

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF NOVICE  
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN  
TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2018

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Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2018

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. *Parental involvement* was defined as parents actively engaging in their child's education, critically important to academic development. Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory was the theoretical framework for this study. The significance of this study investigated *novice teachers*, those with five or fewer years' teaching background, and their experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. In doing so, 14 novice teachers from Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, were chosen to participate. Interviews, individual and focus group, as well as writing prompts, were used to collect data. This study attempted to answer the central research question: How do novice teachers describe their experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia? This study also attempted to answer sub-questions: (a) What role do novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have when engaging parents in family-school relationships? (b) How do novice teachers in Title I elementary schools describe prior experiences in teacher-preparation programs when training for building family-school relationships? (c) What successful academic and social experiences can novice teachers describe with students in Title I elementary schools when parents are home- and/or school-base involved? and (d) What do novice teachers perceive as academic challenges with students when observing a lack of home- and/or school-based parental involvement in Title I elementary schools? Data analysis used Moustakas' (1994) step-by-step method, to provide a rich description of novice teachers' experiences.

*Keywords:* parental involvement, teacher preparation, family-school relationships, novice teachers, teacher candidates, collaboration

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### **Dedication**

This document is dedicated to my husband Casey and our two beautiful children, because without them I could not have completed this journey. Casey took on extra responsibilities with the children and house, never complaining or asking for anything in return. I cannot express how thankful I am for his continuous support and encouragement. Casey would not let me quit when I became frustrated, instead I was met with words of encouragement and a big warm hug. My children and husband sacrificed a lot of time with me, and I just appreciate their patience while I set out to achieve my goal. Additionally, it is with my hope that by completing achieving my doctorate degree, I will have shown my children that anything is possible if you work hard and set your mind to it. Therefore, it is with all my heart that I dedicate this document to my husband, my rock, and partner in life, as well as my children, my everything.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Abstract Conceptualization (AC)

Active Experimentation (AE)

Advancement via Individual Achievement (AVID)

Concrete Experience (CE)

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS)

Reflective Observation (RO)

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. This introductory chapter will provide a background into the problem and state the purpose of the study, as well as its significance. Additionally, the central research question and four sub-questions will be explained in detail. Chapter One will conclude with a thorough description of the research plan and key vocabulary terms pertaining to the study.

### Background

*Parent involvement* can be defined as parents' participation in student acquisition of education and experiences (Demircan & Erden, 2015). Parental involvement, also known as foundational family-school relationship, is a significant factor associated with student academic achievement (Abenavoli, Greenberg, & Bierman, 2015; Alexander, Cox, Behnke, & Larzelere, 2017; Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş, Özel, & Konca, 2016; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum, Blatz, & Rodriguez, 2016). Involvement holds different interpretations depending on whose perspective - teacher or parent - is being examined. Ensuring a child attends school and is safe qualifies as active involvement for some parents (Demircan & Erden, 2015). However, teachers believe active involvement requires more than ensuring a child attends school daily; instead parents should also take an active role within the school. The period of time prior to and during students' elementary years has proven to be critical for parent involvement in education to foster academic development (Johnson et al., 2016). Student achievement has been strongly linked with parental involvement, especially in specific core areas such as mathematics and reading (Crosby, Rasinski, Padak, &

Yildirim, 2015; Joseph, Velez, & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2017; O'Sullivan, Chen, & Fish, 2014; Ross, 2016).

Increased student learning and achievement occurs when a strong family, school, and community partnership is created (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Patte, 2011). Additionally, when a sense of community is developed among teachers and parents, an authentic relationship can be created, leading to strong connections (Family Engagement, 2015). However, teachers continuously express feelings of being unqualified as they relate to these partnerships (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Zion & Sobel, 2014). According to D'Haem and Griswold (2017), some teacher candidates do not have the confidence necessary to foster strong family-school relationships due to the lack of curriculum and experience from preparation programs. New teacher programs have failed to provide teaching candidates with required skills for fostering family-school relationships (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). Partnerships among schools and teacher educational institutes are challenging (Willemse, Vloeberghs, de Bruïne, & Van Eynde, 2016). If teacher education institutes and schools would increasingly collaborate, it could assist with teacher candidates gaining knowledge in regards to family relations (Willemse et al., 2016). Currently, teacher education programs were falling short in teaching candidates' accountability in regards to planning and evaluation, as well as direct interaction with families (Willemse et al., 2016). Therefore, preservice teachers require more experience with theories, practice, and ideas assisting them in comprehending demands of families and their role in building fundamental relationships (Willemse et al., 2016).

## **Historical**

U.S. policy, throughout history, has continuously regulated parent-school relationships based on middle-class values (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). The

economic structures of families, especially those of color, are negatively affected if relationships are viewed through only one lens, such as the middle class. Prior to Title I, in the 1800s and early 1900s, the significance of familial roles in education, especially those of ethnic and minority populations, was excluded (Family Engagement, 2015). The cultural values of ethnic and minority groups' beliefs, when differing from those of the American way, were perceived as harmful, leading to exclusion. Therefore, the first U.S. policy to consider educating children outside the home was the The Civilian Fund Act of 1819 (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). This legislation was designed to improve and assimilate Native Americans into mainstream western society. In order to accomplish this task, boarding schools were developed separate from the reservations, forcing Native Americans to learn English and speak less of their native language, essentially Americanizing them. Programs for the Americanization of Mexican immigrants followed, leading to the passing of the Home Teacher Act of 1915. This legislation took a different aim than the Civilian Fund Act of 1819, placing teachers in the homes of the students. Teachers could then instruct parents, specifically mothers, on practices involving hygiene, American government, and citizenship.

Parental involvement has been continuously evolving through U.S. history. During the Progressive Era, schools were viewed as pivotal centers of socialization and communication between the school and home (Zeichner, Bowman, Guillen, & Napolitan, 2016). A strong agreement among federal policymakers currently existed for school leaders to improve family-school relationships while also increasing parental involvement (Evans, 2013; Ross, 2016). Beginning in the 1960s and progressing forward in U.S. history, parents and families were seen as playing an integral role in students' academic success (Family Engagement, 2015). This was exhibited during President Lyndon Johnson's presidency and in the document *War on Poverty*,

where he described parental involvement as a remedy for minority populations with regard to academic achievement, with women playing a key role (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013).

The federally funded program, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, was passed following Secretary of Labor D.P. Moynihan's report on African American families and male job loss, also during Johnson's presidency. This Act included provisional programs such as Head Start and Title I. Head Start was created to "help break the cycle of poverty" (Family Engagement, 2015, p. 18) by providing preschool children of low-income families an all-inclusive plan to meet their varying needs. In addition, Head Start programs transitioned young children from impoverished families to federally sponsored daycares (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Title I provided additional funds to districts and schools that currently had a high percentage of students labeled as economically disadvantaged. As of 2014, 44% of children in the United States lived in low-income families (Evans & Radina, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016), the official 2015 poverty rate in the United States was 13.5% or 43.1 million people.

Parent involvement and family-school relationships came under question by the public with the release of the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, under the Reagan administration, comparing the achievement of American students to that of students around the world (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). The report argued that the decline in student achievement scores was a result of America's failing schools; however, others argued that the blame could also be placed on parents' lack of interest in the education of their children. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, it was mandated that those districts seeking Title I funds set up a means by which to increase family-school relationships (Evans & Radina, 2014; Pakter & Chen, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



Title I, one of the largest federally funded programs, outlines 1% of its monies to be utilized for family engagement (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). Under Title I, schools are required to develop and implement strategies for engaging low-income and all other families, as well as report progress (Evans & Radina, 2014). Parental involvement opportunities must exhibit parents as equal partners in a child's achievement (Virginia Department of Education, 2015). Examples of "reach out" efforts included: Twitter, newsletters, coordinated services, parent workshop sessions (Virginia Department of Education, 2015), and/or a district-wide parent advisory council (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). In addition, a School Family Engagement Committee (SFEC) could also spark parental engagement with childcare and transportation offered. This committee could provide workshops or trainings, as well as fatherhood activities.

Therefore, NCLB recognized that parents as well as teachers are responsible for the academic success of students (Pakter & Chen, 2013). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the reauthorization of NCLB, maintained the significance of family-school relationships with these same provisions (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to ESSA, parental involvement is when parents play a critical role assisting in their child's learning and actively involving themselves in their child's daily education, as well as becoming active partners with the school (Virginia Department of Education, 2015).

Even though federal policies have laid the foundation requiring programs be created to increase parent participation, achieving it requires more. At the elementary level, parents volunteer at various functions, join the parent teacher association, and attend parent conferences (Malone, 2017). Research has suggested that parental involvement tends to taper off as students progress through their education and move beyond elementary school (Bhargava & Witherspoon,

2015; Malone, 2017; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013). Research also suggests parent involvement decreases as adolescents desire autonomy (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Thus, parental involvement at the secondary level may include working at a concession stand or fundraising event (Malone, 2017). As a result, working class families give much of the responsibility of developing a child's cognitive abilities to school systems (Otter, 2014). Those of lower socio-economic status tend to have low self-efficacy towards their abilities to assist their children with homework or any academic responsibilities (Otter, 2014; Johnson et al., 2016). These families are perhaps inclined to respond differently when it comes to involving themselves in their child's academics (Young, Austin, & Grove, 2013).

### **Social**

Economic inconsistencies are present within the quality of United States K-12 educational institutions and student postsecondary education enrollment and determination (Benner et al., 2016). Inconsistencies when analyzing socio-demographic characteristics such as class, gender, ethnicity, and parental involvement are present as well (Watt, 2016). Individuals from lower socio-economic status (SES) groups, minority, and male have been labeled as *hard to reach*, with regard to engagement in a child's education (Watt, 2016). Involvement can also differ based on cultural beliefs and values (Joseph et al., 2017). Latino family involvement is affected by culture more than any other ethnic or minority group in the United States. Therefore, collaboration and interaction levels differ from one family to the next, despite the word *partnership* (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013).

Parental involvement can be broken down into two categories: home-based and school-based (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013). Home- and school-based

levels of involvement vary depending on individual family values and beliefs (McWayne, Limlingan, Melzi, & Schick, 2016). Studies have suggested that African American parents engage in more home-based academic involvement than do Caucasian parents (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). This is also true for lower income, ethnic minority, and immigrant families (McWayne et al., 2016). Caucasian parents engage in more school-based academic activities (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Home-based involvement activities enrich information obtained within the school day (Benner et al., 2016) such as checking for homework completion and correctness (Hemmerechts, Agirdag, & Kavadias, 2017), reading with or to children (Sy, Gottfried, & Gottfried, 2013), and assisting with studying (Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Joseph et al., 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Home-based involvement - parents spending time on reading, writing, and math - (Lang, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Jeon, 2017), also consists of museum visits and concert attendance, proven to have a positive impact on academic achievement (Benner et al., 2016). Despite their significance, home-based strategies are less noticeable to the schools and are often discredited (Joseph et al., 2017).

School-based involvement, which occurs when parents participating in activities within the classroom or school (Çağdaş et al., 2016; Lang et al., 2017), can consist of the following: volunteering within the school day where assistance is desired (Benner et al., 2016; Hemmerechts et al., 2017; Watt, 2016), maintaining an open line of communication with teachers, especially during parent teacher conferences, (Benner et al., 2016; Hemmerechts et al., 2017; Watt, 2016), involvement in the PTA (Sy et al., 2013), and participating in school organizations (Benner et al., 2016). Some parents who are assisting children with homework (home-based involvement), and conferencing with teachers, (school-based involvement), may

participate less in educational events at the classroom and school levels (Çağdaş et al., 2016). Home-based involvement with low SES students has had a stronger impact on student achievement (Benner et al., 2016; Suizzo et al., 2016). Levels of home- or school-based involvement have been related to positive social skills in low-income and ethnic minority students (Lang et al., 2017). However, Young et al. (2013) suggested that a clear definition of parental involvement is lacking, leaving many parents questioning what their exact role is in assisting their child academically with direction often times missing from teachers. Students of low SES tend to have access to fewer engaging resources (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Johnson et al., 2016; Malone, 2017; O'Sullivan et al., 2014; Otter, 2014). School districts and teachers must realize “some parents need assistance for education to be meaningfully engaged” (Malone, 2017, p. 59).

Gaining knowledge of students' communities assists in developing respectful connections with the families in ways that can support student learning (Zeichner et al., 2016). Therefore, it is significant for teachers to know the community from which their students come. For example, parents defined as low income and less educated are more likely to hold lower educational expectations for their children, compared to their counterparts (Benner et al., 2016). However, Barr and Saltmarsh's (2014) study suggested that parents were more likely to become engaged in a child's schooling when administrators and teachers created a welcoming environment. According to a study conducted by Zion and Sobel (2014), it is critical for teacher education programs to revise current curriculum to ensure that social justice and culturally responsive instruction are included and teacher candidates are properly taught to work with diverse communities of learners and families. Elementary program teacher candidates were immersed in authentic experiences with urban school communities in a study conducted by

Waddell (2013), allowing them to not only gain direct experiences with the families, but also a deeper understanding of cultural diversity.

### **Theoretical**

Learning through experience is stressed through Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory (ELT), the theoretical framework for this particular study. ELT provides an overall framework or model of the learning process, stressing the role that experience plays in learning (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002; Matsuo, 2015), especially as teacher candidates progress through preparation programs. On the other side of education, various studies (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Flores de Apodaca, Gentling, Steinhaus, & Rosenberg, 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013; Patte, 2011) have based their frameworks around Epstein's (n.d) six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating with the school, volunteering, facilitating learning at home, participating in decision making, and collaborating among the community to improve the educational system. This framework explains the significances in obtaining family-school relationships (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015; Park & Holloway, 2016; Patte, 2011). Epstein (n.d.) explained how involvement is a collaboration or partnership among the following stakeholders: home, school, and community through frameworks (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017), while providing in-depth descriptions of strategies for schools to use to support families (Epstein, n.d.).

Parenting involves schools assisting with establishing a safe home environment conducive to supportive learning, which may consist of educational courses for parents who require it (Epstein, n.d.). Open lines of communication are created among teachers, administrators, and other staff members with family members with regard to student progress and school programs in an attempt to increase engagement. Reaching out and recruiting families

to volunteer at the schools, and establishing a welcoming environment are methods for increasing parental involvement. Families need to understand parental engagement extends beyond the walls of the school to the home, as families must comprehend how to assist with homework and be provided information on curriculum, activities, and planning decisions. Parents and guardians are significant stakeholders in school organizations, making them key decision makers. Collaborating with the community is the last essential type of involvement (Epstein n.d.), as schools need to bring in a variety of resources from the community to strengthen already existing programs or develop new ones.

Parental involvement presents itself as a barrier for teacher candidates when they have received limited training on the proper methodology of engaging in family-school relationships (de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Patte, 2011; Zeichner et al., 2016). With a limited number of strategies available to them, “family engagement is a significant challenge for new teachers” (Evans, 2013, p. 123). Experienced teachers have even reported high levels of anxiety when dealing with families (Evans, 2013). Teacher candidates need to be equipped with the knowledge necessary to develop partnerships while in preparation programs to gain skills for developing family-school relationships once they enter the teaching profession (Hindin & Mueller, 2016).

