, & Gulker, 2013; Ollerenshaw, 2012). There are multiple connections between the ecological theory of human development, Epstein's model of parent involvement, and the two family models noticed in previous research. There are clear themes noticed within the selected literature concerning parental involvement in child development.

### **Foundations in the Literature**

In preparation for this research, I identified four main themes throughout the literature in relation to children in their early years of learning. This included informal learning within the home and community, as well as the first years of formal education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some elements from one theme overlapped into another theme, which demonstrated a strong connection between the necessities of early childhood development. From the Head Start programs, to family circumstances and family involvement, to the various methods of learning that take place in the education of young children, there were concepts in the recent literature that formed a solid foundation for the current study.

### **Head Start**

Due to the focus age group for this study, as well as the level of social economics of the families, the government program of Head Start was one theme in many recent

studies. Head Start is a preschool program offered across the United States for children who are part of families with a low socioeconomic status. With the goal of ameliorating poverty in the United States in 1964, Head Start has continued in subsequent years and been impacted by each president (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013; Zhai et al., 2011). Over the years children who attended Head Start programs obtained higher levels of kindergarten readiness skills than children in the same communities who did not attend the program (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Certain aspects of this program are vital to its success and therefore the success of young children. Those elements could be utilized as a foundation to begin cutting edge methods to increase parent engagement in their child's education, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Health necessities impacted by Head Start.** To begin, the health of the children was recognized as an essential part of Head Start. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the lack of nutrition and medical attention that children in low socioeconomic communities receive due to finances, time, and inexperience of their parents. Additionally, routines are an important part of children's lives; when children's lives are chaotic and unplanned, there are definite struggles in the child's development (Jeon et al., 2010). Daily routines need to include hygiene, nutritious meals, and plenty of sleep. In low socioeconomic communities, families most often do not keep these necessary schedules. This leads to lower preparation for learning in general. Children do not demonstrate kindergarten readiness skills, nor are the children able to focus on the teaching and practice times given in the classroom once they entered the formal school (McDermott, Rikoon, Waterman, & Fantuzzo, 2012).

Research with students who were enrolled in Head Start classrooms showed that complete families learned about the importance of organization (Gregg et al., 2012). Parents needed to display routines in the home and help their young children create plans for the day. One scheduled portion of the Head Start day was mealtime. Not only did the children learn about their schedules, the children were also served a healthy breakfast and lunch. Additionally, the children learned about healthy eating so they could continue that as a part of their routine away from school (Manz, 2012; McWayne, Cheung, Wright, & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). Daily necessities led directly into the yearly health needs for young children.

Medical and dental situations are two factors of health that were recognized in recent studies (Manz, 2012; McWayne et al., 2012). Head Start programs provide connections for families in order to learn about the health needs of young children. Also, the programs provide some services to ensure that the children have dental check-ups, immunizations, and regular doctor visits (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

**Cognitive necessities impacted by Head Start.** Cognitive development of young children was another fundamental element of Head Start programs noted in the literature. One study explained that in families where English is not the primary language spoken in the home, “the educational risks overshadow the relative strengths” brought into early childhood education (Farver et al., 2013). This is a trend, not only with English language learners but also with English-speaking students who have other risks associated with low socioeconomic status.

Research has shown that risks involve single parenting and parents with less than a high school education (Manz, 2012; Zhai et al., 2011). These risks present fewer moments for the children to spend reading books with their parents. Reading books with children give children a larger vocabulary; reading also gives children knowledge about letters and words. The families reported little time communicating with their children, which would build oral literacy skills (McWayne et al., 2012; Welsh et al., 2010). In addition, the parents often did not work with their children on prewriting skills (Farver et al., 2013). Whether it was from a lack of time after working odd shifts or a lack of knowledge for how to teach their children, parents who were interviewed did not express a high level of working with their children on cognitive development (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010).

Head Start programs enhance the abilities of young learners by stepping in to help families teach their children during pivotal years. This is an area that should be continued and expanded in order to meet modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century standards of learning. Teachers work with parents to set goals for their children concerning their development. Within the Head Start classrooms, teachers observe the progress of each student in accordance with the family's goals and the state educational standards (Manz et al., 2013). In addition, this program offers small ratios of children to each teacher, which gives each child substantial time with the teachers in the classrooms (Jeon et al., 2010). Classrooms are often designed in a way that the teachers only give lessons to the whole group of children for a small amount of the day and more teaching in small groups. Children practice their skills in learning centers with partners and small groups of peers (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2012).

Each of these attributes of the Head Start classroom enhances the cognitive growth of the young children enrolled in the program.

**Full child development impacted by Head Start.** Child development explored in the recent studies, specifically as offered in Head Start, stretched beyond cognition. Social, behavioral, and emotional growth are also described as areas that are critical in the early years of a child's life. Repeatedly, classrooms filled with students from a low socioeconomic community display below average social, behavioral, and emotional abilities (Manz, 2012). This situation impacts the academic development of the students in a negative manner; for example, students who are not ready to enter elementary schools with a capability to control their emotions and work with peers show difficulty in completing school work (McDermott et al., 2012). With current standards in schools, researchers have noted the necessity for children to be equipped in multiple ways (McWayne et al., 2012). Standards for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require even young learners to be focused, ready to work with partners or teams, and prepared to solve problems in their studies.

Children need to enter kindergarten socially prepared to learn with a full classroom of peers, where decisions have to be made with a team and groups of students have to share tools. Behaviorally, students also have to learn to be ready for kindness to peers and self-discipline. Educators in Head Start classrooms provide instruction in these skill sets to the young and their parents. Relationships affect this part of development in both the lives of the children and the families as a whole. Teachers must work to create positive interactions with students and parents. Once those relationships grow, behavior

issues decrease and social skills improve (Jeon et al., 2010). It is a combination of all of these skills that help a child prepare for kindergarten and continued success in formal education.

**Parents impacted by Head Start.** The literature not only presented information about education for children, it also mentioned the education of parents and families of the children who are enrolled in Head Start. Manz, Lehtinen, and Bracaliello (2013) described the Head Start program as “two generational” due to the way the educators work with the children and parents to bring quality development to complete families in low socioeconomic communities (p. 132). Within the classrooms teachers present daily communication with the parents; this occurs through conversations, written notices for the entire class, and notes for individual parents (Jeon et al., 2010). These communication tools provide information on the events of the classroom as well as suggestions for activities in the home that the families could participate in together.

In one study, Farver, Lonigan, Xu, and Eppe (2013) went into the homes of Head Start students to interview parents and also conducted observations of family interactions. Farver et al. considered the number of literacy activities that took place when the children were away from school. They were able to give parents ideas for building literacy development for their children. Parents were also taught about the encouragement they can offer their young children in regards to academic development. In another study Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, and Waldfogel (2011) described that parents can do more than simply teach their children about letters and numbers. Parents who show support to their children on a regular basis often had children who chose to read books over other activities.

By creating strong relationships between teachers and parents, home interactions are more practical throughout the school year (Gregg et al., 2012). This approach offers moments for teachers to work directly with families in an authentic setting, which encourages future practice of the skills once the teacher left. Parental involvement is not only a vital part of the Head Start program, but an important piece of early childhood education everywhere. As curriculum changes and technology improve in the schools, there are new ways to reach parents in advanced forms. By implementing technology, teachers can potentially communicate with more parents build more learning opportunities for young children.

### **Family Involvement**

Research in education often describes the involvement of families in regards to social, emotional, and academic development. Although these are broad descriptors, there are many added categories of family involvement that were acknowledged in the background literature of this study. Overall, studies indicated that it is essential for parents to play an active part in the way their children learn, even before their children attend school (Barnyak, 2011). Children learn at a higher pace and an elevated level when they have the encouragement and guidance of their parents within their homes, community, and schools where parents join in the day-to-day learning activities. This involvement is valuable at every level of a child's development but is an especially vital part of a young child's growth (Durand & Perez, 2013).

**Six types of parent involvement.** Other educators and theorists have worked to improve parent involvement in schools. Two decades after Head Start began Epstein

(1991) devised a model for parent involvement that included six parts. Though each portion of the model does not have to be followed in a step-by-step plan (Manz, 2012), the model started with the concept of *parenting* (Meyer et al., 2011). In this part of the model, educators are encouraged to guide families with the skills that are necessary to raise children in a well-rounded manner. Secondly, the model suggests that *communicating* is needed between school personnel and family members (Jeon et al., 2010; Lynch, 2010). *Volunteering* is the third part of the model; it is here that the author recommends parents offer their talents within the school and community. This model also calls for *learning at home* to take place which involves both the parents and children working together to build skills. Next, is the concept of *decision making*, which refers to parents taking part in school functions where they play a role in the finding answers to questions that will benefit the organization and then working with a team to make a resolution. Finally, the model offers a type of involvement as *collaborating with the community* so that the family members will work with businesses in the neighborhood in order to help students, families, schools, and entire communities. Epstein (2005) concluded that parent involvement is necessary at a higher level in every ethnic group and across all socioeconomic lines. Once parents start getting involved in the educational lives of their children, achievement levels will increase (Cooper et al., 2010; Harper et al., 2011; Karakus & Savas, 2012).

**Building literacy skills at home.** Researchers have reported a need for parents to work with young children on different skills that are necessary before the first days of school (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). First, basic cognitive skills help children as they enter

the formal education system. Foundational literacy abilities begin long before children sit in a classroom. Parents introduce these concepts to their children through direct teaching about letters, words, and books. This occurs when parents read books to their children and keep books in the home for the children to explore. Parents who provide writing materials for their children to use in the home lead their children to a better understanding of literacy abilities (Barnyak, 2011; Farver et al., 2013).

Indirectly, children learn literacy skills when their parents engage them in conversations that are filled with descriptive words and a sizeable vocabulary (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). Though research shows parents work with their children less frequently on math skills than reading, there is still a benefit when they introduce number concepts to the young children. These skills are developed when parents play board games with their children and help them count spaces or card games where numbers are taught and recognized (LeFevre et al., 2010). Evidence showed that this involvement between children and parents allows children to enter school with the necessary skills to find success in their classroom experiences, rather than start the schooling process at a low level of performance (Cadima, McWilliam, & Leal, 2010).

**Parents guide children in behavioral skills.** In addition, behavioral development was also noticed an important factor leading to a more productive beginning to education. Parents played a role in that development; sometimes it was recognized as an active involvement and other times it was more of a casual manner. One research team specifically recorded the connection between a father's association with his child and the child's behavior in school. They realized that children who were supported by their

fathers in activities and with their emotional well-being, did not have as many behavioral issues as children with fathers who did not get involved in their lives in positive ways (Ramchandani et al., 2013).

It is also important to look at mothers and the two parents together in order to discover more about the behavioral development of young children. When parents engaged with their children in numerous activities, the behavior of the children was better than children who were not part of families with parental involvement. The approach of involvement also played a role in the child's behavior. If parents were more positive with their children, then the children showed higher levels of respect and self-discipline. Whereas, when parents were abrasive toward their children, the children often displayed higher levels of hyperactivity, issues with classmates, and poor attitudes toward adults (McGilloway et al., 2012). Galindo and Fuller (2010) described ways that academic skills were influenced by a child's behavior in the classroom. For young children to successfully complete their schoolwork and learn the new concepts taught on a regular basis, the children needed to display self-discipline and emotional stability.

**Parents teach children within the community.** Elements of cognitive development were increased through efforts made in the community. Past studies demonstrated ways that families took part in their neighborhood activities to help their young children learn new skills. There were times the activities occurred before the children started school and other times the events were completed during the school years. Ollerenshaw (2012) presented research that showed how children benefitted from experiences in the community that led to literacy development.

Parents attended events in their neighborhood and continued using the discovered concepts about teaching their children literacy skills in a way to enhance their early growth. Children learned more about subjects introduced in school when their parents worked with them on specific skills to support those areas. For instance, some parents commented that they took their children into the community and taught them about the nature and science within their surroundings. There were parents who included their children in building projects. Parents also enrolled their children in sports or other activities where the children learned more about numbers due to scores and they also learned about discipline within a team (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). Children developed at advanced rates when their parents included community events in their lives.

**Parents worked through their children's transitions.** Various transitional points in a child's life presented a need of young children. As children moved from staying at home during the day, to attending school for a large part of the day, there were recognizable ways that parents aided in transitions. Some parents stayed in preschool classrooms for a moment to read a book with their children and ease them into the classroom. This helped the children realize the value of the classroom and the care of the parent (Lee, 2010).

When parents accepted offers for teachers to enter their homes and get to know their families before the school year started, the young students had an easier time adjusting to the classroom. Home visits were one part of Epstein's model that benefitted both children and parents (Meyer et al., 2011). Parents and teachers could then stay connected with one another to communicate about the young learners as they prepared

for school and progressed during the year. In addition, children were more prepared for school when the teachers opened the classroom to parent involvement and the parents took part in those moments. The children showed an appreciation and excitement when their parents were a part of the school activities (Pedro et al., 2012). Parents also helped their children with the transition from the home to school, by teaching them social skills to help the children behave well in the classroom, work with peers, and adjust to the changes (Galindo & Fuller, 2010).

Parents assisted children in transitions from grade level, to grade level. Especially when children make monumental moves in school, it is critical for parents to help their children prepare for the changes. When young children go from preschool to kindergarten, or even when students go from elementary school to middle school or junior high, there are changes in the school design, the routines, recognition of teachers, and workloads (Durand & Perez, 2013). Research demonstrated that children were mentally and emotionally equipped for these transitions when their parents discussed the new schools, along with the elements of the school that were different. This engagement from the parents allowed children to enter schools without discomfort and worry (Hatcher et al., 2012).

**Parents were involved in the schools.** As children started school, researchers identified the advantages that came to students when their parents met with teachers to discuss plans for school experiences. Parents desired time to get to know the teachers with an intention to feel comfortable with the people who would spend large portions of the day with their children (Cantin et al., 2012; Durand & Perez, 2013; Jeon et al., 2010).

When parents took the time to get involved in meetings with teachers and schools prior to a child's enrollment, the parents and the children released some of their worries about the new school year (Lin & Bates, 2010).

Levin and Aram (2012) identified particular meetings as moments when teachers coached mothers in order to direct them in ways to help their children gain necessary, early literacy skills. There were occasions when parents were not able to assess their child's proficiencies accurately in relation to the school standards (Carrasco & Fox, 2012). Meetings with teachers led parents to a more precise understanding of the skills their children needed before entering school (Anthony et al., 2011). With technology and new ways of approaching parental involvement, teachers could set up meetings online to work with parents and build websites that help families connect more with the classroom.

Casual conversations between parents and teachers also encouraged parents to engage in learning opportunities with their children on a daily basis. Research demonstrated instances when parents learned more sufficient ways to teach their young children beginning literacy and numeracy skills that corresponded with the state educational requirements for early childhood learners (Karakus & Savas, 2012). Both parents and children additionally gained confidence for new school years when they knew the academic requirements for the approaching year.

Meetings between teachers and parents were valuable to children's development, when parents continued the conversations through the school year. Karakus and Savas (2012) mentioned the need for those meetings to stretch beyond the twice a year parent-teacher conferences. When parents attended those conferences to keep in touch with the

progress of their children, they learned ways to help their children grow in academics and social skills (Harper et al., 2011; Levin & Aram, 2012; Robins et al., 2012). However, parents who chose to attend school functions and meet with teachers at additional times in the year, created a higher level of work effort in their children, than the parents who did not attend additional functions. Many of these informal meetings helped parents gain a desired comfort to increase their involvement in the schools (Fluckiger et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2011). Both parents and children benefitted from the school participation.

Children benefitted when parents took time to talk with them about school. Conversations about cognitive and behavioral development were advantageous to the children (Luce et al., 2013). Rather than simply reading to children, some parents talked with their young child about the letters, words, and sentences on each page (Robins et al., 2012). Parents also asked their children questions about stories. They stopped the stories at some moments to make predictions and allow the children to share their emotions about the story (Barnyak, 2011). These types of engagements helped the children grow in literacy development (Herold et al., 2011).

The story times helped the young children learn to sit and listen during a book much like staying focused through a lesson; this is a skill that facilitates readiness for the sitting and learning in a classroom (McEachern et al., 2012). The research demonstrated ways that children made even greater progress in school when they set goals with their parents (Gregg et al., 2012; Hatcher et al., 2012). Families were able to check for continued improvement over the school year and set new goals when other targets were achieved (Manz et al., 2013).

**Parents provided home learning environments.** Children developed at increased rates when their parents provided a learning environment within their homes. Before formal education, young children whose parents helped them learn beginning literacy and numeracy skills were well prepared for the classroom (Cooper et al., 2010; Dickinson & Porche, 2011). On the other hand, children who did not receive that helpful preparation were often behind in their development. Some moments for learning about literacy were offered through observations. Children benefitted from watching their parents read, write, and speak in such a way to advocate quality language skills (Weigel et al., Bennett, 2010).

Reading in the home was sometimes supported by literacy teaching within childcare centers, which gave children multiple forms of instruction in literacy skills (Crosnoe et al., 2010; Lee, 2010). Hartas (2011) revealed that families in low socioeconomic communities usually had fewer resources to give their children a productive learning environment. Communication between children, parents, and staff in neighborhood schools made a way for families to find manageable methods to help their young children get ready for school (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011).

The home learning environment was also noticeable as a benefit once children were learning new concepts in school. Besides the academics that children increased through expanding their learning moments at home, they also learned to value school and the education process (Lynch, 2010). Parents showed their children the importance of an education when they helped their children with homework and built on the lessons taught in the classrooms (Savas, 2012). Teachers urged parents to work on homework with the

children and talk about lessons from schools in inventive ways, so the entire family was motivated to continue their teamwork with the school and other activities.

Much like the years prior to formal education, families with few resources showed less involvement with their children's learning process throughout the school years, than those families who had more financial security (Hartas, 2011; Nwokah et al., 2013). Yet, the researchers showed that it was necessary to find ways for parents to set aside their life circumstance and take part in learning activities with their children. Research made it evident that teachers could encourage parents to participate more in the educational lives of their children in order to create a team between the school, the student, and the home (Meyer et al., 2011; Muir, 2012).