Expectations of what family-school relationships should look like needs to be portrayed to parents by teachers and school leaders (Young et al., 2013). Therefore, teacher candidates must comprehend the significance of family-school relationships and the knowhow for effectively communicating with diverse families prior to entering the education profession (Evans, 2013; Patte, 2011). Although various qualitative studies have been completed debating educational institutions' training abilities with teacher candidates on family-school relationships

(Zeichner et al., 2016), the essence of the novice teachers' voices are lacking. This study used a transcendental phenomenological methodology to thoroughly investigate how elementary novice teachers, individuals with five or fewer teaching years, and their experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Researchers use this type of methodology to analyze data through the reduction of information or participant quotes into themes, creating an overall essence of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Obtaining voices from novice teachers has the ability to assist with the development of mentoring programs for teacher candidates, as well as improve college preparation programs.

### **Situation to Self**

Growing up in the suburbs of Pittsburgh in a middle-class family opened the door to preconceived notions and ideal conceptions of parental involvement. Each night my mother ensured that my brother and I had completed homework to her satisfaction. This included spelling individual words and completing multiplication facts for practice each night until 100% accuracy was met in preparation for weekly assessments. In addition, my mom requested tests, quizzes, and grade reports, as well as maintaining an open line of communication with teachers. These specific events defined what I perceived to be parental involvement, and what I currently practice with my own children. With my mother being as involved as she was, it assisted me in being extremely successful in school. She consistently held high expectations throughout my educational career, which I understood to be the norm for everyone.

Through my 15-week student teaching experience in an eighth grade civics class located at a sixth through eighth grade middle school in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, I observed and concluded the impact of what high expectations have, not only in the school environment but also home. Most, if not all, students came with completed homework assignments, and did

classwork asked of them. The students excelled in classes and behavior issues were kept to a minimum. This experience again reinforced the mindset of how significant it is for parents to be involved. Little did I know once I took my first full-time teaching job 14 years ago, would these preconceived notions of parental involvement change entirely.

Throughout the 14 years I had spent educating middle school children in Title I settings, I have learned the *ins and outs* of parental involvement in education. Email is a form of communication for some parents, while others communicate more frequently through text messaging. However, educators still have those parents/guardians that cannot be reached with either method and a home visit is used as a last resort. Exposure to facilitating family-school relationships would have been both beneficial and meaningful to my first teaching experience.

Currently, I am serving as an assistant principal of a Title I elementary school, as well as the district director for AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) where I oversee the AVID program that I taught for three years. AVID coordinators and teachers organize family and student informational events. The struggle for parental involvement is observed firsthand with the lack of parent attendance, but not as much as for teachers in core areas due to the ability to loop with students. When a teacher loops with his/her students, the teacher follows them from one grade to the next. Looping with students enabled me to create a rapport not only with students, but also their parents. Other content area teachers, especially novice teachers, have more of a struggle when contacting parents, based on my experience. When it comes to parent/teacher conference nights few parents show up for the conferences, especially at the secondary level.

AVID is not just another program brought into school systems, but rather a philosophy or school-wide culture, which holds students accountable to high academic standards of learning



(AVID, 2017b). Students are held accountable for high academic standards while being provided academic and social support needed to become successful in this globally demanding society. AVID trains more than 60,000 educators a year through its summer institute on research-based strategies enhancing critical thinking, literacy, collaboration, organization, and math skills that are infused into elementary through higher education curriculum standards. At the secondary level, making AVID unique, there are middle- and high- school level AVID elective classes targeting students in the academic middle: B, C, or D, recommended by their teachers and meeting other specified requirements (AVID, 2017b). These students receive more intense approaches to the AVID curriculum, as well as college campus visits, guest speakers in specific careers, and an extra advocate for their education. The AVID elective teacher goes into classrooms during planning times, to observe what and how students are learning and assist if needed. Through these trainings, implementation of research-based strategies, and dedication of educators around the globe, AVID is able to meet its goal of closing the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and other secondary institutions.

Discussion of my own personal narrative to this research study demonstrates the significance to understanding teacher candidate preparation when dealing with parents and accessing the voices of novice teachers in Title I elementary school schools. Often I have seen new teachers come and go at a rapid rate, ill prepared for student demands in a Title I setting. Therefore, my desire in completing this study was to describe the experiences of novice teachers in Title I elementary schools in an attempt to reveal strategies for engaging more parental involvement and having an increased number of post-secondary institutions reflect on their teacher preparation programs. An ontological viewpoint assisted in guiding this study, as I spent a great deal of time with participants, capturing their individual perspectives and the realities

they perceived with parental involvement (Creswell, 2007). This assisted in improving processes by which school districts attempt to train new teacher candidates. The various realities gathered through working with these individuals were analyzed and categorized into themes. In using the ontological viewpoint, it was significant for me to understand how novice teachers truly view parental involvement (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). What is the workplace really like for them? According to Lee (2012), *realities* can be defined as events or objects socially constructed by actors, which can be embellished. In this particular study, the actors were Title I elementary school novice teachers, and this study attempted to socially construct their reality: experiences with parental involvement.

While analyzing novice teachers' realities using an ontological viewpoint, it was also significant to focus on how various concepts were socially assembled differently through constructivism or how the mind actively creates knowledge (Schwandt, 2015). As humans, knowledge is not discovered but rather constructed. Constructivists strive to explain how individuals interpret specific social or historical ideas. Furthermore, interaction between a subject and object is critical within a study (Lee, 2012), as individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013). In this study, novice teachers socially constructed and evolved their own meaning of parental involvement in a Title I elementary setting based on school-aged, college, and classroom experiences. Based on a constructivist viewpoint, the goal of this study was to depend as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation (Creswell, 2013). The constructivist ontological view aligned with this research study through the construction of multiple perspectives from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon to be analyzed (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, per Kolb (2015),

a constructivist learner moves through the context or learning environment and continue to be affected by it.

### **Problem Statement**

Education begins at home (Goodall, 2013), as parents should be the first individuals disseminating information on the context of the world, as well as the significance of knowledge. Well-educated parents tend to draw on their own educational experiences and understanding of how the process works to both advocate and actively engage in the educational process with their child (Ross, 2016). Quantitative studies have suggested how parental involvement in education is a significant factor in student achievement (Brown, Harris, Jacobson, & Trotti, 2014; Johnson et al., 2016), especially when analyzing urban schools (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). However, despite the importance of family-school partnerships, teacher preparation programs are limiting or omitting coursework that builds skillsets for engaging in family-school relationships (Brown et al., 2014; Collier, Keefe, & Hirrel, 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Furthermore, questions exist as to whether or not middle-class teachers can engage in partnerships with families from poor urban environments (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). The problem is that while a significant number of quantitative research studies exist on parental involvement, and some qualitative research has studied the perceptions of teachers on parental involvement, the gap is the lack of qualitative understanding that exists with novice teachers and their experiences with parental involvement in elementary Title I settings in southern Virginia. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. For this study, parental involvement is generally defined as parents actively engaging in their child's education, which can be critical to academic development (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Young et al., 2013). The theory guiding this study was Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory (ELT). ELT is an adult learning theory featuring the essential role experience plays in learning and evolution of thought (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo, 2015). Knowledge is a transformational process continuously created and recreated (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). Without receiving prior experience in building family-school relationships in a low-income setting through teacher preparation programs, novice teachers are unable to "gain maximum developmental benefits" (Matsuo, 2015, p. 444).

### **Significance of the Study**

Describing novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia provided different levels of significance to the study: empirical (observation/experiment), theoretical (based on theory), and practical (putting into practice). The empirical significance of this study had been observed in prior quantitative studies conducted with novice teachers exhibiting their lack of ability in developing family-school relationships (Brown et al., 2014; Kent & Giles, 2016; Mahmood, 2013; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Theoretically, this study aligns with Kolb's (2015) ELT, describing the importance of learning through experience, such as college preparation programs and other settings prior to teaching full time, to become better prepared to teach in Title I elementary schools. Practically, this study was significant in that districts, as well as colleges/universities, may use the findings

for self-reflective practices when examining new teacher mentor and/or teacher preparation programs.

The significance of this study was to provide novice teachers, as well as other educators and administrators, with various strategies to engage parents and assist all teachers in building family-school relationships. By analyzing the information specified within the literature review, school districts can develop programs to overcome the barriers hindering many families from becoming involved. Additionally, findings could provide Title I elementary schools qualitative data for evaluating mentorship programs for new teachers and ensuring professional development on the fostering of parent-teacher relationships, as well as creating a welcoming environment. Also, by hearing the voice of these participants, novice teachers can use the data to self-evaluate personal relationships and interactions they have had with parents. Reasons for lack of involvement can also be shared with current educators so that they may assist families with overcoming as many of the obstacles as possible. Additionally, the results of the study can identify professional development opportunities to individual school districts as a method for increasing family-school relationships among all faculty within Title I schools. Finally, this study can provide insight to colleges and universities with regard to the significance of teacher preparation programs. The different levels of significance are described in further detail below.

### **Empirical**

Teacher candidates have felt that teacher preparation programs could better assist candidates when communicating with families effectively (Brown et al., 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Collier et al., 2015). D'Haem and Griswold (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study with regards to the attitudes and practices of student teachers and practicing educators. Results suggested that while family-school partnerships are significant to both sets of individuals, strong

concerns exist with teacher candidates, those seeking employment after graduation, and their ability to work with parents. Graduating teacher candidates, many times, are lacking in skills, attitudes, and the confidence essential in building collaborative partnerships (Collier et al., 2015). Therefore, these individuals desire more knowledge in proper ways to address parents, assist parents with gaining comfort with teachers, and offer positive feedback about students (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). There is a great need in preparing teacher candidates in education students of low SES; however, few preparation programs are meeting this expectation (Cho, Convertino, & Khourey-Bowers, 2015).

### **Theoretical**

Parental involvement studies have stressed Epstein's (n.d.) Six Types of Parental Involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, facilitation at home, participation in decision making, and collaboration within the community to explain the various roles parents take in family-school relationships (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015; Park & Holloway, 2016; Patte, 2011). Teachers and parents perform a significant role in a child's education (Collier et al., 2015). Given the importance of parental-school relationships on student success, it is vital for teachers to develop and be trained in skills for establishing positive family and student relationships (Collier et al., 2015). Although Epstein's framework focuses on parental involvement (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; de Bruine et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015; Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Park & Holloway, 2013; Robbins & Searby, 2013; Ross, 2016; Zeichner et al., 2016), Kolb's (2015) ELT was used in an attempt to stress the importance of learning experiences of novice teachers and interactions with parents in a Title I elementary school, as well as any prior experiences these novice teachers might have had with parents in preparation programs.

Kolb's (2015) ELT provides a holistic model of the learning process, emphasizing the role that experience plays in the learning process (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo, 2015). ELT is comprised of four learning styles, also referred to as stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo, 2015). Concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are grouped into comprehending the experience, and reflective observation and active experimentation are grouped into transforming the experience (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). Some individuals transform learning experiences through the observations of others involved in the experience and reflecting on what occurs (Mainemelis et al., 2002), while others are more active in the learning process. Learners who are more active within the learning process, are motivated and actively take part in what is happening (Mainemelis et al., 2002).

Teacher preparation programs providing opportunities for teacher candidates to actively engage in parent interactions, although rare, have shown positive outcomes (Collier et al., 2015). Thus, these outcomes exhibit the significance of experiential learning through active learning (Mainemelis et al., 2002). Furthermore, teacher training programs, including teacher reflection, enhance candidate motivation to develop family-school relations (Collier et al., 2015). After analysis of different teacher preparation studies, it was suggested that these programs were deficient when it came to enabling teacher candidates and novice teachers to engage in family-school relationships (Brown et al., 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Collier et al., 2015; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Rather, novice teachers find themselves dealing with the concrete experience or parent interaction with no prior experience, having to reflect on the experience, logically analyze the interaction, and possibly experiment

with different methodologies the next time (Matsuo, 2015). It is beneficial for individuals to experience all four stages of learning, within ELT, to gain maximum development.

### **Practical**

Teacher candidates are receiving less than appropriate preparation in family-school relationships, especially when examining demographically diverse families (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016). Teachers continue to feel unprepared following field experiences for reasons such as, poor communication from administration and cooperating teachers, personality traits of teacher candidates leading to a disconnect and failure to create successful family partnership, and/or limited opportunities for parent interactions (de Bruïne et al., 2014). From a parent perspective, those who feel a strong confidence in one's own ability to meet the child's needs, and trust the school and its teachers, are more likely to become engaged in the child's education (Suizzo et al., 2016).

### **Research Questions**

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to investigate the phenomenon or shared experiences of novice teachers in dealing with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Guiding this study was Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory or ELT, which focuses on the idea that learning is a process whereby knowledge is continuously modified or transformed (Mainemelis et al., 2002). The emphasis of this study was to capture the voice of novice teachers, or those with five or less years teaching experience, encountering parental involvement. In addition, data was collected from novice teachers, who experienced the phenomenon to address subsequent central and sub-questions (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Questions were formulated from relevant literature to structure the investigation and are outlined below:



**Central Question:** How do novice teachers describe their experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia?

Building relationships are significant factors for fostering respect and trust with parents and students, as well as being the keys to professional success in an urban setting (Waddell, 2013). Research continues to stress the significance of family-school relationships and parental involvement, as the building blocks to increasing student academics (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Waddell, 2013; Young et al., 2013). Family-school relationships consist of trusting relationship among families, teachers, and students (Waddell, 2013). However, some teachers struggle with fostering a connection with students' families due to a lack of suitable training in developing these relationships (Elbaum et al., 2016; Hindin & Mueller, 2016). In addition, some programs are failing to adequately prepare teaching candidates to work with culturally diverse students (Zion & Sobel, 2014).

Despite federal policy makers' efforts with NCLB and ESSA, and educational institutions' efforts to increase parental involvement, not all parents are as willing to become engaged in a child's academic journey (Park & Holloway, 2013; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Ross, 2016; Young et al., 2013). Parents from low-income, ethnic, or racial minority groups are less likely to involve themselves in a variety of ways in a child's education than their counterparts (Demircan & Erden, 2015; O'Sullivan et al., 2014; Otter, 2014). Parental self-efficacy in low-income parents has also presented itself as a barrier when it comes to assisting students with homework (O'Sullivan et al., 2014; Otter, 2014). It is assumed that those parents with more experience and education can provide more practical assistance with schoolwork (Otter, 2014). Additionally, some parents have different attitudes or perceived goals towards education than others (Demircan & Erden, 2015).

**Sub-Question One:** What role do novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have when engaging parents in family-school relationships?

Teachers interacting with families and the surrounding school community have had a long history in contemporary American education (Zeichner et al., 2016). Furthermore, “contextual features of the school environment are associated with parents’ perceptions of how well schools engage them in their child’s education” (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014, p. 79). Schools can create events that provide opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and skills with community and parents, outlining school expectations, curriculum, and ways in which student academics can be supported (Zeichner et al., 2016). Creating events engages various stakeholders in the learning process, which can lead to further support of the school system.

Parents take into account attitudes, leadership, and communication practices of administrators when maintaining family-school relationship (Zeichner et al., 2016). According to Epstein and Salinas (2004), schools can implement activities involving six different types of involvement: parenting, volunteering, communicating, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. By creating activities assisting parents in becoming involved in the various capacities delineated, student and family needs can be met. Teachers are the most persuasive factor when it comes to parental involvement, which makes it necessary for teacher candidate programs to improve when providing skill-based knowledge on building family-school relationships (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Furthermore, teachers are native to the skills necessary to collaborate and resolve problems with all stakeholders to comprehend ranges of persuasion in education (Zion & Sobel, 2014). As a teacher learns to build relationships with parents and students, trust and respect will develop over time (Waddell, 2013).

**Sub-Question Two:** How do novice teachers in Title I elementary schools describe prior experiences in teacher-preparation programs when training for building family-school relationships?

Limited information exists on the perception teacher candidates have with regard to their preparation in collaborating with the community and families (D’Haem & Griswold, 2017). Student populations are becoming more and more economically, linguistically, and/or culturally diverse across the United States (Waddell, 2013), making classrooms of aspiring teachers quite the assortment. Family-school partnerships continue to be stressed to better student outcomes. Many novice teachers have expressed a need for improvement with preparation programs and building family-school relationships (de Bruïne et al., 2014; D’Haem & Griswold, 2017). Field experiences are practices designed to engage teacher candidates with a diverse community of students in an authentic school setting, which are critical in preparing future educators (McMahan & Garza, 2017). Individuals entering education need strong skills in collaboration, democratic leadership, and the ability to develop partnership programs with family and community members (Epstein, 2005). Therefore, teacher candidates must have the opportunity to practice coursework to enrich content knowledge and skills acquired as a way to close the gap between concept and practice (McMahan & Garza, 2017).

**Sub-Question Three:** What do novice teachers perceive as academic challenges with students when observing a lack of home- and/or school-based parental involvement in Title I elementary schools?

Home-based involvement is when a parent assists with homework and building reading skills after school hours (Benner et al., 2016). Parents who take part in school events, either athletic or parent-teacher organizations, are involved at the school-based level. When parents are

involved prior to and during a child's elementary school years, a child's development is fostered along with levels of achievement (Johnson et al., 2015). The early years of development and education are critical for parental involvement (Johnson et al., 2015), in order for students to obtain maximum results from their education (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). African American and Latino parents tend to converse and read at a lower rate with their children, using more subordinate vocabulary than Caucasian parents do, resulting in decreased rates of school readiness (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). Unfortunately, parental involvement does not have a one-size-fits-all remedy (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parents and families have varying needs and backgrounds. Parents from lower SES backgrounds have lower educational aspirations for their children (Goodall, 2013), causing low student academic efficacy (Gonida & Cortina, 2014), detrimental effects on homework (Goodall, 2013; Otter, 2014), and lower student aspirations for the future (Goodall, 2013; Otter, 2014).

As children progress through their education, parent involvement tends to tailor off, especially when studies become more specialized and parents have a difficult time assisting with homework (Goodall, 2013; Pakter & Chen, 2013). Parents have expressed a lack of confidence when it comes to homework assistance, as instruction has evolved. Furthermore, parents with low levels of education often perceive themselves as not having the ability to assist, therefore decreasing levels of involvement (Otter, 2014). This makes it imperative to show these parents that they can assist their children in being successful in math, even if they are unable to provide direct support with homework (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). In addition, students from low-income backgrounds are at an increased risk of performing lower than their peers (Johnson et al., 2016). Thus, students having less academic support and supervision are 34% more likely to drop out of school than their peers (Ross, 2016).

**Sub-Question Four:** What successful academic and social experiences can novice teachers describe with students in Title I elementary schools when parents are home- and/or school-base involved?

A child's family environment is said to have the largest social influence, especially in the early years (Hampden-Thompson, Guzman, & Lippen, 2013). Student learning is optimal when parents and teachers work in unison to support the learning process (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Therefore, children show an increased interest in their learning when parents are more involved in academics (Brown et al., 2014). In addition, student self-esteem and motivation with learning increases, as well as achievement levels (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parents who are engaged in the learning process increase the chances of their learner becoming competent and autonomous learners (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Young et al., 2013). Parental involvement during early childhood stages is especially significant as children develop intermediate skills and adapt to a new environment, taking on the role of a learner (Lau, 2016).

Home-based involvement in the form of reading activities has shown increased reading achievement for African American, Latino, and Caucasian students (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). Reading at home is the key to successful literacy (Crosby et al., 2015); as parental involvement increases, so do students' positive feelings towards literacy (McDowall & Schaugency, 2017). Therefore, a child's advancement in literacy is greatly impacted by parent involvement in the child's early learning (Crosby et al., 2015). When parents take on the role of motivator, they influence student achievement in not only reading but also mathematics (O'Sullivan et al., 2014) and students triumph in standardized tests (Evans & Radina, 2014). Parental involvement and encouragement to enroll in eighth grade algebra has played a role in future college enrollment (Bui & Rush, 2016). However, not only is parental involvement

significant in specific subject areas, but it has also been linked to student success for overall academic achievement (Abenavoli et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş, et al., 2016; de Bruine et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum et al., 2016).

The significance or practicality of this study was two-fold. First, this study attempted to assist with persuading educational institutes to reevaluate new teacher programs to ensure coursework is including enough hands-on experience with family-school relationship building. Second, this study attempted to assist with the re-evaluation of new teacher programs in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, with regard to the preparation level of novice teachers with parental involvement. Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory (ELT) describes how learning takes place through life experience (Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo, 2015), and being that this study is transcendental phenomenological, its significance lies in capturing the true essence of novice teachers' experiences (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2015).

### **Definitions**

The terms and definitions outlined below are significant to the study, related to the topic, and supported by the literature, as well as the theoretical framework.

1. *Collaboration Skills* – A method of problem solving between teachers, students, community members, and families to assist with understanding all stakeholders influence in the educational system (Zion & Sobel, 2014).
2. *Experiential Learning Theory* – Theory explaining learning as a process, transformed or modified continuously through life experiences (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo 2015).

3. *Family-School Relationships* –Networking among schools, communities, and families in a collaborative manner to promote students’ academic, social, and emotional growth (Collier et al., 2015).
4. *Novice Teachers* –Teachers also referred to as beginning teachers (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). For this study, novice teachers were those teachers having five years or less teaching experience.
5. *Parent Involvement/Engagement* –When a parent is observed actively engaging in their child’s learning and education (Johnson et al., 2016). These behaviors are critical to a child’s academic development. Levels of parent involvement vary in activity; homework, daily conversations, meeting with teachers, or taking part in school meetings (Hemmerechts et al., 2017).
6. *Qualitative Research* –An approach to inquiry where data is collected in the natural setting of the participants and places being studied, both inductive and deductive, to create themes. The final presentation of data captures the voice of the participants, as well as a detailed interpretation of the problem and its contribution to existing literature (Creswell, 2007).
7. *Teacher Candidates* –Individuals who are experiencing or have had fieldwork experience and are seeking a job in the education profession (de Bruine et al., 2014).
8. *Title I* – A federal provisional program initiated under the ESEA of 1965 (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Title I provides additional funding to those school districts with 40 percent or greater of students identified as economically disadvantaged (Evans & Radina, 2014).

9. *Transcendental Phenomenology* - Type of qualitative research approach that occurs when the researcher identifies a common phenomenon or experience among several persons, while bracketing out one's own experiences (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Data is collected on that phenomenon, analyzed by reducing information to significant statements and evolving the statements into themes. From the themes, the researcher creates a textural, the what, and structural, the how, description of the experience, concluding with a composite description of the phenomenon.
10. *Field Experiences* –Experiences teacher candidates engage in prior to their first teaching job in an authentic school setting with a diverse school population, as a method of applying content knowledge learned in lecture-based classes (McMahan & Garza, 2017).

### **Summary**

Parental involvement/engagement has been suggested by a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies to lead to a range of positive student outcomes such as academic achievement (Abenavoli et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş et al., 2016; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum et al., 2016), lower dropout rates, and increased student engagement in school work (Park & Holloway, 2013). Despite the significance of parent involvement in a child's education, it has been shown to be inconsistent with some demographic and cultural groups (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). For example, children raised in low-income neighborhoods are at an increased risk of poor academic performance (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Johnson et al., 2016). Additionally, parental involvement is observed as inconsistent and trickling off as students



transition from elementary to secondary school (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

When analyzing parental involvement and fostering family-school relationships, the overall issue intensifies when teacher preparation programs in many cases are limiting or not preparing teacher candidates at all for their first teaching job (Brown et al., 2014; Collier et al., 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014), especially in low-income Title I settings. Despite various research studies suggesting the significance of family-school relationships, teachers continuously express feelings of being unqualified as they relate to these relationships (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Therefore, the gap exists in that no qualitative studies capture the voice of novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in southern Virginia.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents, in detail, the theoretical framework of Kolb's (2015) ELT, for which the study is based. Following an explanation of the theoretical framework, a thorough literature review building background into the study's significance is presented. This study was designed to understand the experiences of novice teachers with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Therefore, in setting the stage, the literature will (a) define parental involvement, (b) discuss the academic impact of parental involvement, (c) discuss the impact of family-school relationships, (d) discuss current obstacles within parental involvement, (e) discuss student and parent motivation, (f) discuss the lack of family-school relationships, (g) discuss academic obstacles, (h) discuss the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, and (i) discuss additional needs of teacher preparation programs. Chapter Two will conclude with a thorough summation and explanation of the literature gap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework on which this qualitative study was based is David Kolb's (1984) ELT, where learning is described as a process where knowledge is created through transformation of experience (Richlin, 2006). Furthermore, knowledge is fostered through grasping and transforming experience, which emphasizes the critical role experience plays in learning (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000; Matsuo, 2015). According to Kolb (2015), "The experiential learning theory starts with the premise that development occurs through the process of learning from experience viewed as transactions between individual characteristics and external circumstances – between personal knowledge and social knowledge" (Part III: Section 6: Adaption Consciousness & Development, para. 29).

Kolb's (2015) learning model attempts to explain how individuals learn, which includes gaining empowerment and trusting in their own experiences to gain mastery in learning. The model consists of four dialectal modes: two of which assist with grasping experience, concrete experience, and abstract conceptualization, and two assist with transforming experience, reflective observation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). These four dialectical modes fit into a four-stage learning cycle; one stage flowing into the next, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract observation, and active experimentation. Concrete experiences are required for reflective observations to take place (Kolb et al., 2000). Reflections, in turn, become integrated into abstract concepts from which new ideas are developed. Lastly, new ideas are applied through active experimentation, making it necessary for all four modes to be present during an experience for learning to occur (Murphy, 2007).

Concrete experience, the first dialectal mode, describes learners being involved in learning experiences and managing immediate human circumstances in a subjective way (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). These experiences provide learners with a context for discussing knowledge gained (Murphy, 2007). Reflective observation, the second mode, occurs once a concrete experience(s) has happened. Learners take the experience and view it from various perspectives (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002), explaining or reflecting on how they obtained knowledge (Murphy, 2007). From reflecting and observing, the learner moves on to abstract conceptualization, where the learner emphasizes thinking over learning (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002) by explaining or analyzing a specific subject (Murphy, 2007). The final mode in Kolb's (2015) ELT is active experimentation, or the application of knowledge (Mainemelis et al., 2002) into new environments (Murphy, 2007). While applying new knowledge to various situations, learners are influenced by the surrounding environment (Kolb,

2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). As learners gain knowledge through numerous experiences, they process through the four learning modes, and begin to critically analyze their learning into a larger context or real world application (Murphy, 2007).

Conflicts related to knowledge attainment are resolved “between concrete or abstract and between active or reflective in some patterned, characteristic ways” (Kolb et al., 2000, p. 228) called learning styles. Kolb (2015) defines these styles as diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (Mainemelis et al., 2002). Diverging learners are best with concrete situations and gathering information (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002) in an environment requiring brainstorming (Kolb et al., 2000). These individuals prefer to work in groups and listen with an open mind. Assimilated learners can deal with a wide range of information, leaving them less focused on others and more interested in ideas (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). Converging learners find a more practical use for ideas, increasing their ability to solve problems and make decisions based on finding solutions. These problem solvers prefer technology-based tasks and experimentation with new ideas and practical application (Kolb et al., 2000). Finally, learners who are accommodating, acquire knowledge through hands-on activities, and enjoy carrying out plans, as well as a challenge (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002). Accommodators prefer to collaborate to set and achieve goals, as well as complete fieldwork (Kolb et al., 2000). One learning mode, active experimentation or transformation of knowledge through expansion, incorporates a combination of two preferred learning styles: accommodating (strong imagination and awareness of meaning) and converging (problem solver and decision maker) (Kolb, 2015).

Transforming or processing experiences involves individuals observing others immersed within the experience and being able to reflect (Mainemelis et al., 2002). According to Kolb

(2015), educational institutions create conditions to make knowledge accessible for individual learners to develop skills. However, when analyzing teacher preparation programs and support provided to novice teachers, these programs are lacking in many cases (Collier et al., 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Specifically, programs are failing when it comes to offering teacher candidates with concrete experiences focused on parental involvement (de Bruïne et al., 2014, Collier et al., 2015; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). When examining Kolb's (2015) dialectal modes, teacher, and concrete experiences, teacher preparation programs are lacking; therefore, novice teachers have nothing to write or verbally reflect. With these things missing, there are no theories to create with the new knowledge at the abstract conceptualization stage for teacher candidates, which then leads to a lack of new knowledge being applied to an individual's first teaching job at the active experimentation stage. Prior experiences, provided by educational institutions and students, make learning meaningful to teachers, who are being denied in this case.

Without prior experience, teacher candidates may never have the opportunity to move beyond the reflection stage of experiential learning, fully engaging with families in a more traditional involvement model (Patte, 2011). Currently, many novice teachers are entering their first teaching job without any prior family-school relationship skill-building experience, as teacher preparation programs are omitting this in coursework (Collier et al., 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Epstein, 2013; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Teacher candidates enrolled in preparation programs are falling short in field experience with regard to parental involvement, and are denied the ability to use a learning process for transforming knowledge and modifying learning as the experience transpires (Kolb, 2015).

This transcendental phenomenological study will describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. In addition, this study will serve as a reflective tool for school districts in the creation of their new teacher programs and educational institutions' teacher preparation programs. Implications of the significance of Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory, as well as the importance of experiences, will be referenced.

### **Related Literature**

This specific section of the literature review consists of an analysis of significant areas supplementing the research. The current literature defines *parental involvement* and discusses its implications in different areas such as academic impact and student-parent motivation, as well as barriers within and federal policies on parental involvement. Additionally, the literature details teacher preparation programs and their effectiveness in preparing teacher candidates for engaging in family-school relationships.

#### **What is Parental Involvement?**

Parental involvement can be defined as those parental attitudes, behaviors, and/or activities occurring in and outside the school (Young et al., 2013) to support a child's academic and behavioral development (McDowall, Taumoepeau, & Schaughency, 2017; Young et al., 2013). Parental involvement also encompasses fostering a relationship between home and school (Lang et al., 2017). Involvement varies based on educational institutions, students, and/or families. Levels of involvement may consist of meeting with teachers, taking part in school meetings, assisting an individual's child with homework, or having daily conversations about school (Hemmerechts et al., 2017). Moreover, parent involvement may change over time and vary across student grade levels (McDowall et al., 2017). Families, schools, culture, and family-

school relationships all affect an adolescent's educational development throughout his/her schooling (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2013; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Parents play a critical role in a student's education from kindergarten through college (Family Engagement, 2015). In addition, parents are typically the stable source for students throughout their lives (Bui & Rush, 2016), advocating and intervening on behalf of their children to overcome obstacles, especially in education (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Therefore, parent involvement is significant, as it conveys the importance of maintaining high expectations for students and consistent communication with academics (Mahmood, 2013). Those parents who attend educational activities communicate to students the importance of accomplishment (Pemberton & Miller, 2015).

Involvement of parents in early childhood is invaluable, to ensure that students have advocates with regard to any experiences or required needs between home and school settings (Lang et al., 2017). Parental involvement at the high school level assists students with academic competencies and educational values, which contribute to student behavioral, emotional engagement, and successful transition into adulthood (Otter, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Wang & Sheikh-Khalil's (2014) study stressed the significance of involvement by stating "Parents who conveyed the importance and value of education and discussed future plans with their children motivated them to engage in their academic work behaviorally and emotionally" (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014, p. 620). All levels assist with a successful transition into adulthood. Furthermore, parental involvement builds an internal value of education among students while also aiding them in academic success (Brown et al., 2014).