### **Family Circumstances**

Continuing the emphasis on families' roles in the development of young children, it is valuable to identify the circumstances that families experiences on a daily basis. Each child who entered a classroom, walked in from various situations at home. There were moments in a child's life that proved to be stressful, which affected the child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Some families reported multiple conditions in their homes that caused complications in their children's progress. As the negative family issues increased, the possibility for standard children development decreased (Cadima et al., 2010; Weigel et al., 2010). In some research, parents showed circumstances in their lives that added risks to their child's learning while at home and at school (Ferguson & Vanderpool, 2013). Research from recent years displayed numerous

ways that the nature of the home could improve in order to bring a positive influence to young children (Meyer et al., 2011).

**Families with a low socioeconomic status.** Many studies were completed in relation to low socioeconomic households. That research demonstrated that families in this situation often do not use their financial resources in a way to help their children's learning process (Guhn & Goelman, 2011). These parents showed a need simply to find enough time in the day to work one or two jobs and make enough money to pay the household bills (Hartas, 2011). Unfortunately, children in families with low incomes also showed higher numbers of health concerns. These needs required time and energy that pushed academic development further down on the list of necessities in their homes (Schwarz, et al., 2012). Extra hours in the day were devoted to completing household chores, rather than spending time in learning activities with young children in the home.

These situations created a lack of learning, plus a lack of understanding for the value of learning (Nwokah et al., 2013). Part of early development in the home is critical due to the way children identify the importance of learning new things. Children needed to acquire an enthusiasm for education even before they entered the formal school classroom. If they did not have that drive from home, they were often behind in school on academic and motivational levels (Crosnoe et al., 2010; McEachern et al., 2012). It helped to reach out to parents and tell them about this enthusiasm. Some teachers produced modern ways to share this information with families through the use of technology.

In addition, these families usually did not have learning materials in their homes (Cooper et al., 2010; Tucker-Drob & Harden, 2012). Books were not noticed at a high volume in the homes. Writing materials were not seen in the houses. These supplies were necessary for the young children to learn more about literacy and build the basic skills needed for beginning a successful education. The children in lower socioeconomic communities also exhibited fewer learned abilities to behave appropriately with a group of peers, follow teacher directions, and interact socially within the school (Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). When children were not offered beginning reading, math, and social skills at home, they had a difficult time in the first years of school. Those struggles continued throughout their education.

Carrasco and Fox (2012) explained the risk that children who live in a family with low socioeconomic status held for dropping out of school before high school graduation. This detail showed the result of early struggles in education. Socioeconomic status influenced both numeracy and literacy skills in young children (Thiel, 2012). Once children had a rough beginning to academic development, it was hard for them to raise their ability levels throughout their education (Kierman & Mensah, 2011). For that reason, multiple studies revealed ways for families to find time and materials to help their young children with developmental experiences.

Families with preschool children benefitted from attending courses that instructed the parents on how to use basic books and songs to teach beginning literacy skills to their children. The classes also encouraged families to add more time in the day to share conversations between parents and children in order to build oral language abilities

(Lundberg, Larsman, & Strid, 2012; Robins et al., 2012). It was also valuable when the courses presented encouragement for parents to help them gain confidence to teach their young children (Levin & Aram, 2012). Though a child's socioeconomic level displayed a direct connection to academic struggles, when parents realized their children's needs, they were able to work with their children and schools to raise their child's academics (McDermott et al., 2012).

**Education levels of parents.** Research showed selected moments when a family's financial security was attributed to the education level of the parents. Without advanced training, parents were not able to obtain higher paying jobs. These parents often did not have the skills necessary to acquire advancements along the way in given job fields (Cadima et al., 2010). There was a correlation between low education levels of mothers, to the low scores in school of children (Hartas, 2011; Torppa et al., 2011). As mentioned previously, many low socioeconomic households did not spend time in learning activities with their children.

Not only did parents with a lower degree of education bring in less money and stability to the home, but they often showed insufficient skills to help their young children prepare for success in school. Literacy developed through conversations was not observed at an adequate level in families with lower education levels. Parents spoke without a large vocabulary and were also found using inaccurate grammar. When the children heard these speech patterns on a daily basis, they learned that type of speech (Farver et al., 2013). On the other hand, parents who had more education exposed their

children to new descriptive words, a wide vocabulary, and correct grammar, even before school started.

Without a quality education, parents showed less comprehension on the need for children to learn through playtimes and other daily experiences in the home (Nwokah et al., 2013). Parents displayed a need to learn about child development, in order to reach their young children (Robins et al., 2012). Wu and Honig (2010) noted that mothers who had higher levels of education than other mothers did chose to read with their young children on a more consistent basis and read in front of their children more often. When children saw their mothers reading, they noticed the value of reading and were motivated to read on their own. Children usually duplicated their parents' actions, which could be positive or negative. Parents needed to consider that when they were speaking and completing responsibilities in the home (Levin & Aram, 2012).

**Families whose first language is not English.** Another situation that many children deal with in the United States was noticed in the prominent language spoken in the home. When children spoke a language other than English in their homes, but were expected to complete schoolwork in English, reports revealed that the children struggled with their progress (Thiel, 2012; Winsler et al., 2012). These children often did not learn accurate grammar in their early years because their parents did not learn proper English. Some of the families immigrated to America and worked to learn English by listening to people in the neighborhood, rather than taking classes. They learned vocabulary, but not the correct sentence-building skills (Farver et al., 2013).

Besides struggles with oral language, these students also learned how to read at a slower rate than their English-speaking peers (Swanson et al., 2012). Words in books were frequently confusing to these students not only in how to read them, but in their meaning as well. Teachers had to instruct students in the sounds of letters, which were sometimes very different from any sounds from their first language (Anthony et al., 2011; Cooper et al. 2010). Plus, they had to take time to explain some vocabulary, which slowed the reading process down.

Studies also indicated stresses in children's development when they had to deal with different cultural influences between their homes and school (Simms, 2012). There were moments in school when experiences were not typical in the child's home and culture, so they had to learn about those things in order to move forward with personal development (Isak-Ercan, 2012; Jeon et al., 2010). This was noticeable in cultural foods and bigger situations such as parents entering the school to help with their children's classrooms or helping with homework. Learning needed to take place with the children and their parents (Durand & Perez, 2013). Schools were helpful when they provided times of the week for families to enter the school and learn about their child's education, as well as share cultural characteristics of the community.

**Parenting Styles.** Another family circumstance that showed an impact on child development, in recent research, was the style in which parents raised their children. Select parents were more authoritative, while others were more cooperative, or even lenient; there were also times when researchers noticed parenting styles altered within a family between children of different genders. There were noticeable problems with social

behaviors, such as aggression and disrespect, in children who had controlling parents (Atlay & Gure, 2012). These negative issues were also observed in children whose parents gave little guidance and participation in the children's activities (McGilloway et al., 2012).

Parents who offered a home environment and daily instructions through conversational, considerate methods, found their children more prepared for classrooms and learning experiences (Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Lin & Bates, 2010). Children were influenced in positive ways when their parents created boundaries and reasonable expectations (McEachern et al. 2012). There was also recognition of quality social and academic development when parents were constructive with their criticism and supportive with their children's efforts. This repeatedly served as a way for children to progress at higher levels and show excitement for personal development (Karakus & Savas, 2012).

Young children also benefitted when their parents took a hands-on approach to parenting. Learning occurred at a higher success rate, when families worked together on school work and developmental opportunities, rather than instructing children to work on those efforts individually (Durand & Perez, 2013; McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). In fact, the research displayed a need for balance between parenting styles in order for children to grow academically and socially. Parents and children took advantage of learning more about this style of parenting by attending sessions that presented suggestions for balanced family in engagement in the home.

**Family structures.** Family structure was one more situation that proved to influence student growth. Single parent families exhibited tensions that negatively affected the social and emotional growth of young children. These families also described more stresses than two-parent families. Those stresses extended into schoolwork in such a way that made it hard for children to concentrate and progress in academic growth at an expected rate (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010). On the other hand, children that lived in homes with parents who were married often developed at a higher level than children of single parents did. This growth improved even more when married parents displayed courteous conversations between one another and created a home full of respect for one another, as well as each family member (Carlson, Pilkauskas, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2011).

Structure of the family was also represented by the age of the parents. Teenage parents showed fewer skills to assist their children in the areas necessary for adequate development. There were obvious connections between the ages of parents and other circumstances in the lives of the families. Younger parents were often less educated and therefore, less prepared financially for everything that emerged with the responsibility of parenting (McGilloway et al., 2012). At times young parents chose to take classes to learn more about parenting, which benefitted both the parent and the child involved.

Although they were not observed as frequently, other family circumstances were noticed as risk factors in a child's development. Pendry and Adam (2013) pointed out the negative impact that parental arguments had on child development. They worked to show families the importance of keeping disputes to a minimum when the children were present. Anxiety caused those young children to focus on their parents' struggles, rather

than the natural play of a young child that would bring opportunities for learning. Patterns and schedules were also noticed as a necessity in the home for children to build a capacity to learn and develop in a proper manner (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010). Even a family's participation in a religious organization was recognized as a factor that led to more family connections in other areas such as academics (Carlson et al., 2011).

Families may have other situations that were not found in recent research. Teachers were encouraged to talk with students and remain attentive of any situations that occurred outside of school that may influence their learning. Parents were also urged to give more attention to these risks that influenced the education of their children (Pedro et al., 2012).

### **Methods of Learning**

A final connection between multiple articles was the type of learning that took place with the children mentioned in the studies. Each of the noted learning techniques is used in many classrooms across America. Classrooms were designed to introduce new ways to learn and reach each child's personal learning style (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2012; Mc Dermott et al., 2012). Many teachers started using real-world practices in their classrooms to make lessons more practical. Teachers suggested that parents started implementing numerous methods for learning in their homes as well (Crosnoe et al., 2010). While it was not suggested to make a house look like a schoolroom, families were encouraged to teach through the everyday events of life (Barnyak, 2011).

Manz, Lehtinen, and Bracaliello (2013) noted that children benefitted when their parents helped them set goals for development. Even young children learned to talk about

their interests and aspirations. They also recognized how to follow their work to identify when a goal was reached and how to set a new one. Once parents realized the current, age appropriate skills that their children could obtain, they were better prepared to guide their children in setting these goals (Carrasco & Fox, 2012).

During their conversations, parents started learning that it was valuable to describe how to reach those goals. With the help of teachers, parents brought the new classroom learning methods into their homes to heighten the level of development for individual children. Complete families showed an appreciation when they could strive for particular goals in such a way that was personally motivating (Rodger et al., 2012).

**Learning through free play.** Playtime was noted as a regular part of the day for many young children, but it was also recognized as a useful means to gain academic and social development. Most children showed comfort when playing with siblings and peers. When they were at ease, they were more open to talking with those who joined in the activities. This allowed for language development in the lives of the children (Nwokah et al., 2013). It was especially beneficial when the parents encouraged the children in their play and commented positively on any new abilities that were displayed (Kierman & Mensah, 2011). Children were noticed using beginning math and reading skills, and they showed an inquisitive nature for learning (Hatcher et al., 2012). While it was valuable for children to learn to play without the guidance of adults, it was also important for adults to know when to jump into a child's playtime in order to push their development higher.

In addition to moments of play at home, teachers also took time to set up an environment for learning through play in the classroom. Rather than spending the day

giving direct instructions and assignments to young children, educators appreciated the way children built their knowledge base by playing with peers (Hatcher et al., 2012). Teachers set out activities that led to grade-level objectives and allowed the children to make choices in their play. This created an enjoyment from the children that generated added play and therefore, more academic growth (Lillemyr, Sobstad, Marder, & Flowerday, 2011).

While students joined with friends on activities in the classroom, teachers listened to their conversations. Teachers took moments to guide their discussions to basic understandings about science, numeracy, and literacy. This was accomplished by asking the children open-ended questions that encouraged them to continue their play with a purpose. In addition, the teachers used these occasions to build children's vocabulary and grammar (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Educators realized that some parents needed ideas on how to steer their child's talk during activities. Those teachers created take-home packets to connect the home with the school, which included activities and a suggestion sheet for parents (Muir, 2012). This helped children enhance their playtimes both at school and at home.

**Learn through exploring and discovering new things.** Playful moments were valuable to young learners often times due to the discoveries that the children made during their explorations. For instance, as children played with cards, dominoes, and board games, they discovered counting and problem solving skills, that would later be used in math lessons and math used through life (Muldoon, Towse, Simms, Perra, & Menzies, 2013). They also explored language when they talked with peers about the

activities. When observed, children were noticed asking questions about the games, giving answers, and even creating new games along the way based on their interests and conversations (Lefevre et al., 2010).

The nature of children was noticed when they talked with peers and helped one another discover new abilities through their explorations. In observations, children showed a willingness to work with one another and share their ideas (Fitneva, Lam, & Dunfield, 2013; Weigel et al., 2010). These experiences led them to new knowledge. The young students watched others during games, and learned literacy skills, as well as social skills. Children learned to take turns, let others speak, and work together.

When children searched and found answers to personal questions, the new knowledge remained with the child for the long-term. Researchers noticed the way children continued to work on finding answers, when they were the authors of the questions (Fitneva et al., 2013). In fact, once the little ones discovered one answer, they often created new questions (Weigel et al. 2010). This presented a purpose for educators to give students more time for personal discoveries, rather than directly teaching all of the material in the curriculum. Educators could provide materials to lead to specific objectives and allow the students to explore, question, and uncover new knowledge. At that point, the teacher would support the discoveries with direct instruction.

Young children displayed an ability to learn at a higher level when they used multiple senses. Scents, touch, and sounds were noticed to help young learners comprehend new knowledge in regards to each subject area (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). For example, children who were taken outside, to discover the science of plants

and animals, were able to make connections with each experience due to the senses that were applied. Children were asked questions in relation to the senses used, in order for them to create links between learning objectives and experiences (Luce et al., 2013).

Children benefitted from manipulating materials that kept their attention on the new skill, whether learning at home or at school. Once there were various items for the children to implement into their learning opportunities, their interests rose (Fitneva et al., 2013). They showed an enthusiasm for learning with the use of letter blocks to build words or words cards to create sentences (Lundberg et al., 2012). Children then chose to utilize numerous writing materials to extend their learning.

**Learn in authentic situations.** Research showed a need for children to learn in authentic situations. The children gained more capabilities when they gathered new knowledge through experiences that they would repeat throughout life (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Children who learned within their daily routines were likely to repeat the skills each day (Nwokah et al., 2013). This gave them practice time to improve on their abilities and be able to use the readiness skills in school.

Parents helped their children grow when they taught new skills to their children in places such as the grocery store or in the outdoors (Luce et al., 2013). Gregg, Rugg, and Stoneman (2012) explained that parents also taught their children through “natural learning” experiences in their homes (p. 88). When families cooked together and talked about measuring the ingredients, the children learned about a basic math skill. When families shared conversations while cleaning up the home, the children learned bigger

vocabularies and proper grammar (Robins et al., 2012). These were skills that were necessary to begin school on a solid ground.

Teachers also demonstrated ways to create authentic learning opportunities in the classroom. Learning centers were modeled after places in the neighborhood. Books were chosen based on interests and cultures of the children (Barnyak, 2011). Within the design of the classroom, teachers included objectives from the curriculum that were required. Those learning practices supported the hypothesis that children learn more through real-life learning methods (Nwokah et al., 2013).

**Early interventions are beneficial to learning.** In recent years, studies across the United States showed that children entered kindergarten without the necessary skills to learn the objectives set out for that first year of formal schooling. This was noticed, in part, due to the new, more advanced standards in the schools. Parents of young students often displayed a lack of knowledge about the higher leveled objectives, which made it impractical for the young learners to prepare for school in an appropriate manner (McWayne et al., 2012). It was clear that children, who attended prekindergarten programs in the public schools, were more prepared than their peers who had stayed home prior to kindergarten (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Within the kindergarten classrooms, there were apparent divisions of knowledge and social abilities displayed by the students, which required the teachers to work with groups of students at varying levels.

Many educators realized a need to provide more directed lessons to students who did not have the necessary skills for learning kindergarten objectives. Teachers who

offered students interventions early in the school year noticed the children made greater strides throughout their elementary years than those children who did not receive interventions until later in elementary school (Crosnoe et al., 2010). For those interventions to take place, teachers had to observe the students and assess their capabilities on a weekly basis (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2012). The new lessons were then formed around the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

To bring children additional assistance with their academic development, certain teachers found ways to involve the parents in the intervention process. The teachers sent activities home with students that included directions and all the supplies needed for the learning (Muir, 2012). This presented lessons that were directly related to the needs of the individual students, rather than telling parents general kindergarten objectives to fulfill. Aside from the extra practice, young children increased their learning when they noticed that their parents cared enough to work with them on their schoolwork (Simms, 2012).

Teachers even entered homes to work on developmental concerns with students and their families. Especially in families with a low socioeconomic status, where families often did not show an understanding of the classroom goals, these home interventions supported the work completed in the schools (Manz, 2012). Individualized time helped children at an early age begin to learn skills they would use throughout school.

**Learn in small groups.** No matter what form of learning opportunities the children were given, research showed that there were advantages to the children who worked in small groups with their teachers. Within those guided lessons, teachers used a combination of the previously mentioned learning methods (Jeon et al., 2010). Some of

the small group moments were created with the use of learning centers in the classroom. These were areas that teachers set up learning activities around the room where the students could use different senses and learning styles in order to practice new skills (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2012). Parents were also encouraged to create guided moments for learning in their homes where the parent and the child had time dedicated to skill building (Barnyak, 2011; Weigel et al., 2010).

Educators worked to create new teaching methods by incorporating many senses within original learning centers. Areas for enhanced learning were even developed outside the classroom walls. This provided places where children experienced nature and skills learned in the environment (Kahriman-Ozturk, Olgan, & Guler, 2012; Luce et al., 2013; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). Learning centers also provided a time for teachers to implement new technology resources. Young children practiced new concepts with the use of computer games, interactive programs, plus connections with other classrooms, students, and educators over the internet (Shamir, Korat, & Fella, 2012).

Students took many occasions in the centers to work with a peer and even selected times to work independently. In addition, teachers were able to circulate the classrooms, observe the student work, or use the time to individualize lessons with a few students. It was beneficial for students to experience various types of instruction and practice throughout the day. These moments offered ways for children to explore each learning style. They had the opportunity to find personal strengths. Plus, the students showed more growth when one skill was reinforced with multiple approaches (Crosnoe et al., 2010).

## Conclusions

Throughout recent studies, there were a number of themes that demonstrated trends in early childhood education. These included elements from both formal education with educators in a school and informal education with parents and community members within the home and neighborhood (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). Many specific, vital aspects of education were noticed, but through it all, it was indicated that children gain a great deal of development in their first seven years (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). It is critical for parents and teachers to offer young learners valuable forms of education early in life. Furthermore, educators should take their expertise and produce groundbreaking trends for students in modern, technology-filled classrooms (Harper et al., 2011; Levin & Aram, 2012).

For many years, there was a realization that educating children took a team effort. Those efforts came from the young learners, their parents, and their teachers (Barnyak, 2011; Durand & Perez, 2013). All parents have personal desires for their children, though they vary across families with different cultures and socioeconomic status (LeFevre et al., 2010). It is necessary to compile the ambitions of parents, with the developmental objectives laid out in each level of education. Teachers showed an ability to work with families in order to help children succeed in their education. It was critical for each person to understand the goals and practical ways to reach those aspirations (Gregg et al., 2012; Rodger et al., 2012). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are innovative methods for these teams to implement in order to help the children find success in their development.

Studies on the development of young children are prevalent, yet continue to show a need for more research. A major gap detected from the literature is that of discovering the perceptions of parents in regards to their child's education (Welsh et al., 2010), especially once the parents have the opportunity to join the classroom as an observer and participant (Kierman & Mensah, 2011). Generations of students would benefit from educators creating innovative ideas that help families engage more in their children's education and development. Though it seems like a simple request, there are many families who find this involvement difficult and uncomfortable.

Early childhood educators should look past their classroom walls when working to teach the young students. These educators must look at the families of the students (Lin & Bates, 2010). They need to build relationships with not only the children, but the parents. Once those relationships are formed, then the teachers can help the parents find ways to help their children with development at home (Lynch, 2010; McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012; Savas, 2012). They can also encourage parents to enter the school to participate in each child's growth during the school day (Rodger et al., 2012). This cooperation between families and educators contributes to a higher quality of education for young children.

By providing young learners with a valuable education in their first years of school, lasting results will occur (Cadima et al., 2010). Ferguson and Vanderpool (2013) described the ways full communities can benefit from stronger education programs for complete families. Once parents understand the needs of their children and help their children reach high potentials, there is a potential for less burdens on society. For

instance, the students are more likely to complete each grade level on schedule, they are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education, and they are expected to lead successful lives. These factors generate more money for a community and less money spent on caring for families who cannot care for themselves (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

With new, high-level requirements in the first years of schools, it is critical for early childhood educators to form bonds with families in order to guide them through the education process (Durand & Perez, 2013). This will also help their children begin their development with success (Karakas & Savas, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011). This will take innovative concepts to reach the lofty goals, especially in areas where parents work long hours and do not have the education to completely comprehend the new objectives in school (McWayne et al., 2012). Discussions with parents and educators involved in early childhood education provided necessary components for a case study that gave insight to this need in education.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this case study was to describe innovative ways that parents in a low socioeconomic community engaged in activities with their children that influence the academic and social development of their young children. The learning methods were noted following the parents' attendance in kindergarten classroom events where they were given an opportunity to observe and take part in activities with their child. Many young children, especially in communities with a low socioeconomic status, leave their homes each morning and enter the school building with a disconnection between their home life and school life (Cooper et al., 2010). This research prepared to guide families and educators in creating that necessary connection. An innovative approach was taken to form a team between parents and teachers when parents were invited into the kindergarten classrooms in a way for them to see the current standards for the young learners and discover ways to reach those objectives in the school and home.

To begin this chapter, I explain the research design along with the reasons behind the design choice. I also define my role within the study and the participants of the study. Moving into details concerning the methodology for the research, I explain how I selected participants for the study and what instruments I used to collect the data. I share details in relation to the procedures for data analysis, which include the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data (Yin, 2009). I also discuss the care and security of people and information during the process plus the methods used to close the research. Further ethical considerations taken for the study are also presented.

Throughout the chapter, clear details about the entire qualitative, case study are described.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Based on recent research, there is a need for families who live in low socioeconomic households to help their children prepare in a more proficient way for formal schooling in regards to academic, social, and behavioral skills (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010). For example, educators can show parents ways to practice numeracy skills and literacy skills with household goods, as well as using moments within the grocery store and other parts of the community (Barnyak, 2011; Robins et al., 2012). However, there is a deeper need for families to understand how to help their young children with these preparations (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). This clearly impacts the lives of young children entering kindergarten classrooms, as well as their family members. In addition, this need influences the presentation styles of early childhood educators in many communities.

### **Central Question**

In a low socioeconomic community, what influences on early child development will parents and educators describe about parent-engagement after parents participate in the kindergarten classroom?

### **Subquestions**

1. What are the parents' perceptions of their role in early childhood development?

2. What are the educators' perceptions of a parent's role in early childhood development?
3. In what ways does the kindergarten classroom engagement of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten students, and their parents influence the development of young children?
4. What are the parents' perceptions of their child's academic and social abilities following their engagement in the kindergarten classroom activities?

### **Central Concept of the Study**

This study involved kindergarten teachers who opened their classrooms to parents to observe and participate in their child's academic and social development. During these moments, the educators demonstrated ways for the parents to work with the children on specific skills when they are at home. Parents of kindergarten students were invited into the classrooms with the intention of the parents learning more about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning standards and practices for young children. I took various avenues to discover the perceptions of parents in regards to the necessities of their children and how they can assist with their child's development when their children are at home. One expectation of the study was to advocate for higher levels of child development in the foundational years, with students in low socioeconomic communities. This is more likely to take place when a team is formed between the school and the home (Kierman & Mensah, 2011).

## **Research Tradition and Rationale**

To analyze observations and conversations, I implemented a qualitative approach. Conversations between the researchers and participants often brought descriptive comments that lead to solid answers for a study (see Appendix A). These answers are produced by learning about a phenomenon through commonalities in the observations and interviews, rather than through statistics (Patton, 2002). In this study, specific conversations took place with parents of young children. Other conversations occurred, in form of group discussions, with educators closely involved with early childhood education.

In this qualitative study, the research took place through a holistic, single case study (Yin, 2009). A single environment was viewed to get a better understanding of one situation in the early childhood classroom (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Recognition of how the conceptual framework related to the classroom events helped form questions to present to each interviewee. Parents who were a part of the case shared their perceptions and experiences from the classroom events. Educators also had an opportunity to share their involvement with young children and their parents. This type of case study was described as one with an advocacy paradigm due to the potential for social changes to come out of the research.

Due to the ethnicity of most of the families in this study, there were thoughts about using an ethnographic approach to the study, rather than a case study. Yin (2009) explained that ethnography often takes extensive time to complete observations. Case studies do not rely on lengthy schedules or the researcher taking a participatory role in

the study. Additionally, the ethnicity of the participants was not the highlight of the study. Overall, this study aspired to understand the issue of parental involvement in early childhood education, which can be accomplished clearly through a descriptive single case study.

Due to the recognizable stories that would be shared in this study, there was a consideration to take a narrative approach to the research. In a narrative study, a researcher focuses on one or two people in order to gather their stories. Those stories usually detail long periods of time in the life of the participant (Yin, 2009). The current study pursued interactions with more people than a narrative approach and called for discussions with two groups of people, both teachers and parents. Apart from the participants, this study focused on a particular experience within early childhood education. If a participant shared lengthy stories, the focus could be lost in their narrative. For these reasons, neither an ethnographic nor a narrative study was suitable for the current study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this study, I took on the responsibility to direct it through completion as an observer. This occurred by leading a focus group of educators who were directly involved in early childhood education, and then an analysis of the information, to gain more information about the benefit of parental involvement in this community. I also conducted the individual parent interviews. This study took place in the elementary school where I teach kindergarten. The noted, monthly Friday classroom events took place in each kindergarten classroom through the 2013–2014 school year. However, no

parents from my past students were invited to join the study. This guarded against worries concerning objectivity in the research process.

With the small size of the elementary school where this study took place, I have some knowledge about the parents built the participant base. Throughout the school year, or in previous school years, there were encounters between the parents during activities that occurred with the entire kindergarten population or the overall school population. Additionally, the members of the kindergarten teaching team worked together to plan daily lessons and discuss classroom interventions. Student names and ability levels did enter these conversations, so there was a potential to know information about some of the students whose parents volunteered for each case in the study.

An initial concern was mitigated due to the fact that no parents from my past students will be included in any form of the study. Another concern of bias was diminished by dismissing comments from other teachers that concern students of parents who volunteered for the study. Instead, the only data utilized were gathered about the students and parents to conclude results from the focus group and comments from the interviews. Experiences that were established within the classroom events, and comments that parents shared concerning developmental progress in the home, rather than any other experiences they have in the school as a whole, were the focus of the analysis. This included, but was not limited to Parent-Teacher Association, dealings with teachers of siblings, or situations with administration.

## **Methodology**

Many components work together to build the methodology of a study. This includes the participant base, instruments that will be used in the data collection, and how the data will be collected and analyzed. Researchers consider theories, the research questions, problem, and purpose to design a clear plan that will be implemented throughout the data collection and analysis of the information (Miles et al., 2014).

### **Participant Selection Logic**

To form the participation pool for this study, parents and educators from the given elementary school fell into one of two categories. First, willing educators who directly influenced early childhood development had the opportunity to take part in a focus group (see Appendix B). Secondly, to volunteer for the interviewing process, parents who had children attend kindergarten at the school during the 2013–2014 school year, had to attend the kindergarten classroom events. It was there that they were observed and participated in developmental activities. The parents were also willing to participate in interviews to discuss the classroom events and developmental activities that emerge in the home (see Appendix C).

Most of the families in the school site live in a low socioeconomic household. Data from the state identified that close to ninety-six percent of the students fall into that economic category (State Education Agency, 2011). Generally speaking, the families also have a Hispanic heritage, though they still speak English as their first language. The state additionally reported almost ninety-five percent of the students in the school claim a Hispanic ethnicity (TEA, 2012). Within the school, there are a high number of students

who are at-risk of developmental delays due to a lack of exposure to early literacy and numeracy skills.

This study implemented a purposeful sampling of participants, which aids in the precise responses needed to answer the research questions (Patton, 2002). After parents attended one of the meetings that explained the study, and they signed an agreement form to participate, I placed them in the case of interviewees. As mentioned, the case included six parents.

It was expected that the necessary number of parents would volunteer for this study. This study focused on families within the early childhood department, which has the highest rate of involvement within the school. This school has three kindergarten and three First Grade classrooms. With the six parents for the case, this was a sufficient number of participants to provide a complete view of the events. Implementation of the case study delivered added information to the study to gain widespread insight from the parents.

### **Instrumentation**

The research was conducted through a focus group and interviews; the interviews of which were recorded (Yin, 2009). Each instrument was chosen to complete the case study, which intended to inform parents and educators about innovative ways to guide young children to appropriate developmental skills. Qualitative research requires participants to actively engage in the research. This started by conducting a focus group of educators who were involved with early childhood education (Patton, 2002). The educator-participants were given an opportunity to share ideas they have about 21<sup>st</sup>

century standards of learning for their young students. The focus group discussions gave them an opportunity to further discuss ways young children can achieve those objectives, as well as any concerns regarding their students' overall development (see Appendix D).

A second instrument that was used in this study was interviews that were voice-recorded. Proper interviewing techniques assured clear, complete answers from the parents who formed each case of the study (Yin, 2009). Open-ended questions (see Appendix E) permitted the interviewee to share personal feelings and experiences with meaningful answers (Patton, 2002). I evaluated each instrument independently and collectively.

While extra precautions from bias are needed, there are benefits to creating instruments specific to the study. A case study offers details about experiences in life that can teach people (Yin, 2009). In most cases, those lessons can bring positive changes to a specific group of people. For the necessary advice to arise, it is critical to develop questions, data collection materials, and an analysis process that will answer the questions of the study.

I introduced the innovative concept of bringing parents into the classroom during the school day, to the administrator and the kindergarten teaching team. Furthermore, there was an explanation of the focus group in accordance with the study. I devised conversation starters with consideration of the past literature and current learning objectives.

Based on the research questions and the Friday, kindergarten classroom events I created questions for the interviews. The questions considered the needs of the children in

the school and the needs of young children noted in the literature. I asked in an open-ended format and there was time for responsive questioning. Due to the fact that I also conducted the interviews and was familiar with the questions, there was a great deal of eye contact with the interviewees to send a message of ease. Notes were also taken about body language that was pertinent to the study.

The given instruments offered varying views into the lives of early childhood students, specifically in this condition of modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, and the students' learning process in conjunction with their parents. It was beneficial to identify relationships between the actual events in the classroom, noted by educators, along with the descriptions given by parents. The instruments for this qualitative case study presented a way to "capture" personal stories that live the phenomenon day in and day out (Patton, 2002). Once the relationships are presented, educators can create more solid ways to connect with families so the young learners build a stronger foundation for development.

### **Procedures for Participation and Data Collection**

After the instruments were fit to the case study model and the benefits of creating personalized instruments was realized, it was appropriate to consider how each tool would be implemented within the research. Certain parts had to be used before others could be fully developed. In all of the planning, the goals of the study were carefully measured in addition to ways to respect all people involved.

Upon introducing the concept of this research, potential participants received details about any exact dates or small time frames that were to be utilized for the study

(see Appendix F). This allowed parents and educators to confirm their availability prior to the beginning of the data collection portion of the research. Participants who volunteered to take part in the study were readily available for discussions, due to the fact that their children attend the school where I teach daily. Even with this easy access to participants, schedules were followed and participants were not simply stopped with a moments' notice.

Within the explanation of the study, detailed information about the participants' role in the research was presented. This offered security to the participants during the study, which encouraged them to continue their engagement of each portion of the research. Through the interviews and the entire study, participants were included in talks about timing and ensured of comfort in the setting chosen for the meetings.

A focus group was organized to have an open forum about learning in the developmental lives of young children. There was one occasion for educators to attend a focus group. The date for the group was set in conjunction with the school administrator. The meeting lasted just over 60 minutes. Within 48 hours of each event, the notes from the group session were analyzed. I specifically notated information about the educators' perceptions and concerns about advanced learning standards in early childhood education, as well as parental involvement. Notes were recorded and retained in a password protected, electronic file.

Interview questions focused on parents of students who are now in first grade who participated in the classroom events during their child's kindergarten year. The questions geared toward interactions learned within the classroom setting, that the families can

incorporate in their homes. They also considered the way educational standards have changed in recent years. There were additional questions formed which arose for this group based on the focus groups.

Each interview was recorded with audio equipment on a personal tablet. Before agreeing to take part in the study, participants were made aware of the recording. Participants also had access to their personal recording within a day of the interview. Interviews took place at arranged times in accordance to the participant's schedule. The participants understood that the interview could take 60–90 minutes. While many took less time, the participant was able to request a time extension. At the time of scheduling the interviews, participants had the option to have the interview take place in English or Spanish.

During the interview, I asked the prepared questions as well as many responsive questions that were applicable to the study. Aside from notating basic answers to questions, body language and emotions that were displayed during the interview were documented. Within 48 hours of the interviews, I personally transcribed the recordings. An analysis of each interview also took place within that time period, in regards to the questions in the study. Once all of the interviews were complete, each analyzed interview was re-visited and examined to find any similarities and major differences. Comments from the focus groups were evaluated in conjunction with the interviews.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

All data were saved in a password-protected file on a personal computer, as well as a personal external drive. Notes from the scheduled focus groups were contained in

one file. Individual interview recordings, each transcript, and notes from each interview were held in another file. All files were labeled with a date and a code to identify the file, without revealing any names of participants.

All of the data were analyzed through manual, researcher-produced tactics. An excel workbook was created to gather the data; there were separate pages for individual pieces of data, as well as pages that showed the connections between the various information. For the initial part of the analysis process, I designed a system to code all of the data. This system was developed with colors that were selected to quickly identify conditions and circumstances in the data. The first cycle of coding searched for key words and phrases that were common within each transcript and notes taken from the focus groups.

To find continuity between each interview and discussions with the focus groups, a second cycle of coding was completed. I looked at the first set of codes and discovered the number of occasions which particular words or phrases were used by parents. Then I categorized the codes, which allowed identification of additional details that reflected answers to the study (Miles et al., 2014). That analysis was added to the overall notes for the study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

I took steps to show that the data were not threatened. This case study implemented a system of triangulation to check all areas of concern within the research; for instance, there are two instruments, focus groups and interviews, used for the research. The fact that there were two groups of participants, educators and parents,

added to the strength of the results. By identifying details within each one, and the collection of all data, the overall analysis was reinforced (Patton, 2002). The analysis was also supported through demonstrating credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

To be sure that the data were viewed and analyzed in a credible manner, kindergarten teacher colleagues reviewed each portion of the excel workbook. They were asked to look for information that was pertinent to the research questions, so that each conclusion was supported with clear evidence in both instruments of data collection (Patton, 2002). Even before colleagues reviewed the data analysis, consistencies were identified between the two types of data collected in the study. This was completed in such a way to assure that there was plenty of information from the participants and that the findings were valid (Miles et al., 2014).

### **Transferability**

The demographics in this school, low socioeconomic, Hispanic background, and low parent education levels, are found in many other near-by schools. The information discovered in this study can be transferred to those neighboring schools to assist their parents and whole families (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Children who live in a low-income community demonstrate a need for higher levels of achievement in developmental skill. This is noticed throughout the United States, so there is a potential for the results of the study to impact a larger area of the country. Besides simply helping

families who already have children in school, the information can be used to guide parents as they raise their young children.

### **Dependability**

Triangulation, which was previously described, offers a solid demonstration of how dependable the results are for the given study (Yin, 2009). With the use of two different data tools, focus groups and interviews, the information collected throughout the data collection showed that the results were reliable. In addition, the research benefitted from encompassing different parents and educators. By finding the relationships between comments from all participants, the results maintained a dependable take. This information helped me give evidence to parents and educators that is practical and worthwhile as they guide young children in learning and development.

### **Confirmability**

Another area used to determine if the data collection were completed in a trustworthy manner is to give evidence of confirmability. To offer a confirmation that the study was objective, a colleague from another campus, who was not a part of the classroom events, reviewed the data. The individual was an educator with whom I had worked, so that the reviewer completely knew and could identify my voice within the analysis. The reviewer verified that the analysis was not subjective (Patton, 2002).

### **Ethical Procedures**

In each stage of this research, primarily recognized in the data collection stage, I structured a plan that accounted for the ethics of people and materials used in study (Miles et al., 2014). The people in consideration are any participants that form the cases

for the interviews, the school administrators, and teachers who open their classrooms.