**Academic impact of parental involvement.** Families and schooling are two of the most influential forces on students, for parents serve as a child's first teachers (Bofferding, Kastberg,

& Hoffman, 2016). Parental involvement leads to academic achievement with students (Abenavoli et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş et al., 2016; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum et al., 2016). Parental involvement is significant for students of all races and SES, making it critical for educational agencies to continuously attempt to engage parents in the academic success of students (Alexander et al., 2017). Students with increased levels of parent involvement perform better than those students with a lesser degree of involvement (Abel, 2014).

Involvement also assists with student psychosocial adjustment and scores on standardized tests (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014), as well as improving resilience of those considered at-risk (Abenavoli et al., 2015). Additionally, parents modeling reading behaviors and communicating academic expectations promote educational goals (Crosby et al., 2015; McWayne et al., 2016), and subject-specific partnerships improve academics (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Parental literacy activities are a critical factor for predicting academic success (Hemmerechts et al., 2017). However, the reading needs to be enjoyable and authentic. Early reading experiences are positively connected with subsequent reading skills (Sy et al., 2013). When parents become involved in their children's reading and academics, children develop positive feelings about literacy and increase their reading achievement (McDowall & Schaughency, 2017). The amount of time parents read to their children from kindergarten to first grade has a direct impact on reading skills from first to third grade.

Furthermore, in elementary school when parents are involved with homework and communicate regularly with teachers, there is a correlation with reading achievement (Johnson et al., 2016; McDowall & Schaughency, 2017). Time engaged in reading is significant for reading achievement (Crosby et al., 2015; Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015; Hindin & Mueller, 2016;



Young et al., 2013). Engagement in reading increases student vocabulary skills, improving instructional comprehension in other content areas such as math (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). Strong instruction, as well as socialization, are predictors of a child's reading development, which in turn predict future literacy achievement (Sy et al., 2013). Children's foundational mathematical knowledge can be a predictor of future developmental success (Sy et al., 2013). Parents, who act as motivators and overseers, influence academic achievement in math as well (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). Parental beliefs and expectations in math have projected increased outcomes in student elementary and middle math achievement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). In addition, strong family-school relationships have not only had an effect on increasing reading and math achievement, but also student attendance and positive behavior (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017).

Parents who engage in student learning more and more have the likelihood of increasing student competence and ability in becoming an autonomous learner, providing an additional sense of security and connectedness (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Young et al., 2013). Students are more academically engaged (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014), investing more time in their schoolwork (Brown et al., 2014), when parents are more involved (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014) and raising students' future aspirations and self-esteem (Otter, 2014). Additionally, parent participation in school functions is a positive predictor of high school completion and enrollment in postsecondary education (Ross, 2016). Students also pursue higher career options when they observe parents being more engaged (Brown et al., 2014). When mutual trust evolves among parents and teachers, there is an increased chance of a formal relationship or partnership (Mahmood, 2013). In working with low-income families and students, establishing a sense of trust becomes imperative (Family Engagement, 2015), and as this trust increases, students'

reading will progress (Pemberton & Miller, 2015). If trust diminishes or is never developed, commitment to a family-school relationship will never develop or be lost. Therefore, chances of student achievement are even more promising when families, communities, and schools work in unison (Patte, 2011).

**Family-school relationships.** Children's learning and well-being at home, as well as a constructive relationship among teachers and parents, helps contribute to a child's sense of security and trust (Mahmood, 2013). A constructive relationship consists of parents trusting that their questions and desires have been heard, leaving the parents feeling supported and in sync with the teacher (Lang et al., 2017). A family-school relationship should develop at the pre-school and/or kindergarten level to foster parental involvement (Pemberton & Miller, 2015). When this partnership is created among parents and teachers, increased learning is able to occur among students (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Communication is vital to this partnership or form of co-parenting, as one side values the input of the other side, working together to resolve an issue (Lang et al., 2017). Thus, making years prior to elementary school and the years students attend elementary school critical for parent involvement. This partnership opens the door for student development and achievement at increased rates (Johnson et al., 2016; Mahmood, 2013). Early years in education are significant, but parental involvement during students' high school years is imperative as well (Otter, 2014). Academic motivation, aspirations for the future, and self-esteem are increased for adolescents when parents participate in their education. Furthermore, dropout rates decrease. Thus, schools must take an initiative in fostering positive relationships with parents, as well as provide opportunities for families and teachers to learn from one another to ensure success (Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca, 2015).

Epstein (n.d.) developed a model depicting six types parental involvement: positive environment at home, communication between parent and child regarding schoolwork, parental involvement with school, learning engagement at home, decision-making focusing on student outcome, and a family-school relationship (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D’Haem & Griswold, 2017; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015; Hinder & Mueller, 2016; Park & Holloway, 2013; Robbins & Searby, 2013; Ross, 2016; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Watt, 2016; Zeichner et al., 2016). Epstein’s (n.d.) model is designed to assist schools with methods for involving parents in a variety of ways based on student needs and family agendas. These behaviors stress equality and active participation among families (D’Haem & Griswold, 2017), involving a wide-range of activities (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Parenting and learning engagement involves schools assisting parents with creating a home environment conducive to learning at all ages and grade levels, with full support from the school (Epstein, n.d.; Epstein & Salinas, 2004.). Parents need to become knowledgeable on how to create this setting and encourage students at home year after year with classwork and homework, which can be aided through parent educational courses or family support programs (Epstein, n.d.).

Communication between parents and students is important, as well as school-to-home with regard to school programs, student progress, and courses (Epstein, n.d.; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Regular communication of student progress with those students having individualized education plans (IEPs) is also imperative when building strong family-school relationships, especially when it comes time to inviting parents to problem-solving or goal-setting meetings (Elbaum et al., 2017).

Students benefit academically from multiple types of cultural and societal communication

(Hampden-Thompson et al., 2013). Increased rates of communication correlate with high levels of student literacy. According to Epstein (n.d.), open lines of communication should remain constant throughout the school year. Schools who involve parents in the decision making process allow them input on school policies (Epstein, n.d.), include individuals on school councils or improvement teams, and/or parent organizations (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). It is speculated that parents are more likely to be involved in children's learning and education when a welcoming school environment or climate is established (McDowall & Schaugency, 2017). Epstein (n.d.) further described parents becoming more involved through volunteering at the schools and collaborating with the community, coordinating resources for students and the school from community groups and colleges (Epstein & Salinas, 2004), to assist in strengthening school programs (Epstein, n.d.).

Levels of support and involvement differ with each home environment, leaving some students in urban areas absent in math readiness and support (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). Parental involvement also differs amongst parents with regard to schoolwork and supervision with television and phone time. Building parental capacity for student learning at home requires a strong communication element between schools and families, resources, and sending announcement materials home (Abel, 2014). By providing these resources, this will enable parents to support student learning at home. Other varying factors determining the levels of involvement include how parents feel welcomed and opportunities given, parental self-efficacy, and how parents define their role in a child's education (Joseph et al., 2017). Some parents base their level of involvement on whether or not the school creates a welcoming environment. Schools must effectively and respectfully respond to families and their individual cultures to gain full support for learning (Robbins & Searby, 2013). Academic desires for an individual child, as

well as levels of communication and participation with the school, may differ from one child to the next. There are parents who find that it is their responsibility to become involved in a student's education (Park & Holloway, 2013), exhibiting the significance teachers and administrators play in parents' decision to become involved (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

Effective school communication can be observed through informational workshops in core areas providing families with support on how to assist their child (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Teachers who reach out to parents and encourage participation are more likely to motivate parents to become involved (Kent & Giles, 2016; Park & Holloway, 2013). Schools can provide families a question-and-answer session, assisting with how they can support their children (Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015). Some parents react more when receiving adequate information with regard to their child's academic performance (Sy et al., 2013). Middle school interdisciplinary teams are seen as open and approachable to parents, serving as resources for not only middle school students but parents as well (Robbins & Searby, 2013). Teachers of students with special needs tend to receive increased support from parents (Zeichner et al., 2016). Active involvement in school activities and education exhibit a greater impact on a child's well-being and school progress over anything else (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). When parents feel welcome at their child's school, the child will feel a sense of belonging and acknowledgement (Alexander et al., 2017). In addition, family-school relationships can be the vehicle or mechanism used to increase parental involvement (Lang et al., 2017). Therefore, schools should reach out and engage all families, not just those easy to involve, providing a multitude of activities (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

Frequent and routine communication regarding classroom activities and accomplishments aids in handling problem situations (D'Haem and Griswold, 2017; Robbins & Searby, 2013).

Many educators think of activities such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and/or curriculum nights as ways to increase involvement or family-school relationships (Zeichner et al., 2016). However, teachers have also been encouraged by administrators to set up websites, send newsletters, call, and/or email home, as methods by which to increase parental involvement (Pakter & Chen, 2013). Social events in the form of literacy workshops have also been created on behalf of reading teachers to inform parents about writing and phonics (Watt, 2016). School districts can implement certain programs for increasing involvement; however, unless parents hold certain beliefs regarding their child's learning, programs will have limits (Watt, 2016).

### **Current Obstacles with Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement studies have suggested various reasons why involvement differs based on demographics and/or income (Abel, 2014; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Johnson et al., 2016; O'Sullivan et al., 2014; Otter, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ross, 2016; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Young et al., 2013). Levels of parental involvement can be affected by many variables: the possible demands placed on parents' time when becoming involved in a child's education (Alexander et al., 2017; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Iver et al., 2015; Mahmood, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013; Suizzo et al., 2016), parents having other children in their care (Alexander et al., 2017; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Evans & Radina, 2014; Iver et al., 2015; Mahmood, 2013; Pemberton & Miller, 2015), lack of confidence when communicating with teachers (Suizzo et al., 2016), transportation (Iver et al., 2015), lack of understanding of what their role is (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Pakter & Chen, 2013), parents' educational level (Abel, 2014; Alexander et al., 2017; Lang et al., 2017), residential status (Abel, 2014), gender of parent(s), and whether or not parents feel as

though they can influence student academic outcomes (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Pakter & Chen, 2013).

Schools serving less affluent neighborhoods may face additional challenges with parental involvement (McDowall & Schaughency, 2017). Low levels of academic achievement have been linked to low levels of household income (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). In addition, academic delays, behavioral problems, and the inability to complete mental or executive function tasks are common among students in poverty (Abenavoli et al., 2015). Economic status has been linked to children's cognitive abilities and is considered a predictor of academic achievement (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). However, two-parent households may have greater resources and social support, which in turn allows for increased participation at the school during school hours (Lang et al., 2017; McDowall et al., 2017). Furthermore, educators working within an urban environment frequently discuss parental involvement as an obstacle, as well as engaging with parents from various cultures and backgrounds, speaking a variety of languages (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, & Volman, 2017). In the end, "Teachers entering the field today are inundated with societal issues that impact student success and systemic problems; whereas, the teachers are evaluated based upon students' success" (Taylor, Carthen, & Brown, 2014).

**Student and parent motivation.** Parental involvement becomes a challenge as students' needs change from elementary to secondary schooling (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Family Engagement, 2015; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013; Robbins & Searby, 2013; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Strategies that were once academically or socially effective with students have become ineffective (Park & Holloway, 2013). Although some parents might become less involved as their children age, others ensure homework is complete and educational expectations remain, as they take an active part in post-secondary planning (Family Engagement,

2015). Through supporting parental involvement, educators must be warned that increasing engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). It has also been observed that the parent-child relationships become less hierarchal and more bidirectional (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), leading to less parental involvement throughout higher education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Iver et al., 2015). In addition, adolescents develop a growing desire for autonomy and independence as years pass, causing possible changes in levels of involvement (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, as some adolescents transition to middle school, a decline in academic motivation has been observed, but with family and community involvement, this decline can be curved (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

Involvement of Latino parents has its own set of barriers, and their involvement is critical to the success of Latino students (Alexander et al., 2017). Latino parents are less likely than those of other ethnicities to participate in school activities due to the following: cultural differences, feeling as though the school presents an unwelcome environment (Johnson et al., 2016; Joseph et al., 2017), language differences or the lack of a bilingual faculty (Joseph et al., 2017; Suizzo et al., 2016), and concerns over undocumented family members being uncovered (Joseph et al., 2017). However, it cannot be said that these families do not want to engage in their child's education, but language barriers are perceived to be a big obstacle, especially with homework completion (Joseph et al., 2017). High academic performance and receiving a good education are consistently enforced through the establishment of high standards and expectations (Alexander et al., 2017). Other immigrant groups have reported feeling intimidated by faculty, causing low levels of involvement (McWayne et al., 2016).

Despite new teachers' efforts to foster active participation, some parents remain unresponsiveness or unwilling (Mahmood, 2013), when it comes to structured learning activities



(Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). These parents may lack time, resources, or information to facilitate greater involvement (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Students who come from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to have less-educated parents that are socially inept when it comes to advocating for their child's education (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). Levels of communication from adults within the lower SES bracket who have adolescents tend to be limited, making intervention on the schools' part important (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015). Parents belonging to the higher SES bracket hold greater educational expectations and assist with college planning (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Setting a welcoming school environment on the part of teachers affects levels of involvement (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Iver et al., 2015; Kent & Giles, 2016; Suizzo et al., 2016). Parents have expressed feeling unwelcome at some high schools due to lack of communication with regard to student courses and transition from middle to high school (Iver et al., 2015). About one in five parents (17%) expressed an absence in communication as it related to his/her child's transition (Iver et al., 2015). In analyzing transition, open communication with parents on the process can reduce possible student academic struggles during freshman year of high school. Administrators play an integral role in increasing involvement by setting a welcoming tone (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Iver et al., 2015; Young et al., 2013). Smaller schools tend to be more conducive for producing family-school relationships, as well as a safe and inviting school climate (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). As schools set the tone for their learning environment, expectations for success are also critical (Iver et al., 2015). A principal's overall demeanor or means of communication, as well as leadership practices, has played a significant role in family-school relationships (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014).

**Lack of family-school relationships.** Family-school relationships do not always depict what the name suggests. Rather, interactions with families are not always meaningful and collaborative in nature (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013) and vary based on grade level (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). Schools sometimes carry a misconception that parents of students from minority backgrounds are indifferent or disinterested in their child's education, and fail to engage these parents in school activities (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). Other times, family-school relationships fail to exist due to educators lacking in the ability to reach out to parents. (Mahmood, 2013). According to Mahmood (2013), "The parent-teacher partnership should be formed by a mutual aspiration to understand and consider diverse viewpoints through dialogue with each other" (p. 80). Educators and schools are assumed (Mahmood, 2013) to be at fault for the lack of collaboration among parents and teachers, but affecting a child's academics further is his/her economic background (Tramonte, Gauthier, & Willms, 2015). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds perform worse than more advantaged peers and are less likely to further their education (Otter, 2014).

Parents not knowing their role in a child's education or a clear definition of what parental involvement is has also been a problem (Young et al., 2013). Some parents lack clarity as to what their defining role is in a child's education. In addition, parent involvement becomes an issue when teachers only communicate with parents over negative issues, failing to recognize positives. This gap in communication can hinder an interrelationship. Furthermore, parents' own experiences in schooling, level of education (Hindin & Mueller, 2016), a lack of English proficiency (Johnson et al., 2016), and the unfamiliar content language and practice have also led to decreased engagement (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Parental involvement is never complete, as with each new school year a student's age and learning needs change, causing parents to have to

adapt (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). However, parents' perceptions of teachers' invitations weigh heavily on whether or not they will continue with a family-school communicative relationship (McDowall et al., 2017). Home-school communication increased when parents perceived a more welcoming invitation from the teacher for involvement and an overall positive parent perception of school climate (McDowall & Schaughency, 2017).

**Academic obstacles.** Historically, parents with decreased amounts of resources have been known to respond to academics differently than those with increased amounts of resources (Young et al., 2013). Students of low SES are presented with inequities in school resources (Alexander et al., 2017; Hampden-Thompson, 2013; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; O'Sullivan et al., 2014), educational opportunities, and academic success (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2013; O'Sullivan et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2014). In addition, those students from lower SES may find it difficult to study in overcrowded houses with limited study space or other contextual disruptions (Alexander et al., 2017). Many parents characterized as an ethnic minority and/or economically disadvantaged can find it difficult to be involved with schools; however, still have a strong aspiration to engage in their child's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Low-income ethnic and/or racial minority parents are less likely to participate in their child's schooling (Joseph et al., 2017; McWayne et al., 2016; Otter, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Watt, 2016). Working class parents tend to give many of the educational responsibilities to schools (Otter, 2014) and are less likely to visit the school, as well as promote honors classes (Suizzo et al., 2016). Students of lower SES also face the obstacle of limited or no internet access (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Young children's mathematics abilities are a function of the home and school (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). Racial and cultural inequalities in student academic outcomes

are an inescapable reality within U.S. schools (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). This results in children of lower SES entering primary school with lower levels of literacy than children of higher SES, whose parents have invested more time in skill building (Hemmerechts et al., 2017). It is estimated that illiteracy costs the United States \$300.8 billion a year or two-percent of the gross domestic product. African American and Latino students generally score lower than Caucasian students (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). Lower mathematics scores and measures of proficiency become evident in kindergarten. Poor African American families have limited educational involvement due to time constraints, location of the school, limited finances, and ineffective communication on the part of the school (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015). African American and Latino parents have been found to converse less with children than Caucasian parents, affecting levels of readiness for school instruction (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015).

Parental efficacy, whether or not parents feel strongly about their capabilities to assist their child, is a strong factor in parental involvement and linked to positive academic outcomes (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). As curriculum becomes more advanced, many parents feel incapable of assisting with homework (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; O'Sullivan et al., 2014), affecting parental efficacy. Confusion for some parents develops when mathematics becomes increasingly difficult as children age and is taught differently than when parents were in school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). African American and Latino students have been reported to be at a disadvantage in math proficiency at the start of kindergarten, with a similar pattern existing in reading (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). This makes it necessary to assist low-income parents in realizing they can help their child succeed in core areas such as math (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). Additional barriers leading to a lack of parental involvement are inadequate transportation, inflexible work schedule

(Evans & Radina, 2014; Pemberton & Miller, 2015), and/or cultural differences (Evans & Radina, 2014).

### **Federal Policies on Parental Involvement**

In order to decrease dropout rates, federal policymakers strongly agree that school leaders must improve family-school partnerships, as well as increase parental engagement (Ross, 2016). Students receiving less educational support are 34 percent more likely to drop out. Students who discuss academics and coursework with their parents are 44 percent more likely to enroll in postsecondary education opportunities immediately following high school. The first policy passed as an effort to educate children outside the home was the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, targeting American Indians (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). This act assisted in educating and assimilating American Indians in the American way by creating boarding schools to segregate them from settlers and other tribesmen (Family Engagement, 2015). Programs attempting to Americanize Mexican Americans followed this act in the late 1800s. In a change of pace, the Home Teacher Act of 1915 placed teachers in homes to instruct parents, mostly mothers, regarding the principles of American government and hygiene, as well as citizenship (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013).

Beginning in the 1960s, families were viewed as having a critical role in student outcomes (Family Engagement, 2015). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed providing young children and families of poverty federally funded childcare under provisions Head Start and Title I. ESEA was initiated after homes in low-income and minority areas were deemed ineffective for the well-being and education of young children (Family Engagement, 2015). Therefore, Head Start was constructed to break poverty's cycle by providing preschool to children from low-income households. In addition, Head Start provides

an all-inclusive program to meet health, social, psychological, and social needs for these children. With Head Start assisting families, Title I monies provide additional funding to school districts with high percentages of students deemed economically disadvantaged (Evans & Radina, 2014). A goal of Title I (2014) is to improve academic outcomes of students, while supporting low-income families “by bridging the gap between home and school” (p. 109). Further government legislation has involved increasing student achievement with increased parent presence in the schools. A report, *Nation at Risk*, was released in 1983 indicating that standardized test results were observed to be at an extreme low (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Department of Education Member Coleman blamed parents for the deficit in education.

In 2001 with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the government recognized that parents, as well as schools, are responsible for student achievement (Pakter & Chen, 2013). Under NCLB, the government suggested that educational institutions were not doing enough to engage parents from diverse backgrounds (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). NCLB mandated that those states seeking funding under Title I implement strategies involving parents based on the most up-to-date research to meet high standards (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Evans & Radina, 2014; Pakter & Chen, 2013; Pemberton & Miller, 2015; Ross, 2016; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). It is the belief of the federal government that strong school and family relationships assist in improving achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and overall student attitudes. Baquedano-Lopez et al. (2013) reinforced the federal government’s theory of engagement and achievement, “Core position of federal educational policy is that the engagement of parents and families in their children’s education has the transformative potential to affect students’ academic achievement beyond any other type of education reform” (p. 152). The significance of engagement on student achievement led some schools to develop multiple

possibilities for parents to become involved: parent lunches, talent shows, information sessions, and parent-teacher conferences (Pemberton & Miller, 2015). Former President Obama reauthorized, in 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA preserves a commitment to family-school relationships and increasing parent engagement (Ross, 2016).

The federal government has addressed equity for students with special needs by passing The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, which includes a number of requirements schools must follow for involving parents in the decision-making process with regard to their child (Elbaum et al., 2016). Students having an individualized education plan (IEP) must have a meeting at least once every three years, with many states holding yearly meetings (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). Schools are also required by law to invite, receive input, and gain approval from parents on any required accommodations for a student(s). In order to support parent involvement, especially of special needs students, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education included indicator eight under the 2012 State Performance Plan (Elbaum et al., 2017; Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). It requires states to collect and report yearly data on the means by which schools facilitate parental involvement to improve success of students with disabilities, as well as services offered. It can be concluded that parent involvement as it pertains to student achievement and dropout rate, continues to be of high interest to federal policymakers (Ross, 2016).

### **The Effectiveness of Teacher Preparation Programs**

Family-school relationships began during the Progressive Era with schools being viewed as social centers and education as a team effort (Zeichner et al., 2016). In the United States, standards for teacher preparation programs have established requirements guiding educators who are respectful and have the ability to develop strong relationships with families (Mahmood,

2013). The early years of teaching are the most critical, when discussing the quality of instruction and retention of teachers (Mahmood, 2013). Teaching in an urban setting is difficult, causing turnover rates for beginning teachers to be at elevated levels (Gaikhorst et al., 2017). It is critical for educators to become knowledgeable about strategies designed to successfully engage students' families in the learning process (Epstein, 2013). The lack of preparation for teacher candidates is often the reasoning behind why family involvement programs struggle in the area of organization from elementary to high school (Epstein, 2005). Preparing educators to work with and learn from students' families and communities, in which educators live in the most meaningful and respectful ways, is a mission of teacher education programs (Zeichner et al., 2016). University programs are the last point of direct assistance prior to entering the profession, and are a direct correlation of these programs (Bastian & Marks, 2017). However, upon entering the teaching profession, educators are faced with challenges they have not been adequately trained to handle (Kent & Giles, 2016), and are being placed at a disadvantage due to program disconnect with real school issues (Taylor et al., 2014).

Novice teachers consider engaging with parents the biggest obstacle and for which they have the least knowledge when entering the field of education (Brown et al., 2014; Mahmood, 2013). Communicating with parents can be very intimidating for novice teachers, especially if having to communicate negative news with regards to an individual's child (Taylor et al., 2014). Some educators have an inadequate understanding of how to build relationships with communities differing from their own, such as urban communities (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). While preparing future teachers in classroom management, differentiating instruction, and delivering instruction, educational institutions often fall short in the area of family-school partnerships (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Curriculum has also been reported as weak due to



limited teacher candidate contact with real families, students, and schools (Epstein, 2013). Rarely is an entire course dedicated to building relationships and effectively working with parents (Bofferding et al., 2016). Pre-service teachers need experience in building an understanding, as well as skills with parent interactions. Less than six percent of elementary and middle school preparation programs, through coursework, require teacher candidates to learn about families (Brown et al., 2014). Ninety-two percent of educational degree programs do not have family-friendly language within their mission statements (Epstein, 2005). Therefore, only 42% of teachers with fewer than five years of experience feel prepared to form a partnership with parents to support students' education. It is becoming significant for future educators to be competent in managing partnership activities with parents and other stakeholders (Epstein, 2005). A partnership or trusting relationship among parents, students and teachers, is vital for success in an urban school (Waddell, 2013). When lines of communication are open, as well as what support is offered at home (Commins, 2014), a clearer understanding of academic problems is made possible (Waddell, 2013).

Teacher candidates must have the opportunity to utilize coursework and content knowledge and enhance their pedagogy, as a way to close the gap between concept and theory (McMahan & Garza, 2017). Novice teachers have been known to have a tremendous ability to develop skills while on the job, which can be attributed to spending more time with active mentors (Bastian & Marks, 2017). Having a mentor within the same content area has exhibited increased levels of student achievement in mathematics and reading. Strong emotional support from a mentor has been a reason for some novice teachers to remain in their original locations despite challenges faced (Morettini, 2016). Effective teachers are both knowledgeable of content and pedagogy, and mentor teachers are instrumental in the development of individual pedagogy

and content knowledge (McMahan & Garza, 2017). Structured field experiences, those experiences vital in the preparation of teacher candidates as a method of enhancing knowledge, occur prior to student teaching in an authentic school setting with a diverse population of students. These experiences allow candidates to engross themselves in the culture and climate of individual schools (McMahan & Garza, 2017), instilling required skills and competencies equivalent to everyday teaching practices (Abel, 2014). Field experiences are seen as critical in assisting teacher candidates, as they are viewed as real world teaching (Burbank, Bates, & Gupta, 2016). Additionally, these experiences are viewed as enrichment in the candidates' encounter with students through their teaching and classroom experiences (Burbank et al., 2016). Most teacher education programs incorporate field experiences into degree completion plans, but not all. In order to successfully impact student achievement, educators need to comprehend the dynamics behind the profession (McMahan & Garza, 2017, p. 4).

Trusting that relationships within an urban school environment are critical, courses involving urban education and diversity are needed for teacher candidates (Waddell, 2013). Training can be imperative as novice teachers in urban areas have lower self-efficacy with regard to teaching than their counterparts in suburban areas (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2015). A successful and cohesive urban learning environment is created through the development of student relationships (Tricarico et al., 2015). These teachers must also insist students meet expectations set forth. Professional development on the part of school districts can assist novice teachers with building relationships, a significant key to success in an urban environment, as well as teacher retention (Tricarico et al., 2015). Unfortunately, many teacher education programs are falling short in preparing candidates to teach in an urban setting (Taylor et al., 2014).

Educators already working in the field of education, place a great emphasis on proper preparation of teacher candidates in working with culturally and socio-economically diverse families (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017), as teachers have students from highly diverse families (Abel, 2014; Epstein, 2013). Administrators, along with teachers and guidance counselors, require knowledge in working with diverse students and families, to ensure high standards of learning are maintained (Epstein, 2005, 2013). Ideally, schools should set a high priority on teachers becoming adept in being able to communicate with a variety of cultures to successfully engage with parents and increase involvement (Elbaum et al., 2017). Teachers should be knowledgeable about the environment where students grow and develop to assist with connecting culturally and instructionally (Zeichner et al., 2016). Schools that have an understanding of the experiences of African American, Latino, and Caucasian families makes available an increased comprehension of cultural differences and socialization of customs (Sonnenschein & Galindo, 2015). However, teacher preparation programs are not adequately training teacher candidates to work with students from diverse backgrounds and prepare instructionally (Kent & Giles, 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Training is also ineffective in the area of collaboration with parents, as well as realistic time demands on teachers and administrative support (Elbaum et al., 2017). Very few preparation programs assist teacher candidates with developing skills and knowledge required for establishing strong working relationships with parents. Therefore, universities and colleges must maximize openings for students by providing them opportunities in working with diverse families so they may be successful in the field (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Kent & Giles, 2016).

Mutual respect and trust create positive communication with all families in a positive way (Epstein, 2013). Without these relationship skills, conversations among teacher candidates

and parents from diverse backgrounds will not take place to address stereotyped beliefs of teacher candidates (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). Current educators and teacher candidates have commented on how most preparation courses delivering instruction through lecture and role-play deny opportunities for growth in relational building (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). With teachers having relational skill building, it will assist with fostering student, family, and community relations. Amendments to teacher education programs are imperative in a responsible way, since many changes are being made to only include social justice and culture as foundational principles (Zion & Sobel, 2014, p. 63), while these are critical areas in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. Through a comprehensive partnership program, educators are able to learn the significance of engaging all families, no matter their background, in a child's education (Epstein, 2013). This program would benefit teacher candidates covering such topics as achieving equity in outreach to all families and goal-shaping partnerships.

### **Teacher Preparation Program Needs**

Teacher preparation programs should include not only cultural education courses but also courses assisting teacher candidates with overcoming language barriers that exist between families and schools (Commins, 2014). Language barriers have become more common as student populations are more diverse economically, linguistically, and ethnically, causing aspiring teachers to be more likely to receive a culturally diverse classroom (Waddell, 2013; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Additionally, it is significant for these programs to supply opportunities for teacher candidates to develop positive views towards the preservation of a student's first language and the understanding of why it is significant (Commins, 2014). The more students use their primary language, the greater the possibility for linguistically diverse students to be successful. Teacher candidates are able to examine their own beliefs and practice collaboration

when teacher preparation programs offer positive experiences involving diverse families (Waddell, 2013). These experiences also provide the possibility to honor families' languages and cultural traditions, developing candidates' beliefs further (Commins, 2014). Thus, it is necessary for teacher preparation programs to emanate the value of bilingualism, multiculturalism, and intercultural competence. Teacher candidates need a guide on mutual respect to maintain family-school relationships, as well as a commitment to learning for the good of the community (Commins, 2014). Diversity refers not only to student language use in the classroom, but also to family and educational backgrounds, as well as income level (Taylor et al., 2014). Therefore, it is significant for field experiences in both high and low performing schools to improve anxiety and confidence levels of teacher candidates. Field experiences open the door for candidates to convert theoretical knowledge to practical or real-world application.

Teacher preparation programs have also been less than sufficient when developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions in teacher confidence and competence when engaging with families regarding their child's education (Patte, 2011). Teacher candidates have difficulty transforming the knowledge learned in the preparation programs to real-world teaching situations. Additionally, some teacher candidates have difficulty developing positive attitudes toward families, as well as embracing empowerment of parents. Teacher candidates face various obstacles in the area of family-school relationships as they pertain to pre-service programs such as small numbers of courses relating to family-school relationships (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017), mixed messages during field experiences from administration and teaching staff (de Bruïne et al., 2014), and limited opportunities to interact with parents during student teaching. Forty percent of junior and senior teacher candidates in a recent study reported a lack of learning when it came to interpersonal skills when working with parents and building family-school relationships

(D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). Therefore, programs should consider more ways to expose candidates to collaborative efforts such as parent events rather than just notes home (Tricarico et al., 2015). Teaching candidates would also benefit from cultural education courses assisting parents with the concept of involvement in their child's education and what it looks like (Johnson et al., 2016). Educators must comprehend the significance of family involvement (Zeichner et al., 2016), despite the lack of preparation with strategies for facilitating partnerships (Hindin & Mueller, 2016).