Materials to consider were any handouts and letters that were delivered to people involved in the study, and all of the data that were collected and saved for analysis for the research.

Once explanations were given for the study and the parents and educators chose to participate, participants signed agreements. One form asked educators for permission to use their comments given in the focus groups. Another form asked parents for the right to interview them in an appropriate setting. These served as permission to use their words in the presentation of this research.

To leave each participant with a high level of confidence that their identity was kept in confidence throughout the study, as well as their data secure, specific measures were put into place. Participants' names, and the names of their children, were not used in the presentation of the research. In addition, each parent was offered a transcript of the interview to read for accuracy. I provided contact details for the participant in case there was information in the transcript that needed to be changed for the study as a whole. Participants were also made aware of the security measures taken for the data to prevent loss.

Besides questions about discrepancies, parents were encouraged to share any general concerns in regards to the observations that are a part of the study. Each parent had an e-mail contact that could be used for any issues. Teachers and administrators who were involved with the study were also given that e-mail contact to present any questions, concerns, or comments about the research.

As explained previously, no parents, who had children in my kindergarten classroom, were included in the study. In addition, though discussions about kindergarten events occurred with other kindergarten teachers in the school, the teaching team did not discuss the analysis of the research. This provided a way to keep on one track in finding consistencies in the data.

Some parents in the selected school for the study speak Spanish as their first language. Due to the fact that I only speak English, a translator was recruited to offer services during the interviews if requested. Previous experiences in the school demonstrated that the parents primarily choose to complete meetings in English and this stayed true for the interviews. All of the parents chose to complete the interviews in English.

Materials in this research included audio recordings, any written resources related to the study, and personal notes of analysis. All data were saved in two, password-protected locations for added security; it was saved on a personal hard drive, as well as an external drive dedicated to the study. At the conclusion of the study, all data will be kept for 5 years before erasing it from the two areas. Data were saved with codes, rather than names, to give participants anonymity.

### **Summary**

Understanding each element of the research, how those parts play a role in finding answers to the research questions, and the way they work together is critical in a qualitative study. To gain awareness of each portion, the research questions and parent involvement in the development of young children were presented, as the central focus of

the study. It was also valuable to explain my role in the study to assure that the research was completed in an ethical manner.

Details were given regarding each portion of the methodology for this descriptive single case study. Participants were selected in a systematic way so that a particular situation in the kindergarten classrooms could be evaluated. Those participants created a case, which was treated in an equitable manner and with consideration throughout the study. An explanation of the instruments of a focus group and interviews were given to benefit the study. By implementing a combination of instruments in the data collection phase of the research, complete answers became evident during the analysis.

The analysis procedures were also described to highlight how the research would be conducted. Codes were chosen and explained to show how answers to the research questions were noticed in each piece of data, plus similarities and differences in the collection of data. Additional information was offered to demonstrate an assurance of a valid and reliable study. To get specific, methods were revealed on the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout each stage of the study, as well as keeping ethics present within the study.

In the following chapter I explain, in detail, the results of the research. After offering a reminder about the purpose of the study, the results section will begin by introducing the setting and the demographics involved in the research. Specific information will be described about the data collection process, the data that is collected, and the analysis process. Differences that arose from the intentions presented in chapter three are reported as alterations and reasons they were advantageous to the research.

Evidence of trustworthiness that was detailed in chapter three, will be discussed in chapter four as well. At that time, there will be a description of how the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were implemented throughout the data collection and analysis in order to ensure the integrity of the study. The chapter will end with final results of the research and will include any tables, figures, transcripts, and other documents found as beneficial to the presentation of the study as a whole.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this case study was to describe innovative ways that parents in a low socioeconomic community engaged in activities with their children that influence the academic and social development of their young children. To begin the description of results and findings, it is valuable to revisit the purpose and questions of the study. I offer a description of the setting and participants of the study to gain a background for the data collection. The data collection procedures include details about two groups in the study, educators that formed a focus group and parents who were individually interviewed. I provide an explanation of how I selected participants. This is followed by details about the coding of data and the two cycles of analysis. I present findings for the focus group and each interview and give an explanation regarding the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, I present the results for each research question.

Educators came together to discuss their views regarding the parent engagement in their classrooms and the school as whole. In addition, they talked about their thoughts about the ways that parents can create a stronger foundation for their young children cognitively, socially, and behaviorally. After parents were given multiple opportunities for involvement in the kindergarten classrooms of their young children, parents were interviewed to discover the ways the classroom engagement enhanced each child's development. Within the focus group and the interviews, questions for the educators and parents were devised based on the research questions.

**Central Question**

In a low socioeconomic community, what influences on early child development will parents and educators describe about parent-engagement after parents participate in the kindergarten classroom?

**Subquestions**

1. What are the parents' perceptions of their role in early childhood development?
2. What are the educators' perceptions of a parent's role in early childhood development?
3. In what ways does the kindergarten classroom engagement of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten students, and their parents influence the development of young children?
4. What are the parents' perceptions of their child's academic and social abilities following their engagement in the kindergarten classroom activities?

**Data Collection**

Data were collected for this study on the campus of a public elementary school located in a low-income community with a high percentage of bilingual and immigrant families. The school is small; it currently has less than 350 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Close to 100% of the students are on the free and reduced lunch plans established by the United State Department of Agriculture, which depicts the financial needs of the families. This socioeconomic status is attained due to single-parent homes,

parents who did not obtain a high school diploma, and a lack of higher education. Due to the socioeconomic status, there is evidence of less family time, including time for parents to spend leading their children in developmental growth. Many parents work multiple jobs or hold jobs with inconsistent schedules. In addition, many families have only one parent in the home and multiple children.

Another aspect of the study location included the opportunities for families to participate in regular lessons and educational activities in the kindergarten classroom throughout the school year. For many years the teachers in this school watched parents struggle to help children with homework and they noticed many children return to school with no completed homework. Even before homework started, the teachers realized the kindergarten students did not know basic skills needed to learn the kindergarten objectives. This team of kindergarten teachers recognized the necessity for parents to gain a complete understanding of their children's school objectives. Rather than simply asking parents to read newsletters and complete homework with their children, the teachers invited parents to attend their classes with the children monthly. Parents had the opportunity to observe their children in the classroom and discover a first-hand view of the child's strengths and weaknesses. These observations were meant to provide an experience for parents to learn along with their children. The classroom involvement would also offer support to concerns that teachers shared in conferences or impromptu conversations between teachers and parents. In addition, the parents were able to watch the educator teach lessons. This gave the parents suggestions on how to stretch the lessons into the homes.

### **Demographics of Participants**

There were two distinct groups of people who were informants to this study. First, there were educators who were highly involved in early childhood education within the given school. Educators in the early childhood portion of the school were found beyond the classroom teachers. There were mathematics and literacy specialists who took time to work with children in the classrooms or pulled students out of the room for small groups. In addition, there were special education teachers who supported the teachers with students who showed early signs of developmental delays and those students who were previously diagnosed with needs. Also, librarians, counselors, and support teachers provided collaboration with the classroom teachers to bring more opportunities for learning to each child. Each of the mentioned roles was represented in the focus group.

The second group was parents who had children in the same school. Those parents ranged in age from teenage parents to parents who would be considered “older”. There were parents who had multiple children and others who had only one child. Some of the parent participants were married or living with the child’s biological parent, while others were single and had no contact with the parent of the child. Each parent lived in a home with a financial status of great need. In Table 1 there is an overview of the participants.

Table 1

*Overview of Participants*

| <b>Participant Title</b>   | <b>Number of Participants</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Kindergarten Teachers      | 2                             |
| First Grade Teachers       | 3                             |
| Subject Area Specialists   | 2                             |
| Special Education Teachers | 2                             |
| Support Teachers           | 2                             |
| Counselor                  | 1                             |
| Librarian                  | 1                             |
| Parents                    | 6                             |

Though the children were not involved in the focus group or the interviews, they were the focus of each discussion. These children were 5–7 years old. Many of the children struggled with various aspects of development, whether academic or social. Additionally, there were a few children who notably were on target with the academic standards set by the state and the school district. Throughout the discussions, the betterment of the children was explored in order to provide a solid foundation for their learning and growth.

Answers were found to the research questions and the purpose of the study was fulfilled through data collected for a case study design. In a focus group, educators discussed the issues of early childhood development in their low socioeconomic teaching community. In personal interviews, parents discussed their concerns and perspectives on

the growth of their children. The parents also talked about their personal experiences with education and the ways that they were able to train their children in social, behavioral, and academic skills.

These measures of collection, along with details about the research questions, risks, and benefits of the study, were then presented to the IRB in the fall of 2014. After I offered an initial presentation of the data collection process, the IRB asked questions regarding my personal connections with the location for the data collection. I gave clarifications of my relationship to the educators who would be asked to join the focus group, and the parents who would be asked to take part in the interviews. Once those explanations were offered, the IRB sent an approval. The official approval, 10-20-14-0299147, was presented on October 20, 2014. The following week the data collection process started.

During the Walden IRB process, approval for the study was also requested through the research department of the school district where the study would be conducted. Upon discussing the research with the school administrator, he showed support for the project, but also asked for me to seek authorization through the school district. Through the school district's website, full disclosure of the research was presented in an application for research completion. Due to my role as a teacher in the school district, the procedures were completed within the internal portion of the request process for research. The Department of Research and Information Technologies reviewed the case study proposal and approved the completion of the study within the school district on September 30, 2014.

To begin the course of actions for the data collection, I conducted a meeting with the school administrator to request rooms for meetings and add dates to the main school calendar. During the first two weeks of November educators and parents, who were potential participants for the data collection, were given letters to ask for their participation in the study. The letters also mentioned a time and date for an informational meeting where more information would be explained about the study and questions could be asked (see appendix A). At the informational meeting general questions were addressed regarding the background of the study, the purpose, and the format for the focus group and interviews. Not every parent was able to attend the scheduled informational meeting, but those parents met with me personally to ask questions and discover more information about the study.

Educators and parents who decided to take part in the study signed agreement forms. Dates and times were set for each parent interview. In addition, the date and time was confirmed for the educators' focus group. Locations on the school campus were chosen that offered privacy during each meeting.

### **Educator Focus Group**

To offer an educator's perspective on parental involvement in the first years of a child's development, specifically in the low socioeconomic community, thirteen educators came together to discuss the matter. Sixteen educators were invited to participate in the focus group. The educators included professionals with different roles in early childhood education in the given public school, located in a low socioeconomic community. Of those, thirteen chose to share their thoughts in the focus group setting.

One educator did sign the agreement form, but was not able to attend the focus group due to a medical emergency. Pseudonyms were given to each educator throughout the findings and those names are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Introduction to Educators in the Focus Group*

| <b>Educator</b> | <b>Role in the School</b>                               |
|-----------------|---|
| Mrs. Adams      | Support Teacher   |
| Mrs. Butler     | First Grade Teacher                                     |
| Mrs. Coleman    | Counselor;<br>Recent First Grade Teacher                |
| Mrs. Dodson     | First Grade Teacher                                     |
| Mrs. Evans      | Subject Area Specialist;<br>Recent Kindergarten Teacher |
| Mrs. Rangel     | Subject Area Specialist                                 |
| Mr. Goodwin     | Support Teacher   |
| Mrs. Hernandez  | Librarian;<br>Recent First Grade Teacher                |
| Mrs. Harris     | First Grade Teacher;<br>Recent Kindergarten Teacher     |
| Mrs. Juarez     | Special Education Teacher                               |
| Mrs. Neil       | Special Education Teacher                               |
| Mrs. Lee        | Kindergarten Teacher                                    |
| Mrs. Moore      | Kindergarten Teacher                                    |

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, the educators came together on the campus of their current school to discuss the topic of parental engagement in early childhood development,

specifically in the low socioeconomic community. As explained to the educators at the informational meeting and the beginning of the focus group, questions were presented to the group and anyone was able to jump in to answer the questions while others could play off of their colleagues' responses. This open format proved to be successful as each educator was provided time to reply to the questions as well as their colleagues' comments. During the informational meeting, a time frame of 60–90 minutes was suggested as the length of the focus group. After an hour of discussion that never took a breath, I took a moment to give attention to the time and the educators took moments to make closing, summative remarks. The focus group was recorded on a personal tablet and the recording was saved on a personal computer and hard drive in password protected manner.

### **Parent Interviews**

It is critical to listen to the parental beliefs about their role in education young children to gain an understanding of how to reach form a partnership between parents and schools. The perspective of parents was considered by individually interviewing six parents from the same community. Parents were chosen through a purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013). Requests for participants were given to parents who attended classroom engagement opportunities during their child's kindergarten year and continue to engage in school activities during their child's first grade year.

Seven parents were approached and extended an invitation to take part in the interviews. Those parents were approached based on their involvement in their child's kindergarten classrooms when the teachers opened the rooms to participatory learning

between parents and children. One parent chose not to participate in the interview due to his schedule. Five parents were initially prepared to listen to more information about the study and ready to sign the agreement. One parent was apprehensive to join in the interviews due to her Spanish accent and concerns about not knowing English as her first language. After learning more about the study and talking with other parents, this parent chose to sign the agreement and complete the interview in English. Each one of the parents was given a date and time for an interview that met their personal scheduling needs. All of the six parent interviews were completed by the end of November 2014. Table 3 presents the pseudonyms for each parent that were used when describing the findings.

Table 3

*Introduction to Parents in the Interviews*

| <b>Parent</b>  | <b>Number of Interview</b> |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Mrs. Gutierrez | 1                          |
| Ms. Salazar    | 2                          |
| Mrs. Trevino   | 3                          |
| Mrs. Torres    | 4                          |
| Mrs. Martinez  | 5                          |
| Ms. Perez      | 6                          |

Parent interviews were conducted on the campus where the children attended school. A location was chosen where the parent could speak without any worries of

intrusion during the discussion. During the meetings to explain the interview procedures, which included brief details about the study as a whole, parents were told that the interviews would last about an hour. In reality, the time frame for the interviews was 20–60 minutes. Each interview was recorded on a personal tablet and transferred to a personal computer within 48 hours. The recordings were saved on that personal computer and an external hard drive with password protection.

### **Data Analysis**

Two cycles of analysis took place to accomplish the goals of this study. Deductive coding was implemented based on the questions formed for both the focus group and the interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). All coding was manual and implemented through a color-coded system. In the first cycle, the educator's focus group, as well as each interview, was evaluated on a separate basis. At the completion of the focus group, I typed a transcription which provided an opportunity to note each comment from the educators, as well as recall the emotions that encompassed each remark. Throughout the focus group certain themes continually arose in the conversation which helped to answer the research questions. From those themes, I chose categories that would provide a natural way to identify the outcomes from the data collection. I used inductive coding once additional themes surfaced during the analysis.

Within 48 hours of each parent interview, I transcribed recording. Just as with the focus group, the transcription process offered reminders of the parents' comments and emotions during the interview. After the transcriptions were completed the texts were marked according to the categories created. Those portions of the interviews led to

answers for the research questions. Table 4 displays those categories and the meaning behind each title.

Table 4

*Categories for Coding Descriptors*

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Conversation</b>                | Comments on the need for parents to talk with their children; comments about using extensive vocabulary with young; comments about parents listening to their children and responding |
| <b>Discipline</b>                  | Comments about presenting expectations and holding children accountable for their actions   |
| <b>Early Childhood Development</b> | Comments that considered the partnership between families and educators in relationship to the development needs of young children  |
| <b>Life Events</b>                 | Comments about relationships in the life of young children; comments about the stresses that families face in the given community; comments about parenting styles                    |
| <b>Literacy</b>                    | Comments regarding basic skills of letter recognition, letter sounds, letter formation, rhyming, speaking, and comprehending  |
| <b>Numeracy</b>                    | Comments regarding basic skills of number recognition, number formation, counting, shapes, colors, sorting, and money   |
| <b>Respect</b>                     | Comments about the children giving respect to authority figures; comments about different views of respect in various cultures  |
| <b>Routine</b>                     | Comments that considered the structure of children's lives within their homes   |
| <b>Technology</b>                  | Comments regarding various forms of technology used in the schools and homes by parents, young children, and educators  |

For an easy visualization of the categorical markings within the transcripts, I assigned a color to each category. The texts were read on the computer after completion of the transcriptions. When I recognized one of the categories in the comments, I changed the color to match the color assigned to the category of reference. This provided a visual aid to analyze the data.

Based on the literature review, the majority of the categories noticed in the focus group and interviews were expected. For instance, the beginning skills of 'literacy' and 'numeracy' are necessary to build a foundation for learning that will be implemented

throughout school and life. ‘Routine’, ‘discipline’, and ‘respect’ are also beneficial in order to create the energy and value for learning that are noticeable in students who reach, and even reach higher than, the standards set out by the state education system. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, it was also no surprise when both educators and parents discussed the impact of ‘technology’ on the development of young children. The category of ‘conversation’ was extensive in the focus group and interviews and proved that many areas of development are covered when adults simply take time to talk and listen to young children

Two areas did stand out in a different way than expected. First, the category of ‘early childhood development’ overwhelmingly depicted one aspect of these first moments in learning more than any other aspect. Participants did talk about the early needs for children to learn about literacy and numeracy through creative play and hands-on experiences. They also presented the necessity for children to receive early practices with problem solving and critical thinking. However, throughout both the forum and the interviews, participants described a requirement for early childhood development to be achieved through a partnership between the home and the school.

A second category also demonstrated a particular awareness that is necessary when answering the research questions. Within the concept of ‘life events’ participants did discuss schedules, demands of employment, parenting styles, and numbers of children. They also talked about living situations, such as if there are two parents in the home or multiple generations in the home. Candid comments were offered about fears of raising children in a successful manner. All of these aspects fit into this category, but they

also led to another name for the category, stress. The stresses faced by parents do impact young children in multiple ways that should be recognized.

The second level of analysis provided a way to connect comments from the focus group, with comments from the interviews. At this point, one category was viewed at a time, across the transcripts for the focus group and each of the interviews. I made notes on how the categories were portrayed within each transcript and how the comments compared or contrasted throughout the educator and parent discussions.

There were numerous comments concerning ‘early childhood development’, ‘life events’, and ‘conversation’. There were fewer notations for the other categories within the focus group and interviews, but those remarks still provided suggestions that demonstrated ways for parents to engage in activities with their children and support their development in the early years. Now it is feasible to present the analysis of specific portions of the data collection process.