Graduates of teacher preparation programs many times are lacking in essential skills, knowledge, and confidence required for collaboratively building relationships with parents (Collier et al., 2015). Effective partnerships require educators to understand parents' role in the education of their children as well as the barriers they may face (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Furthermore, experiences during coursework supply opportunities to apply theory and analyze connections among theory and practice (Waddell, 2013), which affirms the significance of experiential learning and authentic learning experience when preparing teachers. Teacher candidates with experienced field work, prior to a teaching job, expressed an increased impact when immersed in family visits, panels, and events throughout coursework (Waddell, 2013); therefore, it is critically necessary to provide multiple field experience opportunities for candidates, and allow for reflection (Collier et al., 2015; de Bruine et al., 2014; Waddell, 2013). Family-school relationships are included in some field experiences but with lack of focus on barriers and power of relationships (Waddell, 2013). In the Bofferding et al. (2016) study, teacher candidates who were involved in a family math night, through field experience, reported feeling less nervous and more confident about working with families.

Additionally, more focus has been placed on primary level relationships rather than secondary, raising concerns among current educators and teacher candidates (de Bruïne et al., 2014). Field experiences are to be stimulating and real with parents, as well as prolonged and comprehensive (de Bruïne et al., 2014). Teacher candidates desire to learn how to deal with parents who are abrasive, defensive, in denial, and/or over-involved (D’Haem & Griswold, 2017; Mahmood, 2013). Some parents are found to be unreceptive when teachers communicate problems with regard to their children (Mahmood, 2013). Therefore, educators have requested more training in communication skills, as well as role playing and field experiences when it comes to meeting parents (de Bruïne et al., 2014).

School climate has been a significant influence on students, teachers, and families (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). An important aspect of school climate is relationships and a school’s respect for diversity and collaboration with the school community. Further attention is needed in teacher programs when preparing teacher candidates for family-school relationships (de Bruïne et al., 2014; D’Haem & Griswold, 2017). Reality shows that some parents are not interested in discussing their child’s education; however, preparation programs can provide teacher candidates with situations like these and more that might be encountered, as well as how to handle them (Mahmood, 2013). As Waddell (2013) explained, it is essential for teacher education programs to support candidates “with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to recognize and combat deficit thinking, build connections, and work collaboratively with students and families” (p. 277).

## Summary

Increased student achievement through parental involvement was consistent throughout research studies achievement (Abenavoli et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş et al., 2016; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum et al., 2016). Parental involvement and encouragement have been correlated to student perception of learning, motivation, and achievement (Iver et al., 2015). This becomes even more prominent as families and schools build a partnership with one another (Patte, 2011).

Schools, including teachers and administrators, play a part when it comes to engaging diverse families, by creating a welcoming environment and inviting school climate (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Iver et al., 2015; Kent & Giles, 2016; Young et al., 2013). Levels of involvement amongst parents have varying factors. Low-income, as well as ethnic and minority families, are not as likely to be engaged in a child's education (Otter, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Classrooms are becoming more and more diverse (Waddell, 2013; Zion & Sobel, 2014), and teacher preparation programs are ill equipping teacher candidates with methods for developing family-school partnerships for diverse families (de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Kent & Giles, 2016; Patte, 2011; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Therefore, it has become a necessity to properly prepare and support novice teachers (Gaikhorst et al., 2017).

Novice teachers have expressed how the task of engaging parents has been the biggest challenge with the least preparation (Brown et al., 2014). As the education profession continues to evolve, it has become evident that teacher preparation programs need to improve the guidance of candidates on how to develop family-school relationships through a commitment to learning and dispositions towards the community (Commins, 2014). Although parental involvement and



teacher preparation have been analyzed, voices of novice teachers and their interactions with parents in a Title I elementary setting have not, and so this study attempted to function as a reflective piece for new teacher mentor programs and college teacher preparation programs.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Therefore, this chapter provides a comprehensive description of the research design, specific details of the research site and participation selection process, review of the research questions, and detailed outline of research procedures. In addition, this chapter provides an in-depth description of data collection and analysis methods. Chapter Three will conclude with procedures on trustworthiness and ethical consideration.

### **Design**

A qualitative study was used in an attempt to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Qualitative studies attempt to gain an understanding of participants' experiences through rich descriptions and reflections (Cruz & Tantia, 2017; Jackson & Drummond, 2007). Qualitative research relies on in-depth responses of participants for an understanding of specific experiences (Jackson & Drummon, 2007). Furthermore, a qualitative study was most appropriate, as the researcher is viewed as an instrument interested in capturing the voices of participants (novice teachers), not statistics (Creswell, 2007).

When analyzing the specific types of qualitative research methodologies, a transcendental phenomenological approach was most appropriate for describing the meaning of parental involvement experiences of novice teachers, as well as providing a comprehensive picture of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenology is concerned with the wholeness of the experience in order to develop an all-inclusive picture of the phenomenon

(Moustakas, 1994), and make the essential characteristics of a phenomenon as free as possible from ethnic background (Dowling, 2007). The researcher made features of a phenomenon free of these ethnic or cultural influences and prejudgments through the process of epoche, or bracketing, a necessary step in phenomenology when refraining from previous judgments (Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As a method of bracketing out any pre-judgements towards participants, schools, and/or districts, journaling was used prior to all interviews (see Appendix A).

The researcher describes this phenomenon through textural and structural descriptions, as well as a comprehensive picture of the experience emanating from open-ended interviews conducted with participants (Dowling, 2007). Open-ended and focus group interviews were used as methods of data collection, also appropriate in transcendental phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), making this approach most appropriate. Therefore, in focusing on the description of experiences of novice teachers and parental involvement in a particular setting, rather than select facts, transcendental phenomenology was also most appropriate for this particular qualitative study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this research study.

**Central Question:** How do novice teachers describe their experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia?

**Sub-Question One:** What role do novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have when engaging parents in family-school relationships?

**Sub-Question Two:** How do novice teachers in Title I elementary schools describe prior experiences in teacher-preparation programs when training for building family-school relationships?

**Sub-Question Three:** What do elementary novice teachers perceive as academic challenges with students when describing a lack of parental involvement in Title I schools?

**Sub-Question Four:** What successful academic and social experiences can novice teachers describe with students in Title I elementary schools when parents are home- and/or school-base involved?

### **Setting**

Novice teachers from three different elementary schools within two separate school divisions in southern Virginia were investigated. Fifteen different elementary schools were considered to ensure a large enough data pool was available for data saturation to occur, and the same themes would be seen for data analysis purposes (Creswell, 2007). As of 2014, “the Southside region continued to have the highest percentage (20.3%) of individuals living below the poverty level” (Virginia.gov, 2017, para. 5) within the state of Virginia. FGH School District (pseudonym) was settled among an urban/rural area within southern Virginia, with both of its elementary schools being Title I (Virginia Department of Education, 2016a). As of the 2016 Virginia state report card, the district educated at least 2,042 students (Virginia Department of Education, 2016a). IJK School District was also located in an urban/rural area in southern Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2016b). Nine out of ten of district IJK elementary schools are Title I, and as of the 2016 Virginia state report card, IJK, educated an estimated 9,182 students (2016b). Central offices for each district are located 32.4 miles (Mapquest, 2017) apart. Further demographic data for each district can be found in Table 1 and 2. These specific

elementary schools were purposefully chosen for this study since they were identified as Title I by the Virginia Department of Education (2016c), and principals responded to the researcher's request. See Table 3 for specific demographic data on schools used in the study. Public schools enrolling at least 40% of students from low-income backgrounds are found eligible for Title I funds, which provide financial assistance to ensure students meet the standards for academic achievement (Virginia Department of Education, 2016c).

**Table 1***Specific Demographic Data on School District FGH*

<b>Division</b>	<b>Free &amp; Reduced Meals</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	<b>Students w/ Disabilities</b>	<b>English Learners</b>
FGH	89.5%	23.4% White 60.7% Black 10.2% Hispanic 0.3% Amer. Indian 1.2% Asian 4.2% 2 or more	61.8%	10.7%	7.7%

(Virginia Department of Education, 2016a)

**Table 2***Specific Demographic Data on School District IJK*

<b>Division</b>	<b>Free &amp; Reduced Meals</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	<b>Students w/ Disabilities</b>	<b>English Learners</b>
IJK	45.1%	69.9% White 23.1% Black 4.2% Hispanic 2.2% 2 or more Races .5% Asian	58.6%	12.4%	2.3%

(Virginia Department of Education, 2016b)

**Table 3***Demographic Data on Title I Elementary Schools*

<b>Division</b>	<b>FGH</b>	<b>IJK</b>	<b>IJK</b>
<b>School</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Membership</b>	32.1% White 56.4% Black 4.4% Hispanic 4.4% 2 or more Races .5% Amer.Ind. 2.1% Asian 427 Enrolled	74% White 12% Black 10% Hispanic 3.1% 2 or more Races 485 Enrolled	73.7% White 18.4% Black 2.9% Hispanic 4.4% 2 or more Races .3% Asian
<b>Free &amp; Reduced Meals</b>	98.9%	58%	62%
<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	52.5%	61.4%	60.8%
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	9.1%	11.1%	11.1%
<b>English Learners</b>	6.1%	7%	1.1%

(Virginia Department of Education, 2016a; Virginia Department of Education, 2016b)

**Participants**

Criterion sampling was utilized for this specific study to ensure all participants had experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Participant parameters included: a novice



teacher from district FGH or IJK and a current employee. There were no age parameters. These participants were specifically chosen because their experiences were believed to have something critical to add to the research study (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2015). According to FGH district website (2018) for the 2017-2018 school year, there were 17 possible novice teacher participants from its Title I elementary school used. According to building level principal Hawkins (personal communication, April 10, 2018) and building level principal Shelling (personal communication, May 29, 2018), in the two elementary schools used from School District IJK there were 10 possible elementary novice teacher participants for the 2017-2018 school year. See Tables 4 and 5 for further demographic information of those participants, who chose to participate

Maximum variation, which refers to selecting a wide variety of situations or events in order to get a difference in the area of interest (Schwandt, 2015), was employed in collecting data from participants. Before interviewing or any method of data collection commenced, a proposal detailing the study and its procedures was sent for approval to the Institutional Review Board (Creswell, 2007). Upon the board's consent to go forth with data collection, a formal letter was sent to each district's superintendent detailing the purpose of the study, requesting permission to contact building-level principals. Once superintendent permission was granted, an email was sent detailing the study to building administrators, requesting permission to speak with individual novice teachers. Building administrators granted permission and identified staff, whereby licensure information was verified on the Virginia Department of Education website by the researcher. In the end, 14 novice teachers participated in the study.

**Table 4***Demographics of Individual Interview Participants*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Years Taught</b>	<b>Grade Taught</b>	<b>Prior Professional Experience</b>
1. Ann	4	1st	Teaching Assistant
2. Becky	2	1st	Para-Professional
3. Charlotte	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	Para-Professional
4. Donna	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	4-H Extension Agent
5. Erin	3	4 <sup>th</sup>	None
6. Felicia	5	1 <sup>st</sup>	YMCA After School Worker/ Para-Professional
7. Gina	5	5 <sup>th</sup>	Substitute Teacher Title I
8. Heather	5	4 <sup>th</sup>	School-Age Coordinator Local Daycare
9. Isabelle	4	1 <sup>st</sup>	Para-Professional
10. Jacqueline	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	Para-Professional

**Table 5***Demographics of Focus Group Participants*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Years Taught</b>	<b>Grade Teaching</b>	<b>Prior Professional Experience</b>
1. Katie	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	N/A
2. Lora	1	K-2 Special Education	N/A
3. Mallory	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	N/A
4. Aaron	1	Kindergarten	N/A

**Procedures**

This study was conducted upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B). Fourteen novice teachers from three separate Title I elementary schools within two different districts in southern Virginia participated in the study. Fourteen novice teachers from Title I elementary schools were interviewed in order to obtain data saturation (Creswell, 2007). Data saturation was achieved when data was analyzed through three different forms of data collection: writing prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group, and the same themes and data within the themes reoccurred. However, in order to begin data collection, formal letters outlining the purpose of this study were sent to superintendents of each district for review, along with an explanation of how participant privacy would be maintained. Once superintendents approved the study, the researcher emailed the principals the same letter regarding the study and asked for approval to meet with novice teachers, those meeting specified criteria.

An email correspondence occurred with novice teachers and the researcher once administrative approval was obtained and a list of applicable teachers given. The researcher emailed out a letter explaining the study (see Appendix C), as well as the consent form (see Appendix D) for the possible participant to review. If there was no word after two days, the researcher followed up. Once the researcher and participants assembled, they reviewed the consent form (see Appendix D), as the researcher explained participant rights, which included the right to ask questions, back out of the study at any time, participant confidentiality, and signature of researcher and participant (Creswell, 2007). The consent form was collected prior to the commencement of the interview (Creswell, 2007). Once a signature was obtained on the consent form, an interview was conducted on neutral quiet grounds such as a coffee shop or classroom. The interviewer must create a comfortable environment where the participant will feel more conducive to reply with honesty (Moustakas, 1994).

Data collection occurred through individual open-ended and a focus group interview, as well as writing prompts. A minimum of ten individual interviews, one focus group, and fourteen writing prompts were scheduled and collected. Data collection continued until saturation occurred (Creswell, 2007). Data saturation was reached when enough information was provided to replicate the study and no new themes were drawn from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In other words, the participants were stating the same ideas with regards to teacher preparation programs and parental involvement. All data was recorded by a recording device with the permission of the interviewees that was able to be plugged into the USB on the researcher's computer for transcription download and saved electronically on a computer, which was password protected for safeguard of participants (Creswell, 2007).

### **The Researcher's Role**

As the human instrument or qualitative researcher in this study, I took the reader through a thick description of others' experiences (Patton, 2015); in this case novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. Therefore, it was essential to bracket my own personal experiences and preconceived notions about parental involvement through finding a quiet place to review my present thoughts to ensure new ideas, and understandings were created with the phenomenon through research and data analysis, regarding the current situation and/or person in order to set aside any biases (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, bracketing through journaling remained essential through this study as I worked within my district, though not at my school, to refrain from any preconceived notions I had of the area or teachers. Even though it was a school within my own district, I was not familiar with most of the teachers located in the building. Again, bracketing was a necessary first step in the research process so I could enter each interview with a clear mindset, differentiating, and explaining. Journaling was also necessary as field experiences and prior coursework in college could never have prepared me for my first full-time teaching job. The makeup of the student body and community culturally, economically, and socially did not compare to learned experiences, giving me a completely different outlook on life and the business of education.

I have had 16 years of educational experience, all of which have been at Title I settings, 14 at middle schools and two at an elementary school. In having taught in a Title I settings for 14 years, I have been able to develop an art for building family-school relationships. This is especially true teaching AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) for three years, for I looped with the students throughout their middle school career. AVID is a college and career-readiness program whose mission is to, "close the achievement gap by preparing all students for

college readiness and success in a global society” (AVID, 2017a). Despite the threat of subjectivisms, bracketing any prejudgments in the car in a notebook, prior to entering the building or before the interviewees arrived, were diffused, and journaling the interview experience occurred to avoid subjectivism (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data Collection**

This particular study was qualitative in nature, more specifically a transcendental phenomenological approach to capture the essence of novice teachers’ experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Therefore, the most used and appropriate instrument for data collection was the open-ended interview (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Data collection proceeded once approval was obtained from the Instructional Review Board and participants signed the consent form (see Appendix D). Other methods of data collection included writing prompts and focus group interviews (Creswell, 2007).