### **Identification of Themes**

Once all of the data were analyzed, I created themes found across the educator focus group and the parent interviews. Table 5 displays how the coding categories were found throughout both sets of data in three specific themes. First, educators and parents discussed the team need to form between the two entities so young children benefit as they grow and develop. To create that connection, parents and educators have to open up to one another with issues that are important to the life of the children. They need to share conversations that allow them to listen and respond to situations that build learning opportunities for the children.

Next, there was an apparent need to build 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills. These are skills that promote problem solving and critical thinking in an independent manner. Parents and teachers can guide children to ask questions in such a way that they can build desired learning. Additionally, the children can use technology to enhance their learning opportunities.

Finally, a theme was noted to enable the community for early preparation using authentic methods for learning. Educators and parents desired for the young children to build their academic, social, and behavioral skills in ways that were implemented throughout each day of the week. The skills that young children learn should be introduced in a way that they realize the importance of the skill for life, not simply a test. Parents can also learn skills that help them guide their young children into more learning.

Table 5

*Connections between Coding and Themes Noticed in the Focus Group and Interviews*

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Creating a team of early childhood educators and parents | Building 21 <sup>st</sup> century thinking skills | Enabling the community for early preparation using authentic learning |
| Conversation   | Literacy  | Discipline  |
| Life Events  | Numeracy  | Respect   |
| Early Childhood Development                              | Technology  | Routine   |

**Analysis of the Educator Focus group**

After I transcribed the focus group recording, I read the comments and analyzed them to find themes. As noted in Table 5, there were three themes that were noticeable in the educators' discussion, which connected with the nine categories, noted in Table 4, within the coding of data.

**Creating a Team of Early Childhood Educators and Parents**

Conversations between teachers and parents can lead to a beneficial team that works together to facilitate the development of young children. With concern in their voices, many educators shared their awareness of daily stresses in the lives of students and families. Understanding this stress helps educators create the necessary team with parents that will benefit the young children. 'Survival' was a word used as Mrs. Harris

noted the families' needs. Many parents in this school worry each day about the ability to afford food, clothes, and a home for their children. This leads to concerns of Child Protective Services contacting them about their capability to raise the children properly. Mrs. Adams agreed with the 'survival' mentality of the parents and added that they so not have time to even think about the education of their children. They trust that the school will take care of that part of life. Unfortunately, as mentioned by Mrs. Butler, the children feel all of this stress. The students often lack the energy and attention necessary to focus on their schoolwork due to the stress at home. This concept of the parents' need for a higher awareness of the education system and child development was the perspective of most of the educators in the focus group. This awareness was only found once the team was created between the educators and the parents.

In considering the focus group as a whole, there was one comment that stood out. "Deep down they do want the best," declared Mrs. Coleman when talking in the focus group about the desires of most of the parents in the school. It is true that the parents often do not comprehend the methods of getting their children to their highest potential. Teachers can help with this. Communication must take be clear between parents and teachers in regards to the strengths and weaknesses of the children. Teachers can lead parents in ways to guide their children through social and academic development, including assisting them in the standards of learning in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Building 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century intense, high standards are set for even the youngest learners, including foundational academic skills, critical thinking, team work, and the use of

technology. The data demonstrated a wide gap between the skills that parents view as necessary to begin kindergarten and the skills that teachers view as necessary. For instance, one teacher pointed out, a basic skill of letter recognition that is difficult for some parents to teach their children before entering school. Children usually know the alphabet song, but Mrs. Rangel described that it is rare for the children to understand ‘Imnop’ is actually five separate letters. Even further, Mrs. Neil mentioned that parents often realize the importance of teaching their children that the alphabet song contains letters that are used for reading and writing. Each letter has a sound that builds a word. Those words build sentences that create stories. Additionally each letter that is sung also needs to be learned as a symbol that can be read and written. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century of learning, the skill set needed by elementary students is much more advanced than in the twentieth century. Before first grade, students now need to know sound that letters make and have a concept that those letter sounds build words, which build sentences.

Aside from parents realizing the importance of teaching a deeper comprehension of the alphabet song, Mrs. Harris reminded the group that many parents in the given school do not speak English as their first language. This presents another hardship as parents prepare their children for kindergarten. Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century entails much team work, including working with others in a multi-cultural environment that prepares children for the diverse work force. In addition to language barriers are the barriers presented by technology that is available to children today. Still, it is imperative that the children learn to use the many devices in a way to build learning and critical thinking. Parents often struggle when noticing the technology involved in their children's

education. When teachers open their classrooms to parents, the use of technology is observed and even learned by parents. New knowledge of technology spreads into the home so it can be implemented in other life activities. Children realize the benefits of various devices though each part of their day.

Problem solving is a skill that children must gain at a young age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is critical for parents to take the time to ask their children questions rather than giving them all the answers. Parents also need to be willing to answer any questions that their children ask. It does not mean that parents always have an answer, but they should at least be prepared to acknowledge the children and help them find the answers in a short period of time. Within these moments, the community can help young children prepare for authentic learning.

### **Enabling the Community for Early Preparation using Authentic Learning**

Authentic learning is much different than a student sitting in a desk, listening to a teacher present a lesson. Instead, teachers guide students to build new knowledge by using their senses to complete activities directly related to their daily lives. Though the families in a low socioeconomic community may not often have many hours in the day to present academic lessons to their children, they can still find quality time. Though the families in a low socioeconomic community may not have often high levels of education, they can still learn ways to help their young children begin a solid education. These concepts encompass the purpose of this study. Though the families in a low socioeconomic community may not have much understanding of how to assist their young children, they do desire the help and there are many innovative ways to reach out

to those parents and complete families. Whether working through time, financial, or educational constraints, parents can discover ways to help their children learn in natural ways through daily tasks.

Parents can work with educators to create a community for authentic learning. The community needs to begin to expect children to communicate clearer earlier through oral literacy development. Mrs. Juarez suggested a need for parents to speak with their children in such a way that children were expected to use “complete sentences where they know the vocabulary and just be able to express their feelings.” These conversations present a way for children to gain knowledge about literacy in a natural form. It is beneficial for the children to understand how literacy impacts communication, as well as reading and writing at school and home.

### **Analysis of the Parent Interviews**

Within 2 days of the actual interview, I transcribed the recording and then read each one to identify themes that were portrayed in the parent’s comments. I coded categories according to the same color codes and descriptors as in the educator’s focus group, and they were displayed in Table 4. As previously mentioned, viewing each interview independently completed the first stage of analysis. Three themes noted in Table 5 were identified within each parent interview. Parents demonstrated a desire to create a team with the educators in their child’s school. Due to experiences in the schools, the parents realized a need to build modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills. Additionally, parents recognized that they could be a part of a community to help their young children prepare for learning in an authentic manner.

## **Introduction of the Parents**

Interviews began with Mrs. Gutierrez. As she began talking about parenthood prior to her son starting kindergarten, she commented on her confidence in an ability to prepare her son for the beginning of school. While there were skills that seemed simple for her to introduce to her son, she wanted more information to help him once he was in school. She commented on the changes that had occurred in schools since she was a student.

Ms. Salazar is a busy, working mom, who worries that she needs to give her daughter's development more attention. When there is time away from school and work, their time is spent together, but few activities are centered on education. Due to her teenage years, Ms. Salazar has a strong desire to build on open relationships with her daughter so they can communicate through every moment. As her daughter has started school, she realizes that the communication needs to include academics.

An unfortunate, personal upbringing was described by Mrs. Trevino, which was also experienced by her husband. For that reason, she works hard to provide brighter future for her girls. Mrs. Trevino does not have a job outside of the home, so she is able to spend time at the school where she commented that she learns as much as her daughters. This mom believes that school days are not the only time for growth, so she keeps the children learning and on a schedule even on days when school is not in session.

Mrs. Torres likes to get down on the floor to play with her children; she sees the value of beginning learning and social skills that occurs when they interact together. With children from elementary, to one who graduated from high school, she says that she is

still learning to raise children. She also sees a difference in developmental opportunities and needs for children as they have changed over the years.

Mrs. Martinez speaks Spanish as her first language, but chose for the interview to remain in English. She grew up in Mexico and mentioned some of the differences between early school in Mexico and the first years of school in the United States. She is grateful for family members and teachers who help her understand the education system in the United States and the developmental needs of her children.

In the final interview, Ms. Perez discussed the wide variety of means that she implements to bring early development skills to her youngest child. Ms. Perez pushes the academics and respectful discipline because she believes that her boys should always work hard in order to reach high achievements in life. Ms. Perez speaks both Spanish and English, but she did choose to complete the interview in English.

### **Creating a team of early childhood educators and parents**

Communication was noted as a key to developing a team between early childhood educators and parents. This thought came from both the educators and parents. They discussed communicating through e-mails, written notes, phone calls, and conversations in person. There are many elements involved in the communication. Both educators and parents talked about the ability to work with one another to understand children's successes and concerns with development at home and school. Mrs. Trevino explained that it was those conversations that helped her realize how much the teacher cared for her daughter. Teachers in the focus group also identified numerous situations outside of school concerning their students, which they only knew due to multiple, open

conversations with parents. Those moments helped the teachers find better ways to guide the children in their learning.

One of the benefits of the parent-educator team is the opportunity to share resources. Parents expressed a desire for ideas and strategies concerning early child development, especially since it has changed so much since they were in school. Experienced educators in the field for more than fifteen years also talked about the drastic changes in early childhood development. Ideas that teachers can share with parents are appreciated. Parents want to implement the ideas after school hours. By opening their classrooms to parents, teachers can demonstrate manageable ways to extend learning into the homes. Educators noticed the evidence that parents use their ideas when the children return to school with enhanced skills.

Mrs. Torres commented on the teamwork that she desires and noted that she wants her children's teachers to "be human". In other words, she simply wants to be able to talk with teachers and have a relationship with them that helps her find the best development for her children. That feeling flowed through many comments in all of the discussions. Even brief comments, such as one given by Mrs. Martinez carried the same message in few words, but emotions that were full of delight. She declared, "I am so lucky," when asked about the relationship that she has with her child's teacher. This positivity in regards to creating a team between the school and home was visible in each conversation.

**Building 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills**

Changes in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning include various technology devices, higher levels of concept knowledge, at earlier ages, deep creative thinking, and rich skills in problem solving. By entering the classrooms of their kindergarten students, parents were able to observe all of these changes. Parents commented on the benefit they received from the time in the classroom, as well as the benefits for their children. Ms. Salazar described how the teacher helped her learn how to guide her child through homework and other moments of learning in the home. She appreciated the time to watch the teacher as she taught new concepts to the class. Telling about her own experiences with these new concepts, Mrs. Trevino said, “they’re [teachers] taking the time and effort to teach us [parents].”

New methods for learning can be overwhelming to parents. Mrs. Torres admitted that she does not always understand the methods that are used for teaching in the schools today. It helps when she can meet with a teacher and ask questions about the homework or other new learning that her daughter talks about after school. Especially when parents do not fully comprehend the concepts taught in the classroom, they often assume that their children are accomplishing the work correctly unless they hear worries from their children or strong negativity from the teachers. However, classroom participation provided occasions to see exactly where improvements should occur. Ms. Salazar believed her daughter was doing well in reading. Once she entered the kindergarten classroom and noticed books that other students were reading, she realized her daughter struggled with reading at the expected level.

### **Enabling the Community for Early Preparation Using Authentic Learning**

Authentic learning can take place in homes and schools to best prepare young children for learning. Whether children are learning academic, social, or behavioral skills, they need to understand how to utilize the skills in everyday life. Mrs. Gutierrez felt the preparation she gave her son was beneficial in the home, but he needed more training for skills used with peers and authority figures. Teachers depicted how team sports would help her young son build the discipline and cooperation he learned with peers in the classroom. Mrs. Gutierrez commented on the way the sports team idea helped her son improve his social skills, which transferred into their home and his classroom.

Participation in the classroom also demonstrated how parents could help their children learn in natural ways. Ms. Salazar found ways to increase reading opportunities in the home to lead her daughter to improved skills. Other parents shared examples they learned by being in the classroom and teachers described suggestions they gave parents. Excited about her daughter's progress due to authentic learning that was connected at home and school, Mrs. Trevino said that she always finds new ideas when she visits the classroom. Children can take in so much information and even more information when the lessons are presented as a part of everyday life. This parent understood the concept of learning through experiences.

Mrs. Martinez started going into her daughter's classroom when she was in kindergarten, which helped excite her daughter about school. The classroom observations also helped Mrs. Martinez learn more about the expectations in school. This pattern of visiting the classroom at certain times in the month has continued in first grade. She

continues to see the ways that this leads her to teach her daughter at home. When Ms. Perez visited the classroom, teachers also led her through experiences that helped her teach her son at home. Ms. Perez observed “how the teacher interacts with the children” and used those moments as suggestion for how to guide her son. Ms. Perez said that the teacher showed her basic ideas; “so you’re not even teaching the children, you’re also teaching me.” The community of learning is critical for young learners.

### **Analysis of the Connections**

After I analyzed the stand-alone focus group and interviews, I investigated all of the data together to identify connections between the two data collection instruments. One of the most prevalent similarities between the focus group and each interview was the discussion about communication between educators and parents. The educators presented this as a great benefit to students and their parents in order to help the children reach high potentials in their development. The parents also talked about the advantages that they perceive when they have solid communication with the teachers. This positive perception was even noticed in the tone of voice and facial expressions given during the interviews.

While the parents shared different levels of interaction that they have with the classroom teachers, each one offered positive thoughts about their relationships with the teachers. On the other hand, some of the parents commented on a desire for higher levels of communication with the school as a whole.

Parents also extended their comments about communication to the school as a whole. Many of the interview participants had a desire for transparency with the

administration. They also wanted to have more information sent out earlier. While parents even mentioned an understanding that it is not always possible to plan ahead in the school, they did say that they would be able to attend more events if there was more information sent in a timely manner. Within the interviews parents commented on wanting to be able to attend special events with their children or complete projects with their children. However, that was not possible if the information was sent out at the last minute.

Mrs. Martinez even noted a feeling of disappointment in the way that she is treated from some staff members. “Let us not look like, what are you doing here,” were the words she used to tell about this sentiment. Unfortunately other parents shared the same emotion when it came to the entire staff, rather than their child’s personal teacher. Parents wanted to have open communication with the entire school staff. They also wanted to feel welcome in their children’s school. Parents were willing and ready to volunteer where needed in the school; they just needed to feel like they were accepted.

The comments from educators and parents also made connections in the area of working together. The communication goes further than simply talking or writing notes between teachers and parents in order for everyone to stay in touch with the child’s development. It is valuable, as depicted by the remarks of both educators and parents, for a partnership to be formed between the two entities. Mrs. Hernandez clearly stated, “You know this is supposed to be a partnership.” That partnership creates a way for families to work on academic skills in the home so the children can improve skills they learn in

school. The concept, though not heard by the parent, was seconded in an interview. Ms. Trevino said, “It’s a team effort.”

In both areas of discussion, the focus group and the interviews, the stresses of life were noted. Parents commented on parts of their circumstances that make it difficult to help their children with development. They offered comments about abnormal work schedules, single-parenthood, and financial worries. All of these circumstances contribute to hardships in raising children, let alone guiding children through proper development.

Educators commented on matching circumstances that demonstrated their awareness of the families’ needs. They recognized the fact that students come from families with multiple parents and children from multiple family settings. Teachers also noticed that the parents of their students did not often have the education necessary for training the children to reach the achievement levels that they were capable of attaining. No matter what the situations, the critical component is the children. Mrs. Evans said, “Sometimes things are situational, sometimes they are generational, sometimes they are a choice, and sometimes they are not, and so I think you know we need to take it upon ourselves to take a step back and ask what’s going on behind the scenes.” For the most part, the educator’s focus group and the parent interviews shared many common traits. All of those adults are looking for ways to help the young children find successful development.

### **Comments of Discrepancies**

Both levels of analysis did present a discrepancy which is critical to note as a part of the study. Communication was a significant topic of conversation. While some of the

parents wanted more time for conversations with the teachers or other staff on the school campus, there were two parents who revealed their feelings of content in the amount of discussion time. Though she did not talk about an ability to attend each session that was open for parent engagement, Ms. Salazar said that she feels that her communication with the classroom teacher is sufficient. In fact, she even works to talk with other teachers on the staff, such as the music teacher. This helps her to understand what occurs throughout her daughter's day, rather than focusing on the classroom times.

This did present a discrepancy between the parents, as well as the educators, but it did not negatively impact the results of the study. This portion of the study demonstrated that the parents are pleased with their relationships with the schools. The parents still wanted that relationship to continue and realized the benefits that it brought the development of their young children.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I gave attention to four areas, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I took time to ensure the credibility with the assistance of member checks. In addition, there was evidence that the study could be implemented in various settings besides the community where the data were completed. For added confidence in the data and the study as a whole, a peer was recruited to check the information and analysis. When these four topics are presented together, the study is sustained (Patton, 2002).

**Credibility**

Credibility was noted in this study through triangulation. Two different instruments were used during the data collection. A focus group was used to listen to perceptions of one group and individual interviews were used with a second group of participants. The focus group included educators, which the interviews were held with parents. Both the educators and the parents were the part of the same public school. Colleagues reviewed the information collected in the focus group and interviews, and then ensured that the conclusions were found based on that data (Miles et al., 2014).

Member checks were used to enhance the credibility of the study. A summary of the discussion within the focus group was presented to the educators in that focus group. The educators communicated that their answers to questions and emotions were precisely demonstrated in the summary. Once I completed the transcripts they were offered to the parents for review. Each parent agreed that the transcript accurately portrayed their interview.

**Transferability**

Findings from this study will easily transfer to other areas of education. While the study focused on the development of young children, the concepts learned from the focus group and the interviews can be shared with educators and parents of older children. At every age it is critical for teams to form between educators and parents in order to help children reach great heights in their academic and social development. There are multiple suggestions from educators that can guide parents in supporting their children in education.

The concepts can be used in other communities, as well as other levels of education. Just as many neighborhoods across America, the school where this study was completed was located in a low socioeconomic community. Four educators in the focus group specifically expressed their work as an educator in other schools with a common demographic. They shared the hope that other schools will use the model from this school for inviting parents into the schools as there is a noticeable need in other similar communities. As noticed in the comments from parents, they do struggle financially and most often struggle in their ability to assist the children with academic growth. Their stories resemble the lives of many other families in the United States. The guidance that they receive from innovative educators can lead their families to moments of success.

Although the population in the given school included families who are predominately from a Hispanic background, the concepts in this study did not focus on the language or heritage. The study can easily transfer to any neighborhood where families observe other cultures or speak a language besides English as their first language. There was a recognition from both educators and parents of the need to consider language and culture when educating children and introducing new ideas.

### **Dependability**

Yin (2009) described a dependable study as one that includes triangulation. That element of this study was previously described. Multiple forms of data collection were used. Strong connections were found within the information gathered through the focus group and the interviews. Those connections provided a way to offer valuable guidance to educators and parents as they search for applicable forms of teaching young children in

this 21<sup>st</sup> century. After manually coding the data, I worked through a peer review to ensure that the results were dependable. This was an educator in another school who works closely with early childhood learners and educators on a daily basis, in a school with similar demographics of the school in the study.

### **Confirmability**

An objective approach was brought to the study through the use of a peer check system was implemented as a part of the data analysis (Patton, 2002). The educator asked to take this role in the research works on another campus, but has worked with me in the past. There is an understanding of my tone, so there was an ease to knowing if a bias was brought into the results of the research. All of the data were reviewed in the middle of December, along with an outline of the final two chapters and an analysis of the data. It was confirmed, based on knowledge of the school where the study took place, the educator's role in early childhood education, and my association with the educator, that the study was completed in an objective manner.

Since I teach on the same campus where the educators in the focus group and parents in the interviews work and bring their children on a daily basis, it was critical to also confirm neutrality throughout the recruitment process and data collection. Of all of the educators who took part in the focus group, each one teaches at an equal or superior level to me. None of the educators was put into a position where they would feel pressured to join in the focus group. In fact, two educators who were not originally recruited actually asked if they could be a part of the focus group once they heard about the research from other teachers discussing the upcoming informational meeting.

As for the parents, none of them have had the opportunity to join my classroom during their time at this school. The children have had other teachers on the campus and will continue to have other teachers in future years. Due to the fact that the school does not have a high enrollment, the parents do know who I am as a teacher. Still, we had not had the opportunity to work with one another on any level prior to this research. Though bias can occur in research in different forms, necessary precautions were taken in this research and confirmed throughout the data collection and analysis process.

### **Results**

Results for this study are focused on each question that was included in the research, beginning with the central questions and moving into the supplemental questions. The educator's focus group and parent interviews served as independent and associated means in which to arrive at the given findings for this study.

#### **Findings Regarding the Central Question**

The central question focused on the overall purpose of the study; in a low socioeconomic community, what influences on early child development will parents and educators describe about parent engagement after participating the in the kindergarten classroom? As expected, references from the forum and the interviews were applied to produce the findings for this question.

Realizing that the low socioeconomic level puts a strain on many of the families, the professionals searched for modern ways to reach the parents and children. Some suggestions from teachers were based on relationships they formed with the parents. Those relationships were often formed when parents took time to enter the classroom for

moments of engagement during the school day. For instance, when the teachers understood the schedules of the parents, it made it easier to form ideas for the families to implement in order for the child to develop properly.

When parents work inconsistent schedules or a night schedule, it is difficult for them to find time to help their young children with homework or extended learning. These parents often realize their children are struggling, but are not able to change their schedules in such a way to help the entire situation. In neighborhoods such as the one where this case study was conducted, many children live in homes with multiple generations. The older generations speak Spanish as their first language. Even though the grandparents may be home with the children while the parents are at work for evening shifts, they are still not able to guide the children homework that takes place in English.

Teachers will not know these situations in the home unless they take the time to talk with parents and learn about their families. It takes an attitude of compassion. With that necessary compassion in her voice, Ms. Harris told about one of her students and his situation at home where the mother is gone until far after bedtime. Many teachers nodded their heads in agreement and even added comments about the way that inviting parents in to the classroom helps the teachers learn more about the families. It also helps to create relationships with the parents that encourage them to tell about their home lives without any apprehension.

Ms. Harris and other teachers provide innovative ways for the children to progress in reading and writing. While the students may not complete the actual homework for the classroom, the teachers made it known that this learning process was more valuable than

completing the homework without help from his mother or not completing the homework at all. Teachers also use time in the classroom with parents, to demonstrate ways to use everyday family situations as moments for learning.

As Mrs. Butler reminded the group of educators, whenever the parents do have time to spend with their children, they should take advantage of the learning that occurs. When they share a meal together, they can also share a conversation which improves oral literacy development and social interaction skills. When they go to a store together, parents can talk with their children about the money involved. They can think critically about the amount of items needed for certain recipes. Parents can write shopping lists with their children and the child can be the one to read the list at the store and cross items off once they are found. Time may not be found each evening to work on traditional homework, but learning can occur in daily or weekly routines. Mrs. Butler did suggest that be careful to not go “rushing through” those motions and actually spend a few extra moments to create quality learning opportunities for the children.

Directly relating to the moments that were designed for family members to enter the classroom, both educators and teachers realized the benefits of those occasions. There were many ideas learned by the parents which they could implement at home. In addition, the parents were able to observe the ways that teachers present lessons to students in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the educator standpoint Mrs. Adams said, “The First Fridays work. I thought having them [the parents] come in and see how their child is learning in the classroom, I thought has been resourceful.” Another educator shared, “They [the parents]

really honestly don't know until we model for them." To which Mrs. Juarez continued, "And provides sometimes activities for the parents to take home."

On the parent side, Ms. Torres described the classroom occasions as a place where she knows she can go for a "good support system". Plus, the children enjoy having their parents in the classroom. Ms. Salazar described the way her daughter always asks her to come to the First Fridays, "She does like when I come with her."

Later in the interview, this particular parent shared specific ways that the teacher showed her an approach to help her daughter with reading. Without seeing her daughter in the classroom, in comparison to peers, she would not have realized her daughter's struggle with reading. Yes, a teacher could tell her in a conference, but it was more valuable to see the need in action. Other parents talked about the moments when they went into the classroom for learning opportunities. They felt they knew her children's abilities, but also knew their own abilities, or lack thereof, and recognized a need for assistance.

Ms. Salazar stressed the need for her to attend the classroom session as it provided a learning tool for her. She shared, " She [the teacher] tells me how to pronounce the words, how to, how to take it off and use the ending of the words and that's not only helping him, but it's also helping myself because I'm learning how to pronounce the word how it's written on not just saying it." Then another parent explained that she struggled in math as a little girl and so does her daughter. She was grateful to the ways the teacher showed her how to help her daughter with those skills. She said, "I come every First Friday," realizing the value of those moments.

Of course, opening the classroom was something that had to occur with an authenticity of the educators. The parents would not enter if they feel invited in such a way that was genuine. One influence on early childhood development, especially in low socioeconomic communities, that was realized through this study was that of a need for educators to reach out to families in an open fashion.

There are times when parents are afraid to ask questions due to worries or even intimidation. However, Mrs. Neil explained that connections can build a trust factor between the parents and the teachers. She also described that teachers should be careful not to tell parents all the things that they have not done with their children developmentally, but instead concentrate on helping the parents create a connection and way to guide the children to more learning. Mrs. Dodson mentioned being open with parents, “make them feel comfortable, where you can relate to them.” It is critical for educators to stay away from moments where they overwhelm the parents with the information. “We want to be helpful, so let’s focus on one thing that we can do and when that gets taken care of, move to something else,” shared Mrs. Moore.

Linking the thoughts of one teacher’s comment about how parents sometimes feel intimidated, the research demonstrated how teacher’s time spent building relationships with parents is worth the time. Once Mrs. Trevino felt this connection between herself and the teacher she realized she did not have to be embarrassed and even said, “It’s very uplifting that you know that the teacher wants to have that one-on-one personal relationship.” one-on-one personal relationship. After all it definitely does help to raise and educate children when there are lots of people involved as pointed out by Mrs.

Torres, “It takes a tribe to raise a child and I have a lot, I need a lot of help.” She continued with a desire for teachers to simply “be approachable.”

Once parents felt a strong bond with the teachers, then they were ready to extend the relationship. That often brought positive influences to the development of the young children. This occurred in the child’s social, cognitive, and behavioral growth.

### **Findings Regarding Subquestion 1**

The first supplemental question asked about the parent perceptions of their role in early childhood development. Due to the nature of this question, all of the findings were generated from the comments given during the parent interviews. All of the parents interviewed in this study have children in first grade and their children attended the same school for kindergarten. Each parent participated in classroom and school-wide activities throughout their child’s kindergarten year and that participation continues.

All of the parents who were interviewed for this study gave a perception that their child’s development was not solely up to the education system. They also realized that a child’s development is not grounded completely on a pediatrician’s consultation or foundations offered in a pre-school program. While each parent mentioned an awareness of their role in their child’s growth and learning, there were different degrees of involvement noted. Some parents gave a significant amount of personal time to their child’s development. Others gave the little time they could afford at the end of a day. Additionally, each parent offered a perception that their role in their child’s development included efforts with the teachers. The parents saw their children’s education as a connected effort between the school and the home.

Through it all, each parent searched for ideas as for methods of learning before their children entered kindergarten. There was a realization that schedules and abilities played a large role in their capability to guide their children in development. Still, all of the parents wanted to find ways to help their children and be a part of their growth.

Literacy was an apparent need in the eyes of each parent. They realized that their children would benefit from learning their letters. For some parents this stretched into teaching their children to write the letters and even write their names. Parents also presented basic numeracy skills to their children. However, those skills were not as prevalent as reading skills.

For the most part, parents wanted more guidance from educators. When they did receive instruction from the teachers, it was appreciated. That instruction led to more development in the homes, which the parents recognized as beneficial. Ms. Perez strongly stated, “I don’t want to be the parent as if, that’s your homework, you deal with it.” She went on to describe how working through homework with her boys allows her to grasp what they are learning at school. It also provides a way for her to see where they are struggling and reaching successes. In addition, the monthly occasions that her child’s teacher opened the classroom for parents to participate gave her a clear view of how to work through the assignments with her son at home.

Other parents made similar comments during their interviews. There were even comments about using the classroom teaching methods during the summer. Parents were glad to have many ideas ready for the summertime. They knew the learning was valuable to continue through the summer months. Also, parents felt that these ideas kept their

children busy in the summer. Summer months and even vacation weeks during the school year offer wonderful moments to relax, but young children can also take time to learn in their natural environments.

Learning in the home takes can take place in a natural way. Even when a parent does not feel that “teaching” is a strong personal quality, that person can still find ways to help a child learn. The parent is guiding the child and can give encouragement to continue learning. If this particular parent had guidance from the teachers, she could find ways to help her daughter use her love of writing stories to transfer into reading books. She could also find ways to stretch her natural learning into areas of math and science. In part of the interview the parent mentioned that she and her daughter are always together. So, there are many opportunities for learning to take place throughout their time. There is room for the parent to be encouraged with her abilities to teach her daughter when they are together in everyday situations.

When it came to the role that parents thought they had in their children’s lives even before school started, there were varying degrees of involvement mentioned. From buying workbooks for the children to practice basic literacy and numeracy skills, to watching videos, to orally counting to ten and singing the alphabet song, each child had some exposure to learning. Each one of the parents did take initiative to work with their children on basic skills prior to kindergarten. Parents took suggestions from family members on skills that their young children need to understand before starting school, while other parents thought back to their own time in kindergarten and the concepts they learned that year. It was noticeable however that the skills taught at home by the parents,

were often not advanced to the point that children need to enter kindergarten with in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Each of the parents in these examples had hesitancy in their voices when they spoke about preparing their children for kindergarten. Since they had already spent time in the kindergarten classroom, many of them realized that they could have done more to prepare their children. In addition, the parents did want teachers to see that they were trying; they wanted the schools to know that they cared about their child's development. Upon asking them about struggles that their children had during the first year of school, they both talked about areas of development that they felt they could have worked on more before school started. For instance the first parent talked about her son's struggle with handwriting and the second parent talked about the struggle with math. In each situation, the families realized that more practice, or more in-depth teaching, would have been helpful to the children. However, the parents were simply not aware of the larger requirements placed on children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, than when they were in school.

### **Findings Regarding Subquestion 2**

To receive insight into the educators' thoughts, question two asked about the educators' perspectives of the parents' roles in early childhood development. Just as the first question found answers based on the parent interviews, this question found answers based on the educator's focus group. Each educator in the focus group holds a role in early childhood education. The participant may be a classroom teacher, a family specialist, counselor, or specialist in a specific subject area. Their length of experience with early childhood education ranges from five to thirty-four years.

Due to the daily encounters that educators have with state standards for academic skills, they completely understand the developmental needs of young children. There is a strong feeling from educators that parents need to begin the academic and social developmental process with their children long before the children begin school. As standards grow more intense each year, the children are at a tremendous advantage if they come to school with an ability to know how to sit in the classroom and learn next to peers. The children also benefit immensely when they have an understanding of basic literacy and numeracy.

While teachers know there is more preparation needed, once they have children of their own, it becomes apparent that the preparation is possible. It is critical for parents to share conversations with one another. The discussions must include complete sentences. They should include questions and replies that are asked and answered by both the adults and the children. Dialogue in the family should provide moments for the children to solve problems and think critically in basic ways.

Mr. Goodwin shared that he taught for many years before parenthood. He did know that the students were required to obtain higher skill sets, once his own daughter came along he realized that it was possible for young children to achieve those skills if they practiced at home with their parents. He commented that his toddler-aged daughter has a larger vocabulary than many of the kindergarten students in the school. This simply comes from the conversations that are held in his home. Mrs. Moore continued the discussion that children should also have full conversations with their peers and siblings. There is a level of respect that comes with these conversations also. Through

communication young children gain oral literacy abilities in addition to virtues. In both cases the children need the skills for kindergarten and throughout life.

Realizing how basic parts of communication are important to learn before school begins, especially due to intensity of school in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the focus group discussion started covering how much is expected of children at young ages. Ms. Harris mentioned a list of capabilities that the children must demonstrate at the beginning of kindergarten, such as all of their letters and many sounds, critical thinking, problem solving, yet “they’ve never been modeled or taught these things.” This indicates that teachers end up teaching the standards for kindergarten, plus readiness skills to be prepared for their learning. It is likely that parent do not “have the tools” for guiding their children in early years, described Mrs. Butler.

It was apparent that educators thought of everyday activities that would help the young children build developmental skills. However, they did not perceive that parents knew how to use those activities in such a way to help their young children learn skills that were necessary in the growth process. While educators saw a need for parents to play a larger role in their children’s development, there is much education needed for that role to take shape.

### **Findings Regarding Subquestion 3**

Question three asked, in what ways does the kindergarten classroom engagement of teachers, students, and their parents influence the development of young children? As mentioned, the parent-participants did take part in kindergarten activities during the previous year. In addition, some of the educators in the focus group were those teachers

who opened their classrooms. For this reason, remarks from the focus group and the interviews were used to find answers to this question.

The educators were clear that they offered lessons on those mornings that included activities that could easily be transferred into the homes. While parents were able to observe and participate in each subject area that is covered in kindergarten, the teachers mainly provided these extensions for the home in the area of phonemic awareness, writing, and basic math skills. Aside from activities to carry home, the teacher also worked to demonstrate connections to learning as a part of everyday life. This was talked about by both the teachers and the parents. Whether moving through the grocery store, counting money, reading a recipe, or writing notes or lists at home, there are multitudes of ways to connect learning with the home environment. These moments also encouraged conversations between children and parents, children and teachers, as well as parents and teachers, all of which are create meaningful relationships.

The classroom engagement of three entities, teachers, parents, and students, created a relationship between the three that led to greater development. The learning pushed families to continue growth in their homes within every day activities. One teacher even offered a reminder that some of the parents will use the in-class lessons with their younger children as well. Mrs. Lee suggested that parents actually need to learn these teaching skills long before their children enter kindergarten. It would be more beneficial if there were sessions available to parents so they could start their children down an appropriate path of development in the infant and toddler years. While there are courses available, they are not feasible for families in a low socioeconomic community,

especially those dealing with stresses of life such as single parenthood and inconsistent work schedules.

This education for families will impact the kindergarten students, but even more, it will impact younger children. When the parents see the need to reach their children before kindergarten begins, they will be able to start working with their little ones at home. There is a potential to see children better prepared for school in the future.

#### **Findings Regarding Subquestion 4**

Going back the perspective of parents, question four considered the parental views of their child's academic and social abilities following their engagement in the kindergarten classroom activities. This question established answers based on the parent interviews. Within every interview the parents offered comments about their child's progress in kindergarten and first grade. These comments included academic and social development that serve as a foundation for the young children.

Academics were obviously observed during the classroom participation times. Parents looked at their child's strengths and weaknesses on another level when they saw their children in action with peers. For example, Mrs. Gutierrez felt that her son needed practice in handwriting, which impacted his ability to enjoy writing and even be able to read the stories he was writing. On the other hand, she realized that boys may take longer to develop that skill. After visiting the classroom, her thoughts were affirmed and she knew it was time to spend additional practice time at home with the fine motor skills.

Another highlight was reading abilities. When parents hear their children "read" at home, they do get excited with the new ability. However it is often completed with a

lot of help from the parents. Once the parents were in the classroom, they saw the way the teacher gave less answers for the reading questions and guided children to sound out words and use picture clues. Half of the parents made comments about a need for their children to gain higher levels of reading capabilities.

The classroom sessions for parent engagement also gave parents a chance to view their child's behavior. Revisiting comments from Mrs. Gutierrez, she also recognized a need for her son to improve on his behavior in the classroom. To help with that development she registered him for soccer and shared, "that seems to help him with like taking turns and learning how to play on a team and following directions." All of those skills are pertinent to growth in the academic setting as well.

Ms. Salazar noticed that her daughter was talking in class too much. In the interview she made note that at home it is just her and her daughter, so they do everything together, including lots of conversing. Though she is happy to see her daughter as a "social butterfly" she also realizes that there is a time and place for the talking. Observing issues first hand is helpful for parents, rather than discovering the issues in a parent conference. Mrs. Trevino commented that she is usually well prepared for any phone call that may come regarding her daughter since she is in constant communication with the teacher and attends class sessions when she can view her daughter and peers. On the other hand, she said that her husband often "is very not understanding (sic), because he's not there all the time." While she tries to explain the situations to him, it would help if he could observe their daughter in the same way.