### **Interviews**

Interviews used open-ended questions aimed at evoking the individual’s comprehensive account of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Asking relevant open-ended questions (see Appendix E) invited thoughtful and detailed responses. Additionally, the interviews allowed for further probing questions. Ten individuals were interviewed, as data saturation was met (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were conducted using a specific recording device, downloaded onto a password protected computer, and saved (Creswell, 2007). However, questions were first piloted with a novice teacher at a middle school where the researcher was recently employed and peer reviewed by an individual who has her doctorate and conducted a qualitative study herself to ensure the questions were sound and contain desired information.

Open-Ended Interview Questions (see Appendix E)

1. What made you want to enter the field of education?

2. What is your current job placement? Please do not give the name of the school or city.
3. How many years have you been teaching?
4. With what other placements have you had experience?
5. What has been your most rewarding experience as a teacher thus far?
6. How did you define parental involvement prior to receiving your first full-time teaching job?
7. What do you remember about parental involvement through your own schooling experience?
8. How have those thoughts of parental involvement changed as you have worked in the field or if they have not changed, explain why?
9. Explain the level of preparation you felt leaving college and arriving at your first classroom, for not only a diverse set of students but also the necessity of building a partnership with their families.
10. Describe the specific positive interactions you have had with regard to parent involvement in these few years of teaching experience and the partnerships developed.
11. Describe any learning experiences received with regard to parental involvement in these few years of teaching experience in a Title I elementary school.
12. What academic and social success have you observed with students in your Title I elementary school with those parents who have been involved?
13. What has been your biggest obstacle related to parental involvement thus far being a novice teacher in a Title I elementary school? Why do you identify this as your biggest obstacle?

14. Describe specific challenges faced with parent involvement in a Title I elementary school.
15. Explain any strategies you have developed to increase parental involvement, as well as the success rate of those strategies in a Title I elementary school. From where did those ideas derive?
16. What experiences and/or strategies have better equipped you to develop the skills necessary in creating family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
17. What role have your administrators played to increase parental involvement in your Title I elementary school?
18. What role, if any, might administrators play in Title I elementary public school settings to better assist with encouraging parental involvement?
19. What role can administrators play in assisting novice teachers with creating partnerships with families in a Title I elementary school?
20. What role do you perceive Title I elementary schools play in facilitating a family-school relationship?
21. How might novice teachers become better prepared for Title I elementary schools?
22. How might novice teachers become better prepared when it comes to cultivating family-school relationships in Title I elementary schools?

Interview questions (see Appendix E) began with a set of general icebreaker questions, questions one through five, with regards to participants' general interest in the education field, current placement, years of experience, and most memorable moment. Interviews often begin with questions creating social conversations to create a trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994). Preparing teachers to work with diverse families and the surrounding community in proper ways



is one of the purposes of teacher preparation programs (Zeichner et al., 2016), and fostering parent and student partnerships by gaining trust is vital to a successful career in an urban school environment (Waddell, 2013). Therefore, teacher candidates and educators in the field are requesting more training when it comes to communicating with parents due to the lack of prior experiences, which gives significance to questions six through nine (de Bruïne et al., 2014).

When analyzing experiences in the field, questions 10-15, participants engaged in their current experiences with parental interactions and attempts at building partnerships. Research has shown that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to perform at slower rates than their more advantaged peers (Otter, 2014). Therefore, it is significant for teachers to have knowledge of the communities from which their students come (Zeichner et al., 2016), as well as learn how to build a partnership with families in an urban setting since many do not know how (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017) so that students can be successful.

Preparing for the future categorized the last set of questions, 16 through 22, attempting to answer what the two districts under study, or other districts, can do to better assist novice teachers in preparing for parental involvement in Title I settings. Teacher candidates, in some cases, are entering the profession with anxiety or a lack of confidence in developing parent relationships, and/or applying course knowledge to real world situations (Taylor et al., 2014). Parents and families want to feel as though they are welcome by not only teachers but also administrators (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Young et al., 2013). Administrators' attitudes and communication skills, as well as those of teachers, play a key role in fostering parent-school relationships in some cases (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Hindin & Mueller, 2016). A gap in communication can only create an obstacle in the fostering of family-school relationships (Young et al., 2013), especially if teacher candidates enter the field lacking the knowledge, skills

or competence to engage with families regarding their child's education (Patte, 2011). Novice teachers have expressed parental involvement as the most significant obstacle to overcome (Brown et al., 2014). Many graduates of teacher education programs lack knowledge, skills, and confidence in developing parental relationships (Collier et al., 2015).

### **Writing Prompt**

The writing prompt (see Appendix F), “an artifact of thinking, a record remains that can be revisited” (Pritchard, 1993, p. 30), provided participants an opportunity to describe experiences they had with parental involvement during preparation programs and preconceived notions of parental involvement to compare their thoughts on parental involvement once working full-time. The multi-part writing prompt (see Appendix F) given was to, describe any experiences with parental involvement in one's teacher preparation program, as well as one's thoughts on parental involvement before receiving the first teaching job and explain how these notions may have changed through one's teaching experience.

Responses assisted the researcher in comprehending experiences novice teachers have had thus far in Title I elementary schools, coupled with any background knowledge that has assisted novice teachers. Writing prompts were given to participants on a typed piece of paper with explicit instructions following the oral interview. Two days were given to complete the prompt, whereby submission was made through a Microsoft Word document as an email attachment to the researcher's email account. The email address was provided on the prompt. Once documents were received from participants, they were saved on the hard drive of the researcher's computer, which was password protected.

### **Focus Groups**

A focus group interview provided another form of data (see Appendix G) by utilizing a small group format, in an effort to gain a variety of perspectives (Patton, 2015). The focus group consisted of a heterogeneous group of four teachers who taught various grade levels. The focus group remained small, so teachers felt comfortable in sharing, and could provide more in-depth responses (Patton, 2015). The grade levels and schools depended on participant willingness. Focus group participants were a different set of teachers from those who were individually interviewed coming from a different elementary school entirely, which allowed for different experiences and backgrounds or maximum variation (Schwandt, 2015). The principal had allowed them to participate following standardized testing, following the other interviews that had been completed. A second focus group was not required, as data saturation was met following data analysis of individual interviews, the focus group interview, and writing prompts. Focus groups are an additional way to reach data saturation if a decent size pool of potential participants is available to draw from (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

By asking individuals from various grade levels to participate in the focus group, maximum variation sampling was achieved, providing a wide range of interests and experiences (Schwandt, 2015). Furthermore, focus group participants were able to hear one another's responses, agree or not, making additional comments beyond his or her own original stance with the goal being high-quality data in a social environment (Patton, 2015). Groups are able to provide possible information missed during individual open-ended interviews. Purposeful sampling, a qualitative method of sampling used when participants are believed to add an understanding to the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), were used for choosing focus group members. These individuals increased an understanding of the research problem and phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Schwandt, 2015).

The focus group interview took place at a central location, assisting with generation of data on the specific issues of parental involvement, teacher preparation programs, and school climate (Schwandt, 2015). The interview was recorded with the same recording device as individual interviews, with the recording uploaded on the researcher's computer to be transcribed, and transcriptions were saved on the hard drive of the researchers password locked computer.

#### Open-Ended Focus Group Questions (see Appendix G)

1. How many years of teaching experience do you bring to us?
2. What grade level do you currently teach?
3. What were your biggest motivation factors for entering the field of education?
4. Compare and contrast your preconceived notions of what parental involvement was during your teacher preparation program to what it is now that you are employed as a full-time educator in a Title I elementary school.
5. How have your experiences, both positive and negative, influenced how you develop family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
6. How do you perceive student social and academic experiences to be affected by family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
7. Based on your experiences as a novice teacher, what recommendations would you make for new teacher/mentor programs with regard to preparing novice teachers for cultivating family-school partnerships in Title I elementary schools?

Question one through three were general ice breakers (see Appendix G) to assist with getting a feel for participants and their desire for the success of the students, as well as the general makeup of the group. Teacher preparation programs are ill equipping teacher candidates

in field experiences with parents and communities (Collier et al., 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014). It has been reported that less than six percent of middle and elementary teacher preparation programs require teacher candidates to learn how to build family-school relationships as part of their coursework (Brown et al., 2014). Therefore, question four was an attempt to provide a sense of what prior preparation the participants have had and its effect on their sense of what parental involvement was compared to what was actually being experienced.

The last set of questions, numbers five through seven, stressed the significance of schools effectively responding to and building strong family-school relationships. Parental involvement varies among individual parents and is perceived differently by them (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). Teachers who reach out and attempt to build collaborative relationships with parents provide extra motivation to these parents (Park & Holloway, 2013). A trusting relationship among parents, teachers, and students is vital for success in schools, especially urban areas (Waddell, 2013). When lines of communication are open, support at home is made possible when academic problems occur.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected, individual and focus group interviews and writing prompts, in this transcendental phenomenological study were analyzed using steps outlined by Moustakas (1994). As a past middle school teacher and current assistant principal who has been educating students in urban Title I settings for 16 years, it was imperative to set aside personal experiences through the process of epoche, to ensure the focus was on the participants and their experiences during the study. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche is a process by which a researcher sets aside any predilections or prejudgments. Journaling (see Appendix H) was done to assist with

suspending any preconceived notions (Creswell, 2007), as well as the inclusion of *Role as a Researcher* to explain possible biases. Journaling (see Appendix H) was used prior to interviewing, especially since the researcher's district was used, as well as for reflection and analysis when coding and creating themed categories with data to assist with ethical and methodical concerns and issues (Schwandt, 2015).

Once the researcher left behind preconceptions, horizontalization was able to occur (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization required each statement, once transcribed, to be treated with equal value. Following horizontalization, transcribed statements were placed into initial groupings. Following this stage of data analysis, data began to be reduced. This reduction, also known as phenomenological reduction, was done through organizing the grouped information into themes, allowing information not essential to the research to be set aside.

Phenomenological reduction, through a textural description of each individual participant's account of the experience, provided the researcher an essential structure of the phenomenon being studied (Dowling, 2007). The textural description is also known as the "what" of the experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 79). In this study, the participants' "what" is lack of parental involvement. The researcher then progressed from the "what" of the research to the "how" of the research or the structural description (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In this particular the study, the "how" is the participants experiencing lack of parental involvement and in what ways are they working to overcome it.

Developing a structural description for each participant was created through the research process of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), through the process of imaginative variation the researcher is seeks to approach the phenomenon from different perspectives or roles. In this case, the researcher attempted to comprehend parental

involvement from the perception of the novice teacher, parents, administrators, students, post-secondary institutions, and central office staff. Furthermore, striving to answer the question, “how did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is” (1994, p. 98)? This also allowed the researcher to discover qualities of the phenomenon and whether a theme fit it (Dowling, 2007). Finally, through combining and synthesizing both textural and structural descriptions, a composite account of the significance and essence of novice teachers’ experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia was developed (Moustakas, 1994).

Data was reduced through phenomenological reduction, as themes were developed from the information provided creating textural structures (Moustakas, 1994). Then, information was developed into a structural description or the how of the experience. Finally, the information for each participant in the focus group was combined to create a comprehensive essence of the phenomenon being studied. Data retrieved from the focus group and open-ended interviews was stored on the hard drive of the researcher requiring a password (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation of data was utilized with the various forms of data: individual interviews, writing prompts, and a focus group interview. Triangulation involved locating themes within the various sources of data to assist with validity of findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Schwandt (2015), *trustworthiness* is defined as a standard for assessing quality and reliable qualitative research. Trustworthiness addresses the following areas in this transcendental phenomenological research study: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to assuring that the researcher has depicted the participants' views and responses accurately (Schwandt, 2015). Therefore, in guaranteeing credibility, member checking was used. Research participants reviewed personal transcriptions verifying the phenomenon was captured correctly (Harper & Cole, 2012). Harper and Cole (2012) describe it when "The participants either agree or disagree that the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences" (p. 2). Peer review was an additional method of trustworthiness to measure for credibility (Creswell, 2007). This process occurred between the researcher and peer, who graduated with her doctorate using a qualitative study, was chosen to assist in keeping the researcher honest. Peer review sessions were documented in the journal and occurred in two stages, the completion of Chapter Four and then Five.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

An audit trail was used to ensure dependability, which refers to whether the logical steps of the study can be traced (Schwandt, 2015). Throughout the progression of data collection and analysis, copious notes on Moustakas' step-by-step process as explained by Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) were taken. Data analysis steps were very specific, as they matched those of Moustakas (1994).

Schwandt (2015) explained confirmability as the linking of interpretations to data in readily visible ways. Epoche was employed for the researcher to remain objective to ensure confirmability had been established in the research (Creswell, 2007; Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability to carry the results from this study to other similar cases (Schwandt, 2015). Thus, transferability was met through the availability of achieving



thick, rich data or a thick description. This begins with recording circumstances, strategies, or motivations that describe a specific experience. The descriptive interpretation makes it thick. Rich data derived from the open-ended nature of the questions utilized in both individual and focus group questions. Responses to these types of questions require respondents to think and respond purposefully and thoughtfully, also allowing for more probing questions (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, triangulation provided for transferability of data. With triangulation of data, the researcher analyzed information for all sets of data to locate evidence of themes to increase validity (Creswell, 2007).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Moustakas (1994) discussed how ethical principles should guide researchers when conducting studies on human participants. Therefore, several ethical considerations were set in place to ensure participants were treated ethically and justly. First and foremost, data collection did not begin until IRB approval was met (see Appendix B). Second, consent was obtained from district superintendents (see Appendix H) and building-level principals (see Appendix H) before any informational meetings with teachers took place. After consent was given to enter the buildings by district and building-level administration, an email (see Appendix C) was sent out to novice teachers explaining the following: a detailed description of the study and a copy of the consent form (Creswell, 2007). Once possible participant correspondence was received, a meeting was scheduled at a neutral location where the novice teachers were given the ability to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any time, details of the study (Creswell, 2007), benefits and risks associated (Creswell, 2007; Khan, 2014), and another informed consent form (see Appendix D) if needed (Creswell, 2007). Individual and school district names were replaced with pseudonyms, as assigned by the researcher. Lastly, all data was stored on the

researcher's hard drive, which was password protected and will be destroyed in five years. This is the allotted time given according to Creswell (2007).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Therefore, this chapter provided a thorough explanation of transcendental phenomenology and justification for this study, as well as restating the research questions. The research sites, surrounding area, and reasoning and explanation of participant selection were also included. A comprehensive research procedure, as well as thorough explanations of data collection and analysis was outlined in detail within Chapter Three. The chapter concluded with specified techniques for achieving trustworthiness with the following: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In addition, lists of ethical considerations to include methods of participant confidentiality were outlined.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Chapter Four provides background knowledge of each participant interviewed. Data analysis, using Moustakas' (1994) overall methodology of data analysis, resulting in four data themes: prior professional experience, level of parental involvement, communication barriers, and college preparation. Eleven sub-themes were then identified: (a) general education work experience, (b) experiences with parent interaction, (c) negative interactions, (d) positive interactions, (e) personal experiences with parental involvement, (f) attempts to increase parental involvement by novice teachers, (g) role of title i elementary schools in increasing parental involvement, (h) parent-teacher communication, (i) teacher-parent communication, (j) more college preparation, and (k) more novice preparation needed. Themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail using data derived from participant interviews. Furthermore, the chapter uses participant narratives to answer the central research question and sub-questions, concluding with a summary of findings and chapter contents.