Once parents went to the classrooms and observed their children, they had a more complete outlook on their children's abilities. There were times when the parents' thoughts were confirmed and other times that the parents noticed aspects of their children's development that they would not have otherwise noticed. These moments in the classroom were valuable to the continued growth of the children.

### **Summary**

In different forms, this chapter offered the results and findings of this study. After details were provided regarding the setting and demographics of the data collection, the instruments for collection were described. Both of the instruments, the educator's focus group and the parent interviews, were analyzed separately. The specifics of those discussions were presented, including many quotes from the participants. Three main themes were presented that were noticed throughout the discussions; creating a team between the early childhood educators and the parents, building 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills, and enabling the community for early preparation using authentic learning methods. An analysis was also offered for the connections between the two instruments for data collection and one discrepancy was disclosed. In order to ensure the trustworthiness for each portion of the data collection, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and the confirmability was explained in full. To end the chapter, results were presented for each research question. Those conclusions moved through the central questions of the study and finished with the four subquestions.

Those major outcomes from the data analysis will be used to start the final chapter. Proceeding through each research question I will interpret the findings of this

case study, based on the data analysis and the literature review from the second chapter.

To disclose any concerns, the limitations of the study will also be reported.

Recommendations will be offered in two forms within the pages of chapter five. First there will be suggestions for further research that easily follows this study. In addition, actions to take in early childhood education will be recommended that both educators and parents can implement in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. These directly relate to positive social changes that are likely to occur due to the knowledge gained from this study, which will convey the main purpose of the study and the culmination of the dissertation.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to describe innovative ways that parents in a low socioeconomic community engaged in activities with their children that influence academic and social development. Over time, researchers have studied these financially unstable communities. There was also some research completed on parental involvement with the children, in relation to their academic well-being (Kiernan & Mensah, 2011; Mehr, 2014). However, the research is lacking when understanding new ways to approach learning once families enter the school and take part in developmental events with their children.

In a review of research, there was a gap in how schools could make stronger connections to homes; especially in lower socioeconomic communities. There was a need to conduct research in these communities to discover ways that educators could assist parents as they supported the development of their young children. Two specific areas of concern were noted. First, the aspect of families living in low-income communities, where the parents frequently do not have a high school diploma or any higher education, was recognized. In these communities the families demonstrated a lack of understanding surrounding their children's needs in school both cognitively and socially (deHaan, Elbers, & Leseman, 2014; LeFevre et al., 2010). The second aspect of need was noted in the earliest years of learning. Past research showed that young children often do not enter kindergarten with necessary skills to reach the standards that are set by the state. Schools repeatedly work to intervene with the academic needs of each student, but frankly there are just not enough educators to assist with the number of demands (Galindo & Fuller,

2010). I searched for a way to include parents in the children's developmental process with a more hands-on approach in order to help provide the children with a stronger foundation for learning.

The conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the parent involvement model provided a foundation for interpreting the findings for the data in this study. They offered concepts that focused on the development of young children and included the impact of parental involvement with the children. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development, which played a large role in the conception of the Head Start program, began as a part of the United States public education program in 1964 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). The parental involvement model, where Epstein (2005) described six elements of parent involvement that influence a child's growth, was also implemented as part of the conceptual framework. To complement the first two elements, two other models were reviewed; the family process model (McLoyd, 1998) and the family strength model (DeFrain & Assay, 2008) appealed for interaction between parents and children. All four of the concepts established balanced approaches to enriching the academic, social, and behavioral skills of children.

Within chapter four, comments were exhibited from the educator's focus group and individual parent interviews. Thirteen early childhood educators made up the focus group and the individual interviews were held with six parents who took part in classroom engagement occasions in their children's kindergarten classrooms. I used the remarks to demonstrate both an analysis of the data and findings based on each research question. Three main themes were also revealed during the analysis and used as a base to

present the findings. The themes found were noticed following a two stage analysis of data. Manual coding of the information was impeded, which helped to quickly identify the connection between the educators' focus group and parent interviews. In chapter five, I will offer an interpretation of the findings based on the three main concepts described in individual research questions. I will also give recommendations for parents and educators to implement that incorporate new ideas to increase the accomplishments of young children. Higher levels of student achievement will bring positive social changes to the community, which are noted in both short-term and long-term ways.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Key findings were noticed within the focus group and each parent interview. Those three key themes were also supported in recent literature. To begin, educators and parents must form a team where the groups work together to provide learning opportunities for young children to successfully develop in academic, behavioral, and social skills. Additionally, it is critical to build 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills in the lives of young learners, to include independent problem solving and a high use of technology. Last, the learning community needs to enable young children for early preparation through authentic learning methods. Each element was reflected in answers for the research question within the study.

### **Parental Impact on Early Childhood Development after Classroom Engagement**

It is common for parents in low socioeconomic households to lack awareness for learning standards in the schools (Robins et al., 2012). Educators realize that they can help parents learn these standards and facilitate growth in their children. When teachers

instruct parents in various ways to work with their children through the development process, advantages come to the children, the parents, and the teachers. These influences arrive through individual meetings between parents and teachers, but even more beneficial influences are noticed when parents are actually invited into the classroom to experience the teaching and learning in a practical manner.

Infrequent conferences between parents and teachers are simply not enough when it comes to building relationships that will impact young children in a positive way. Not only is it valuable to communicate with parents regularly, but it is also helpful to have the parents enter the classroom and engage in the activities with their children (Harper et al., 2011; Mehr, 2014). Parents need to observe teachers as they talk with children, teach children, and correct children. These observations take place when teachers create an inviting atmosphere and motivate parents to join in the interactions. Situations such as these provide a way for educators and parents to build a necessary team of early childhood education.

Parents do want that motivation, but often do not realize that desire until they get to the classroom and begin reaping the benefits. Some apprehension arises in parents when they have concerns about homework or when a conference includes concepts that are not understood by the parents. Once parents attend classroom engagement occasions, they notice ways to help their children through homework or informal learning in the home. Parents also find a new relationship with the teacher that takes worries or embarrassment away, so they are able to openly ask questions when they arise.

When teachers demonstrate ways for parents to engage in learning activities with their children, there is a higher probability that the engagement will take place at home (Harper et al., 2011; Koops, 2014). This leads to learning in natural settings, which increases a young child's understanding of the learning concept and a reason for the new knowledge. Growth occurs at home, far beyond the hours of the school day. Parents begin providing opportunities for their children to solve problems at home, which is a useful to their development.

Parents often believe they need to tell their children how to complete a project or how to cook a recipe. Actually, the children should be encouraged to find answers on their own. This is a representation of critical thinking and problem solving needed by learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides helping the children learn in a deeper manner, it also shows children that it is alright to fail. They do not have to get the right answer the first time. Incorrect solutions, or more questions, ends up creating more learning. Children also gain another form of motivation from these moments.

Time in the classroom also offers parents time to observe teachers as they allow students to make mistakes and learn from those occasions. Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are often sheltered from the mistakes they make, when they need to learn how to work through mistakes. This is due to family time constraints and schedules, but those need to be lifted so that children learn to solve problems and understand that mistakes can be corrected. Teachers and parents have to continue with consequences that are given to children in light of their poor choices.

Children and parents both show excitement when learning takes place in a meaningful way (Harper et al., 2011; Mehr, 2014). Part of the excitement in the parent is based on their recognition that education can help their children achieve many goals in life. They also know that their children have a desire to go to school which will drive their development for a long time. When children see their success they also come to school with more enthusiasm. This enthusiasm also rises when parents and students know that the teacher is caring and involved in their lives. Children notice when their teachers form a team with their parents and it encourages the children to strive for higher successes academically, behaviorally, and socially.

Particularly in households with low socioeconomics, parents exhibit a significantly better understanding of student expectations once they attend their child's kindergarten classes. This approach is more practical than sitting in a large room with other parents while listening to the standards for learning at the beginning of the school year. It was also more applicable than the time parents shared with teachers in conferences. Once parents observe and take part in classroom activities, conferences are filled with more appropriate questions and valuable information (LeFevre et al., 2010; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). As young learners continue in kindergarten and first grade they will progress due to the work completed with their parents at home and extra guidance in the classroom. This early preparation for life-long success is critical for the lives of young learners and is set by a foundation laid by teachers and parents.

### **Parents' Perceptions of their Role in Early Childhood Development**

One word came to mind when working through the findings related to parents' perceptions to their involvement in their children's development, "desire". Parents display a desire for their children to do well in school. Based on that desire, parents perceive a need to prepare their children for formal school. They realize there is a need for their children to have a foundation of education. Parents do not want their children to struggle in school whether the issue is making friends, demonstrating self-discipline, or learning new literacy and numeracy skills.

It is evident that parents know they play a large role in helping their children become well-rounded students and members of the community (Robins et al., 2012). It is not enough just to be educated. It is necessary for people to demonstrate values, as well. Those characteristics are learned at early ages and enhanced over the years, just as academic learning is introduced early in life and expanded throughout life. One parent made clear that the early years are valuable when she identified the necessity to "show them [children] the right path." There is recognition that many readiness capabilities do begin at home (Galindo & Fuller, 2010). A community can work together to prepare children in their early years to search for lifetime success.

With all of these recognitions, they do not go deep enough. Parents in low socioeconomic communities often do not realize the extent to which schooling and overall development has changed since their first years in elementary school (deHaan et al., 2014; Robins et al., 2012). Parents are teaching their children basic skills at home, but it is apparent that both the quantity and quality of the skills are lacking for many. Many

children in these communities arrive to school with much to learn even before teachers give instruction based on the standards set for the school year. For example, it is beneficial for children to enter kindergarten with groundwork in literacy that includes knowledge of the entire alphabet and an ability to write the alphabet. That was not the case a generation ago, so parents seldom realize the need for such proficiencies. Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century goes much deeper in academic concepts than ever before; parents can learn about the new concepts and styles of learning when educators open doors for parent training.

Parents do recognize that teaching children is part of their parental responsibility. Still, it is common for parents in low socioeconomic communities to view teachers in a high role. They want to support teachers and the school, but do not see their personal abilities to teach their children as effective. There is a definite need to help parents realize their impact on teaching their children. Parents should be partners with teachers, not just a support system (Mehr, 2014; Savas, 2012). As educators provide support to families, a partnership can form that benefits the children.

### **Educators' Perceptions of Parental Roles in Early Childhood Development**

Educators strongly view the parent as a child's first teacher. This teaching occurs through modeling and direct teaching by the parent. Throughout a child's first years of life they receive a vast amount of education. Lessons may be filled with quality modeling of virtues and extensive practice with literacy and numeracy (Harper et al., 2011; Koops, 2014). Or, they may be filled with shallow principles and few academic skills. If clear expectations are given, then the children will learn discipline. If parents model complete

sentences, oral literacy will be learned in a solid manner. On the other hand, if parents model inconsistency in schedules or language, then poor time management and poor grammar will be learned.

Educators realize that the curriculum in schools has changed over the past 10–20 years. To be precise, children are expected to know more academic skills, at an increased intensity, at earlier stages in school (LeFevre et al., 2010). Parents often do not have a grasp of these requirements. Though teachers believe the parents need to prepare their children and stay involved in the education process, parents in low socioeconomic communities are lacking skills to help their children meet these requirements. Once teachers invite parents into the classroom to learn and support their children in their education, the entire learning community is better prepared for the children to reach higher levels of accomplishments in academic, behavior, and social skills.

Technology provides one valuable element of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning that can assist parents in their part to guiding the development of children. Educators know they can contact parents through many types of technology. However, teachers have to make a point to talk with parents at the beginning of the school year to discover the best way of communication. From actual phone calls, to texting, to e-mails there are various methods of interaction and teachers implement the parent's top choice, even if that means a list has to be created in order to keep track of each family's preferred means communication.

Educators should know the types of technological devices in a home so they can present appropriate ways for children to gain extra help in the home. Teachers can share

ideas with families to help them guide children into deeper learning (deHaan et al., 2014).

Teachers should offer texting, e-mailing, and phone calls as ways to talk with parents.

They can also use those tools for teaching new lessons or practicing familiar skills (LeFevre et al., 2010). While it may be surprising to see so many technological devices in a low socioeconomic community, they are definitely present. Teachers can even take videos of individual students to show a parent their child's successes in the classroom. There is a team that will form between parents and teachers when multiple avenues are found to make connections.

### **Engagement of Teachers, Students, and Parents Influences Child Development**

Early childhood classrooms are one place for engagement to occur between teachers, students, and parents. This classroom participation can lead to opportunities for learning by the parent, as well as the children. These moments are appreciated by the parents as they realize that they need more guidance on helping their children find success in school. The value of classroom engagement and the time that teachers take to work with parents who want to learn ways to help their children improve is immense (Robins et al., 2012; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011). Mrs. Trevino offered gratitude for her child's kindergarten teacher, "It's such a blessing to have a teacher that understands where you're coming from." Parents see the growth that they need on a personal level in order guide their children through the development process.

It is beneficial for teachers to create moments for students and parents to engage in the general classroom. This allows teachers to discover the interests and strengths of the parents and help find ways for those parents to guide the children in learning

moments at home. Teachers can guide parents alongside of their children so both the parent and the child understand the concept presented in the lesson. Then parents can help their children practice the lessons at home (Koops, 2014). Skills that are practiced at home will help the children far beyond the first years of school. In fact, these skills will enhance the lives of children for their educational success and accomplishments in the workforce.

Information about a child's home life is gathered when teachers take time to communication with the parents, which can occur when parents are invited into the classroom during the normal course of the day. Mrs. Harris created those opportunities and realized that homework was not completed each week because the mom was not there to help the student and the grandparents were not capable of the work. Mrs. Harris came up a solution. She had the parent and child start a journal together. Each evening the child writes a note to his mom which she reads and responds to so her son can read the notes when he wakes up in the morning. This journal allows the student to practice reading and writing each day, plus it shows his mother the progress he is making with those skills. While the mother made time to attend the special events in the classroom, she was not able to extend the learning into the home. That changed when a team was formed between the teacher and the parent and it influenced the young learner's development in a positive manner.

Motivation is another positive influence of parents engaging the classroom. Students feel encouragement when their parents are involved in the schools. There is something special about the bond between a student and a teacher in the first years of

school. Much care goes into the educating of these children. However, as much as this bond is genuine, the bond between a parent and child is typically much stronger. When a child sees the value that a parent places on education, the child strives for greatness. This presents another reason to invite parents into the schools during the day and arrange times for them to experience the same activities that children experience throughout the day. Again, the team that is created between educators and parents, benefits the young learners.

### **Parents' Perceptions of Children's Abilities after Classroom Engagement**

Once parents had an opportunity to watch their children in the kindergarten classroom, they noticed a need for their children to grow much more to be successful in school and prepare for more learning in life. This growth must occur in academic and social skills. Parents wanted to build the community in which their children could learn in authentic ways so the young students could prepare for a lifetime of learning.

Entering the classroom allows parents time to see the abilities of other students and the demands of kindergarten. There is a realization for the necessity to practice reading beyond the school day (Koops, 2014; LeFevre et al., 2010). In regards to social skills, the observations were also helpful as classmates were seen in building relationships and working through struggles. Parents also listen to the teacher when giving instructions to the children, which offers a better understanding of how young child should operate in to achieve success. Interactions between the students impact individual learning. After parents view those interactions they are able to better guide their children at home to support the child's overall development.

On these occasions when teachers invited parents into the classroom to participate and observe the classroom activities, parents are usually surprised by the intensity of work that takes place in the kindergarten classroom (LeFevre et al., 2010). These moments provide a crucial time for parents to grasp their child's strengths and weaknesses. Parents also create their own questions to ask teachers how they could better help their children. They also build relationships with the teachers that would transpire at other times during the year. Accepting and comprehending comments that the teachers give parents about their child's needs is easier once they watch the class personally and notice first-hand, the increasing demands of the early childhood classroom.

It was clear that classroom engagement serves as a constructive means to nurturing the parent and the child. Parents discover the true expectations for development in the early childhood years. They also learn ways to guide their children through each step of growth. Through these experiences in the classrooms, children are able to make easier connections to learning with their parents at home. This offers additional learning time to children. Parents and children also get to know one another in a different atmosphere and find new motivations for acquiring knowledge (Harper et al., 2011; Koops, 2014).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations for this study were at a minimum, yet still need to be understood in order to view each perspective of the study. One issue that was expected to bring a constraint to the study was a language barrier. In the community where the participants live, many families speak Spanish as their first language. Of the parents who did agree to

participate in the study, two spoke Spanish as their dominant language. All of the parents chose to participate in the study without any translation accommodation.

Throughout the interviews language was not an issue in five of the discussions. In one interview, short answers were often given and the sentence structure was somewhat awkward. This was likely due to the issue of English as the participant's second language. Still, the language barrier did not create a problem with understanding any of the answers given during the interview. The parent also did not display any confusion with the questions that were given in English throughout the interview.

As an extension of the possible limitations of the study, chapter one identified a potential bias in the study due to the fact that I am both the researcher and an early childhood educator on the campus where other educators and parents were selected as participants for the study. People in neither group were pressured to participate in any form. All of the educators who took part in the focus group were either teachers at my same level or educators at a higher level, such as subject-area specialists or administrators in the school. Each person was given the opportunity to participate and chose if it was something that interested them in such a way that they wanted to give their time and thoughts to the study. During the focus group, teachers were able to share their ideas openly and were not required to answer each question or make a comment for each situation. Educators simply shared based on their experiences.

The parents who agreed to participate realized that I was a teacher on the campus. However, they did not have any relationship with me through their children or any other form. This allowed each parent to choose on their own if they would like to participate

based on their interests in the study, rather than a loyalty to their children and a teacher. Questions asked during the interviews gave the parents time to share their experiences with the children at home and with their children in the school. At no time did a parent mention my classroom or students who were in my classes. They stayed focused on their children and teachers from their years at the school.

Another limitation arose during the interviews that were not anticipated during the planning stage of the data collection. There were single moments in most of the parent interviews when a parent did not know an academic term or did not quite know how to describe an academic activity in the classroom. Due to the description given by the parents, the question in their facial expressions and tone of voice, in addition to my experience in the classroom, I was able to understand the parent's intended comment. In each case, I asked the parent if I was thinking along the same line. Each time the parents were certain that it was the same line of thought. This did not cause an issue with the focus of the study. The parents were still able to offer complete thoughts that led to solid answers for each research question.

### **Recommendations**

Once the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, recommendations were established for further research and immediate actions within educational settings. In each case the base concept for the recommendations is the education of young children. There are two recommendations of ways to involve parents in child development within the child's classroom. Suggestions for ways to extend lessons into the homes can also be offered. This will create a long-term value of education and ability for children to reach

their highest potentials. These elements may impact one child at a time, but they quickly influence entire schools, communities, and even the next generation.

I generated recommendations with input from three areas. First, ideas were obtained from the quality means of child development and parental involvement offered in the literature review. Those ideas were stretched and combined with comments from the data collection of this study. Both teachers and parents made remarks during the focus group and interviews that indicated useful methods of ways to build connections between schools and homes so that children benefit. In addition, it is critical to consider the new approaches to gaining knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By combining all of these thoughts, it was possible to establish practical, innovative ideas to benefit young learners, parents, educators and full communities.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There is room for further research, which sets a place for the first piece of recommendations within this study. In direct relation to this study, there are elements that would be beneficial to add to the research if a similar study was completed in the future. A sequential mixed methods study could be undertaken. The research would include data about the number of children in each family and the birth order of the child who was the main topic conversation. For instance, a researcher could note whether the first grader, who was in kindergarten during the parent-classroom engagement activities, was the oldest, youngest, or a middle child in the family. This would offer more insight into the dynamics in the home; it would present knowledge about the parents' previous experiences with early childhood development and the education process. Prior

encounters with the school system may be present if there are older children in the home. Also, if the parent had younger children, the researcher would be able to ask questions regarding how the parent would use their classroom experiences and new knowledge with their younger children.

There are other dynamics in the home that could be researched through a mixed methods study in order to gain an awareness of the parental competencies. A study could include the age of the parents and if the mother and father were married, single, or divorced. It could also include information about the education levels of the parents, as well as their occupations. These elements would be beneficial to add to a case study, such as the one used in this research, to elaborate on the conclusions.

The current study could be extended into a longitudinal study where many more answers would be noticed. It would be insightful to follow the families that were a part of the study as the children continued their education through elementary, middle, and high school. The researchers could take the time to discover the academic progress of the students over time. Analysis could also be completed concerning the involvement levels of the parents through each grade of the student's schooling. With this extensive data collection, details could be explained about the long-term benefits of parental involvement in a child's development.

Another case study could also be created to supplement this study. As mentioned throughout the study, there is a great need for children to receive guidance in their development at much younger ages. Teachers could reach out to families in the neighborhood where they teach. The school could open for times when the teachers could

work with the parents of children who will come to the school within one or two year. During their time together, the educators could demonstrate ways for the parents to guide their younger learners through early skills of literacy, numeracy, and behavior. These moments would provide opportunities for the children to grow in ways that would appropriately prepare them for kindergarten.

Researchers could then create a case study based on the experiences of the educators and families involved with these learning moments. Even more would be noticed through a longitudinal study that observed the family through the students' kindergarten year. This would offer evidence on the benefits of the collaboration between the parents and the educators early in the children's lives. In each recommendation for further research there are ideas that include an element of parental involvement which is the highlight of this study. Parent engagement remains a necessity in the lives of young children.

### **Recommendations for Actions with Parental Involvement**

Recommendations were formed for parents to take actions instantly and begin reaping benefits promptly. Parents often attend meetings at the beginning of the school year and conferences that teachers conduct a couple of times a year. This research presents a reason for parents to communicate with teachers more often and with more purpose. It is critical for parents or guardians to give teachers some insight on the needs of their children and their family dynamics which may play a role in the child's development. Parents should also look to teachers for advice when there are questions

about standards for learning. They should ask teachers for suggestions of ways to work with their children at home in order to help the children develop in appropriate ways.

Parents can also view this study as an endorsement for them to reach out to other families, especially those with younger children who have not started school. Once parents realize their role in a child's development, they can help other parents find the same awareness. When parents learn how to work with their children to build their academic, behavioral, and social skills, they can share ideas with neighbors, family members, and friends who have younger children. Due to the relationships between the adults, there should be a sincere and natural manner in which they discuss ideas. These suggestions will help the younger children gain preparation for formal schooling. It will also help adults gain confidence in their own skills and their ability to help others.

### **Recommendations for Actions with Educator Involvement**

While it is known that educators are always searching for the valuable resource of 'time', there are actions that early childhood educators can take in regards to the findings of this study. First, there are actions that were made known throughout the chapter that advise educators to build relationships with parents and guardians to create a teaching team between the school and the home. These connections can be made by having genuine conversations with parents as soon as a class list and contact information is given. Conversations before and after school, or during conferences, throughout the year should continue at a high volume. If the personal contacts cannot be fulfilled, it is important for teachers to search for other ways to get in touch with parents. This can occur through texting, phone calls, or e-mails. All forms of communication will help to

keep the relationship going and allow the teacher to continue learning about the family dynamic or needs of the child.

Teachers can also duplicate the “First Friday” moments that educators created in the school for this study. At the school in the study, the kindergarten teachers chose to invite parents into their classrooms on the first Friday of each month. Teachers could create these collaboration moments at any time in the month. It is recommended to make these learning opportunities available every month to parents. This allows parents to view new skills that are taught throughout the year and it offers a first-hand look into their child’s progress through the year.

As an early childhood educator, I actually open my classroom to parents the one day each month, but some parents have shared that they have to work on that day. This year I decided to let parents know they were welcome to communicate with me about other days in the month that had available in their schedule to join the class. It is important that parents observe and participate in learning opportunities; the moments should not be eliminated due to scheduling constraints.

This study focused on early childhood education and the given school started the concept of inviting parents in to the classrooms in kindergarten. The school administration noticed the gains that were made in the students’ proficiencies due to their parents joining the classroom activities and asked other grade levels to begin opening the invitations for parent engagement the following year. As children grow more independent in upper grade levels, a parent’s responsibility of working as a team with the school is not dismissed. When teachers of all grade levels open their classroom to parents and

guardians, there are endless opportunities for communication for between teachers and families. Just as in the younger grade levels, these moments provide a way for parents to better understand the lessons that take place with their children. Even if the students are capable of completing homework on their own, the parents can use their experiences to open conversations about education with their children. This drives motivation for the students in regards to their growth and passion for learning.

Additionally, educators can take time to produce homework that encourages family engagement and authentic applications. Teachers can offer homework assignments that require families to read a book together and write a letter to one of the characters about their experiences in the story. Or, after reading the book, the child could write a different ending for the story. Homework could require the child to help a parent make dinner by actually reading a recipe and measuring items for the meal. A family could also go out in the evenings to watch and record the moon phases. These are simple ways to connect the learning standards with real-life. While this does take extra time to produce, it is a valuable part of creating the home-school connection.

In addition, the findings of this study demonstrated a need for children, in low socioeconomic communities, to have a higher quality and quantity of introductions to literacy, numeracy, behavioral, and social skills at younger ages. Many advantages would result from teachers going into the neighborhoods surrounding the schools where they teach to work with families prior to the children beginning school. Local libraries, event centers, or even businesses may be willing to offer a room where classes could take place for parents in the community. Or, teachers could go into an apartment complex to use an

event room where many apartment residents would have easy access to the sessions.

Wherever the teachers choose to offer their workshops, they should provide information to parents about the upcoming standards that children will need to achieve in kindergarten. They should also present simple applications for the parents to use in their homes that will help their young children learn the necessary skills that will provide a strong foundation for learning. It would be most beneficial for teachers to present sessions where both the parents and the three and four-year-old children attend.

Sessions could even be presented to families of children who are only two-years-old. If the teachers can guide parents to facilitate the developmental process of their toddlers, then this process crucial time in the child's life will begin with an intensity that continues into the formal education process. This does require more time from teachers, but the advantages will be immense as the children begin school and continue their education.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Social change is a critical component of this study. There are several avenues for positive social change with the combination of recent literature and the results of the data collected, analyzed, and interpreted. The recommendations within this chapter provide a method to improve learning and give children an opportunity for more success throughout life. Potential social changes should be noted in four areas. Those areas present changes at an individual level for each student, a family level, a level for the schools, and the recommendations impact the larger society as a whole.

It is apparent that positive changes will occur when children are better prepared for school and overall development. Young children, especially in low socioeconomic households, rarely begin school with essential skills for learning each objective set out by the school district and state. For instance, behaviorally, it is difficult for children to sit and listen in a classroom with twenty other young learners if the children have not experienced sitting in a group, working with a team, or even following multiple directions from a parent. On the first day of school early childhood educators welcome new students ready for laughter, excitement, smiles, and even a few tears. There are many procedures and expectations introduced throughout the first week of school and children are required to quickly comprehend the way to move successfully through a school day. By the second week of school full academic teaching and learning begins. If the children are not well-prepared for the procedures and expectations, the academics are even harder to achieve.

Understanding how to carry on a conversation with peers and adults will present opportunities for academic and social growth at higher levels. Ensuring a suitable foundation of literacy and numeracy allows the children to learn at an appropriate intensity that is necessary for development. This will create positive attitudes for learning. Even young children feel negativity when they sit in a lesson that they do not understand. Negative feelings also come to children when they are often placed in groups where they are required to take part in extra learning moments to gain basic knowledge that will get them closer to the grade level expectations. When children are continually

seeing progress, they will strive for more progress. These children will begin a path that is set up for success rather than continual intervention.

Families are also impacted in a positive manner through this study. Parents talk about desires for their children to develop in extraordinary ways. Unfortunately, they do not always know how to drive that development. Think about the parent who is continually called by the school to discuss a behavioral issue with their child. Consider the parent who sits down to conference with a teacher and the conversation is filled with comments about the child's weaknesses. Parents in these situations seldom perceive hope for their child's development reaching the high points that the teacher mentions, instead they regularly say that they understand, but continue in parenting the same way. If families are given the guidance needed to lead their children, then many accomplishments will occur.

Parents displayed an appreciation when teachers gave them guidance in child development. Optimism rises in parents. They begin taking more time out of the day to help their children with homework and suggestions given by teachers. Small steps of success are noticed that lead to larger goals met throughout the year. Education is noticed as a priority in the home. Conversations involving parents and teachers become more frequent than assigned conferences and the meetings continue to include ideas, as well as anticipation for more growth. This bond between the school and the home leads to positive impacts on the child's social, academic, and behavioral growth which last far into the child's progression in school and continues in life.

Positive changes for the school are also evident. When talking about the schedules of schools in many underprivileged communities, the interventions dominate the conversation. Classroom teachers have to find time to teach their main lessons, but it is required for them to spend a certain amount of time in small groups with students who are working far below the grade level expectations. Teachers often feel pressured into spending additional time with the students who need added help, because there is a realization that they will lack the skills needed to enter the next grade level. This also leaves students who are capable of grade level work to often work independently through the school day.

Extra money is usually allocated for schools in these communities to hire additional educators who provide small group teaching to students who are lacking in certain skill sets. Also, librarians, counselors, and even administrators frequently give time out of their days to teach small groups of students who need extra help. Aside from the targeting learning time during the day, educators spend time to tutor students before and after school.

A teacher could be spending time equally with all students during the day or could attend professional development after school. Other educators in the school could spend time focused on their jobs and create even more opportunities for the school as a whole. For instance a librarian could create more research opportunities in the library or prospects for the technological learning moments. Money is often a hot topic in education. If more children came to school well-prepared, then less money would need to be spent on getting children up to par.

As relationships are built between families and school, it is common for the families to share their positive experiences with friends and neighbors. Positive remarks scatter through a community. This provides an uplifting conception about the schools and the education system as a whole. Parents with younger children find an enthusiasm for education. They search for appropriate methods of preparing their young children for the many skills needed to begin school in a way that the children will flourish. Conversations occur between families that include details of what children need to learn the first five years of life to gain a solid foundation. The parents also share ideas of how to reach those goals.

Social change occurs at the grandest level when the lower levels of change impact an entire community. When children learn all of the objectives set by the state, they are trained to enter the work force and begin families in a successful manner. The individuals are equipped to support their neighborhood schools and full neighborhoods. Fewer families will require help from the government for living expenses, health care, and educational supplements. This actually provides gains for the immediate neighborhood, as well as people who live throughout the entire city and state.

Aside from the monetary impact of this study, is the emotional impact. Families who are able to provide for their families on their own accord find a sense of pride that is valuable. These individuals raise future generations with gratification of hard work and push towards even more progress. They also can take their talents to give back to the community. Complete communities advance due to increased development in the earliest

years of a child's life. Small advancements are noticed immediately and the future will bring huge advancements for many people.

### **Conclusion**

This study described innovative ways for parents, in a low socioeconomic community, to engage in activities with their children to influence their academic and social development. From the earliest points of the study, there was recognition for a need of more directed parental involvement in early childhood development. Interviews with parents demonstrated a look into the teaching that parents gave their children before starting school. A discussion with educators presented details about the skills that children usually have before kindergarten begins, plus the ways that parents may be able to work with the school to help their children boost early development. The conversations further displayed the support that educators in the schools should recommend to parents in a personal manner.

Guidance that was tailored to the needs of individual students and families was a vital element noticed in the study. Once that type of direction was presented to parents, the connections between the home and school increased. Engagement between the children and parents that took place in the home showed evidence of the children's progress. This was noted through conversations with the parents and the educators. Key findings were highlighted in three main themes; creating a team between early childhood educators and parents, building 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills, and enabling a community for early preparation of learning with authentic methods. Throughout the interpretation of findings, the three concepts were presented in numerous ways.

Suggestions were made for methods of making those connections possible. It is critical for teachers to learn how to work closely with parents and even teach them, in addition to the children in their classrooms. Ideas were also given to help parents find natural ways in their lives beyond the school day to enhance skills related to academics, behavior and social awareness. This includes using technology to communicate with families and using technological devices to practice new academic skills.

Findings in this study made it apparent that young learners in low socioeconomic communities are in great need for advanced skills when they begin formal schooling. Students often start kindergarten with a lack of literacy, numeracy, and social competencies that are essential to progress through the kindergarten year and subsequent years of school. When children begin school with proper skills, they are able to flourish in school and have attitudes that drive them to high potentials in development. The next generation will be on a path to success if each child's growth is set in motion at an early age, with suitable cognitive, behavioral, and social proficiencies.

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## Appendix A: Explanation of the Study for Potential Participants

### A Study on Parent Engagement in the Kindergarten Classroom.

During the 2013-14 school year parents were invited to observe and participate in the kindergarten classrooms within our school. On the selected days, parents engaged in classroom activities and took note of their child's abilities within the classroom. As a doctoral candidate at Walden University, I am conducting a study on parent engagement in the classroom. I am inviting parents who joined in those occasions last year to take part in an interview for the study. I am also inviting educators to join in a focus group to discuss parent engagement. The specific focus is parental engagement during the early years of a child's development.

For more information about this study, you are invited to attend a meeting on Tuesday, September 23, 2014. The meeting will begin at 3:00 and will not last longer than one hour.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Robyn Tresnak

XXX-XXXX

robyn.tresnak@waldenu.edu

## Appendix B: Agreement Form for Educator-Participants

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of parent engagement as an influence on early childhood development, specifically in low socioeconomic communities. The researcher is inviting educators who are directly involved with early childhood education to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Robyn Tresnak, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know Robyn Tresnak as a kindergarten teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

#### Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to describe the influence of parent engagement in regards to the development of young children in low socioeconomic communities.

#### Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

participate in a focus group with other educators. The group will meet one time for a sixty to ninety minute session. Within forty-eight hours the recording will be analyzed.

Member checking will be completed within two weeks of the interviews.

Here are some sample questions:

In what ways do you believe parents need to prepare their children for school?

What areas do the children in your classrooms need to practice at home?

What are ways that parents are preparing their children successfully for the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom?

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at [REDACTED] School District or Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

#### Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or emotional distress. This study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are potential benefits to the study, such as an understanding of ways to involve more parents in the development of their young children. This could lead to better preparation of young children, for formal education. In addition, it could assist in laying a stronger foundation of education for children in communities with low socioeconomics.

#### Payment:

There will be no monetary or material compensation for participating in this study.

#### Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure with a password-protected system, on a personal

computer and external drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail (robyn.tresnak@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-20-14-0299147 and it expires on October 20, 2014.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

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## Appendix C: Agreement Form for Parent-Participants

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of parent engagement as an influence on early childhood development, specifically in low socioeconomic communities. The researcher is inviting parents of first grade students, who were involved in their child's kindergarten classroom activities, to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Robyn Tresnak, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know Robyn Tresnak as a kindergarten teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to describe the influence of parent engagement in regards to the development of young children in low socioeconomic communities.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- participate in an interview, conducted by Robyn Tresnak. The interview will take place at a scheduled time and last between sixty and ninety minutes. Within forty-eight hours a transcript will be typed and analyzed. Member checking will be completed within two weeks of the interviews.

Here are some sample questions:

- In what ways did you help prepare your child for kindergarten?

- How did you decide what skills they needed to accomplish before kindergarten?
- How do you choose or develop activities to help your child develop age-appropriate skills?
- How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at [REDACTED] School District or Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or emotional distress. This study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are potential benefits to the study, such as an understanding of ways to involve more parents in the development of their young children. This could lead to better preparation of young children, for formal education. In addition, it could assist in laying a stronger foundation of education for children in communities with low socioeconomics.

**Payment:**

There will be no monetary or material compensation for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the

researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure with a password-protected system, on a personal computer and external drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail (robyn.tresnak@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-20-14-0299147 and it expires on October 20, 2014.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

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Date of consent

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Participant's Signature

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Researcher's Signature

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## Appendix D: Focus Group Questions and Conversation Starters

In what ways do you believe parents need to prepare their young children for school?

What ways do parents use to prepare their children successfully for the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom?

What ways can you communicate and demonstrate to offer techniques for parents to implement at home to increase their child's social, behavioral, and academic abilities?

In what ways do you see children struggling throughout the year?

In what ways can parents engage in the classroom to discover developmental ideas to use at home?

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

In what ways did you help prepare your child for kindergarten?

How did you decide what skills they needed to accomplish before kindergarten?

Describe your typical evening with your family, once your children get home from school?

How do you choose or develop activities to help your child develop age appropriate skills?

If there are any areas where your child struggles, what are those areas?

How did you identify those struggles?

How do you address those areas of concern?

How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?

In what ways do you communicate with your child's teacher?

In what ways did those moments influence you as a parent?

How did the events in the kindergarten classroom influence the activities that you completed with your child at home?

Do you notice any differences between the kindergarten classroom of your child and the kindergarten classroom you attended as a young child?