### **Participants**

The population used for this qualitative study were novice teachers, those with five or fewer years' teaching experience, from Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. In order to protect participant rights and confidentiality, pseudonyms were developed (Creswell, 2007) using general female and male names starting with "A" and moving through the alphabet. A demographic breakdown of individual and focus group participants interviewed can be found in Tables 3 and 4 in Chapter 3. Individual open-ended interview participant data and writing

prompts were pulled from novice teachers Ann through Jacqueline, who were employed at two different Title I elementary schools. Whereas focus group participants interviewed, who also completed writing prompts, consisted of four individuals, all novice teachers, from a third Title I elementary school: three females and one male, begin with participant Katie and end with Nathan, the only male.

### **Ann**

Ann was a fifth-year educator in a first grade Title I elementary classroom, inspired after seeing and helping her grandmother grade papers and set up her classroom year after year. Ann's preconceived notions of parental involvement prior to teaching circle around the idea that all parents were concerned with student progress, asking questions about school, and assisting with homework, stating, "that's what my parents did." She described her parents as not being *helicopter parents*, because they did not hover, but did ensure homework was done and had expectations for high grades. Throughout her five years of teaching, Ann's impressions of parental involvement changed as she realized that not all parents wanted to be involved as much as her own were. In fact, she has found it a challenge to contact parents when phone numbers change on a consistent basis for some, or when parents who are reached dismiss the issue and/or become defensive. Despite her obstacles, Ann has found success with parents. She provided one specific example by observing student growth with a father who became involved in his daughter's reading, allowing for intervention at school and working with her at home. According to Ann, a significant factor in this case and what can be in other cases is parental backing. She defined her most rewarding experience as seeing student growth over the course of a year, especially in reading levels.

### **Becky**

Becky, a second-year, first-grade teacher at a Title I Elementary School in southern Virginia, began her professional career as a social worker. However, she always held the passion and love for teaching, and so when given the opportunity to return to school for a Masters of Education, she seized the opportunity. Becky held preconceived notions that more parents would participate in their child's education, originating from her own parents being actively involved in hers. They had a presence in PTO and consistently communicated with Becky's teachers. Therefore, Becky's beliefs regarding the importance of parental involvement remained and coincided with what research said in that parental involvement had an impact on student success (Abenavoli et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2017; Benner et al., 2016; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Çağdaş et al., 2016; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Elbaum et al., 2016). However, her perception of parental involvement changed while working in a Title I elementary school changed to, "disappointment that there are some parents who really don't care and don't encourage their students."

Becky described consistent parent communication as her greatest obstacle, especially when a concern needs to be addressed and no one can be reached. However, she believed some parents are not as involved as they wish to be, because they do not fully comprehend the curriculum students are learning. Therefore, improved communication and support must occur between school and families. Seeing past obstacles and negative cases, Becky found success with a female student who became a high performer as her mother was extremely involved at the school and within the classroom, as well as encouraging her at home to be everything she could be. Becky thought parent-teacher relationships were important to the success of students. In addition, she found it rewarding to develop relationships and encourage students, as it will in turn leave a lasting impact.

**Charlotte**

Charlotte, a first-year fifth-grade teacher, was inspired by not only the less exciting teachers, but also the blockbuster ones to make a difference. In addition, she said, “after interning with kindergarten, I absolutely fell in love with it because I can mold a child into something that they want to be.” Charlotte was inspired further by observing student mastery of skills while working with individual or small groups of students and detecting the moment that students have an “aha moment.” Prior to teaching, Charlotte perceived parental involvement as parents coming to the school for PTO meetings and/or parent meetings. Charlotte’s mom worked within the same school; therefore, she had to “cross every T and dot every I.” As her first year of teaching progressed, thoughts of parental involvement did not change. She continued to view the most important person in a child’s life as the parent.

According to Charlotte, parents are the motivators and encouragers, and she reported an observable difference with those students whose parents are involved and those not. “They (the students) want to do their best for me but when they get home their parents not involved, so it kind of starts and stops right here when they enter the building, when they exit the building. It doesn’t continue at home, does that make sense?” Charlotte described some parents as obstacles themselves, when they feel as though their child does no wrong and become defensive. She described other parents as being receptive, which allowed for successful partnerships with the teacher, enabling goal setting and plan development. This arranged partnership can result in a successful learning environment for the student to succeed in.

**Donna**

Donna, a first-year, fifth-grade teacher, was one of those students who would come home and set up her bedroom to mock a classroom, drafting her brother as a student. Donna loved

playing school and always knew it was her destiny to work with children. Her undergraduate degree was in interdisciplinary studies, as she worked as a 4-H extension agent for five years. In this capacity, she taught in many different formats while working with parents and students. Donna had strong relationships with parents, and the parents were extremely involved. As a 4-H agent, she was responsible for taking students on overnight trips. Donna's parents had high expectations for her as a student growing up. Homework was to be complete each night, and her parents helped her study for tests.

As her first school year has come to a close, Donna's thoughts of parental involvement had not changed. She continued to maintain a transparent line of communication with parents, allowing for good relationship building. These opportunities built a strong rapport along with positive lines of communication which proved successful, specifically with one male student, who made continuous progress with his reading throughout the year and was projected to be on grade level by the end of the year. Cases of student success are what make teaching rewarding for her.

### **Erin**

After growing up with a teacher as a mom and strong teachers through her own schooling, Erin wanted to have the same influence on children as she just finished her fourth year as a third-grade teacher. Erin had the opportunity and privilege to work with elementary-aged students through high school coursework. As mentioned, Erin wanted to influence her own students, and observe their growth year after year. She views it as a rewarding experiencing, and demonstrated that desired influence. For some students, this growth can be attributed to the amount of parental involvement. "It is a clear difference when they have parents who are involved. They are normally the students that either succeed from the beginning or they either

are the ones that work really hard and have the motivation to succeed because they have parents that support them.” Erin’s parents were involved while she was going through school, especially at the elementary level. Many of her classmates’ parents were involved as well. “I knew most of the classmates’ parents were involved as well. I could recognize them just from as much as I’ve seen them in the building and in the classroom.” However, Erin’s notions of parental involvement shifted once she received her first full-time job. It “feels like parents don’t come by the school as much, they don’t help out as much as what I remember.” Although Erin experienced frustration with some parents not being concerned with student education, there have been positive interactions with others through email, phone, and in-person meetings. “There’s been parents that I actually became close to, that we have been able to continue to talk about the children even after they’ve left my grade.” Furthermore, Erin discussed the positive experience of having a few parent volunteers, and the tremendous amount of assistance they provided reiterating the significance of parent-teacher partnerships.

### **Felicia**

Growing up as a student with a learning disability, Felicia desired to become an educator herself to help those students who struggle as well. Felicia has taught for five years; two years in kindergarten and three years in first grade. Prior to teaching, she was a paraprofessional at a preschool for six years and an afterschool worker at a local YMCA for three years. While working as a paraprofessional and afterschool worker, Felicia was in regular contact with parents, especially with the high number of field trips. Consistent interaction with parents assisted her with building a communication skillset. Growing up, Felicia’s father was an administrator (one year as hers), and her mother worked in same the elementary school This lead them to be fully involved in Felicia’s education. Working in a Title I elementary school,



Felicia realized not all children have parents present like she did; however, Felicia described the significance of good parent communication and how it can make or break a teacher's year.

Felicia explained that positive communication benefits parent-school relationships, as parents approach her in public to speak with her and tell her how much their child misses being in her class. Additionally, those same students in Felicia's class whose parents are involved exhibited a lot of growth, both socially and academically. These students were academically strong throughout the year, participating in class and were socially mature with classmates. A big obstacle described by Felicia was parents with disconnected phone numbers, making it difficult to address a behavioral or academic concern. Beyond the obstacles, Felicia finds it rewarding when past students come back and tell her how well they are doing, "You told me I could do it and I did it."

### **Gina**

Gina was a novice teacher, who just finished her fifth year, teaching first and fifth grade. Gina entered the field of teaching with the hopes of helping those students who struggle to learn. Her preconceived notions of parental involvement consisted of parents being involved at home, assisting with homework and studying, but no school-based involvement (sporting events or parent nights). During her school-aged years, Gina did not feel that parents were as welcome at the schools. "I feel like the only time parents were invited to the school was for parent-teacher conferences, or if there was a problem the principal would call the parent in." Her parents never helped her with homework; instead they would just ask in general, "Did you have a good day today?" These feelings towards parental involvement have evolved with experience. "We want our parents to be in school all the time as much as possible. I feel like more parents come to things now," and "are invited to the school more often than they were when I was a child." Gina

has had parents who might not have completed a certain level in their education, but their child has felt safe with Gina. This level of safeness also developed out of Gina making regular communication with the parents. Therefore, the parents felt comfortable coming to her for assistance with the curriculum. “They might call me up and ask me how to do the homework, so they can help their children.”

### **Heather**

Heather just finished her fifth year of teaching. She has taught a variety of grades: second, third, fifth, and currently fourth. Prior to teaching full-time, she was a school-age coordinator at a local daycare learning center. Heather’s preconceived notions of parental involvement consisted of parents showing up for parent-teacher conferences, PTO events and/or meetings, and teachers calling parents. While growing up Heather said, “I remember my mom always getting volunteered to go on field trips, bringing snacks, and that’s about it.” Heather explained that her thoughts have evolved through her five years of teaching saying. “I see the importance of parent involvement. If there’s not that communication between teacher and parent, it’s going to be a struggle.” Communication was significant in relationship building; Heather found it most rewarding when she was able to build relationships with students, and “see them strive and make so much progress and see their confidence rise.” Therefore, positive interactions with parents included, establishing relationships with parents so you are able to communicate positive and negative news. “The partnerships developed basically go back to those relationships,” expressed Heather.

### **Isabelle**

Isabelle just finished her first year of teaching in a fourth-grade classroom. Isabelle entered into the field of education out of appreciation for the teachers she had. “School was hard

for me, and so I had teachers that really went above and beyond.” Therefore, Isabelle wanted to be just like those teachers for her students. She found it rewarding to observe students being successful and feeling proud of themselves. Isabelle’s mom would sit and assist her with homework, and her dad would participate when he could. Her picture of parental involvement was parents attending PTO meetings and helping with homework. “I do remember parents or guardians being more involved in school, and I think it was just people felt a little bit safer. Parents could come in and have lunches and come to parties.” Isabelle explained that her feelings of parental involvement have changed drastically, as she has met parents who are extremely involved and others who are not. “They can’t be contacted, and when they are it’s very quick and to the point.” There are other parents who want to control every situation. However, Isabelle has worked with some amazing parents over her first year who have thanked her for all her hard work. These parents come and thank her for all that she does, not realizing how much of a difference that makes to her. Isabelle described one specific parent who came up to her at the end of the year, hugging her and was crying, thanking her for changing that student’s life. “This was an eyeopener that I don’t just go in and teach every day.”

### **Jacqueline**

Jacqueline just finished her first year of teaching in the fourth grade. She was inspired seeing her own mother as a passionate educator growing up. My mother “had such a great experience, and so myself and my brother are teachers.” Observing the students accomplish their “aha” moment was the most rewarding for her as a teacher. Growing up, my mother was more home-based involved, assisting Jacqueline with homework and studying. Since she was a teacher herself, it was hard for her to attend various events at Jacqueline’s school. Coming into her full-time teaching job, Jacqueline’s pre-conceived notions of what parental involvement was

or should be haven't changed. Parents, "still come to back-to-school night and when the child is in trouble they'll come and you meet them." Despite expressing this, Jacqueline described how she only had three parents who were very involved. Through it all, Jacqueline expressed developing a friendship with one of her parents, whom she remains in contact with. "I've learned that parents are there to help you."

### **Katie**

Katie, and these individuals who follow: Lora, Mallory, and Nathan were participants of the focus group interview. Focus group interviews utilize a small format to gain differing perspectives (Patton, 2015). The group remained small to allow for more in-depth sharing of responses. In addition, a different school was used to allow for different perspectives and backgrounds to achieve maximum variation (Schwandt, 2015). Katie was a first-year special education teacher, who collaborated with fourth grade and learned that she would be collaborating with fifth-grade students for the 2018-2019 school year. Katie comes from a "family of educators," who saw the impact they made each day inspiring her to become one. "It was really inspiring to see, and it made me want to do it too." During her placements Katie agreed with her counterparts that she observed parental involvement occurring during various placements, but as far as her own experiences this year, it was lacking. With special education, "we have to have signatures on things, and we literally have to chase parents down sometimes." Katie felt as though family-school relationships were almost forced for special education teachers due to mandatory meetings and required paperwork. Katie prefers that "parents are involved all the time," and she thinks "it's important to just remember to just have as much communication with them as possible throughout the year for the sake of the child." Katie

expressed to novice teachers the importance of never being afraid to ask questions, especially when dealing with parents.

### **Lora**

Lora, also a first-year special education teacher, collaborated with kindergarten through second-grade students, and was drawn to teaching by her love of children. “I love trying to make a difference, and knowing that we play a key piece in their future is just really moving for me.” As for special education and parent involvement, Lora would like to observe more, “especially when it comes to taking the schoolwork home and just being involved in what their child is doing.” Lora described how while in college, parents are depicted as being extremely involved, but “that’s not the case once you’re actually in the classroom.”

Furthermore, Lora concurred with Katie that family-school relationships are almost forced at the special education level, but also believed that these relationships are based around required meetings, such as individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. Lora further expressed frustrations with ClassDojo and how parents “always go first to the gen ed.,” teacher. ClassDojo is a communication app for classroom teachers; connecting teachers, parents, and students (ClassDojo, 2018). Connections can be made through videos, photos, and messages, as they are shared via ClassDojo. If used properly, Dojo is a collaborative classroom experience bringing ideas to life in classes and home (2018). Despite these challenges, Lora and Katie relied on each other as first-year special education teachers, along with their mentors.

### **Mallory**

Mallory was a second-year, fifth-grade teacher motivated by making a difference in the lives of students. “We talk about it a lot when you’re in your courses in college, but I would say after teaching, you feel like you really have made a difference.” Mallory described the feeling

she got when students ran up, hugged her, and told her they loved her at the end of the year. Her notions of parental involvement have changed since she has come out of the preparation program. “You think it’s going to be great and all the parents are going to love you, and then I remember my first year of teaching the parental involvement was not there until report cards went home.” Mallory explained how the parents were not happy with what they saw, and then the parents wanted to have discussions. Mallory proceeded to communicate how impressionable elementary students are, going home and telling their parents different things and coming back to school talking about what their parents might say at home about the school, teacher, or home-life. Therefore, Mallory stressed the significance that teachers’ first impressions make on students and parents, especially at back to school.

### **Nathan**

Nathan was a first-year kindergarten teacher, also referred to as the “man teacher,” by the community and students. Nathan was the first male teacher in his building in several years. He became motivated to be an educator through the Teachers for Tomorrow course in high school. This course “prepared me to go into the classroom and see if that was what I really wanted to do in college.” As far as parental involvement and any preconceived notions, Nathan’s preparation coursework did not cover parental involvement in depth, but he described observing it in many of his placements. However, in reflecting on his own classroom, he communicated that there was “not as much as I would like to have seen”

Once Nathan was able to obtain parent contact information, he explained how he could make family-school relationships exist rather easily, but it took parents to make the communication effort for this to take place. “They want to be involved when they come to open house, and then three weeks in they’re not checking emails, they’re not checking messages, or

they're not answering the phone.” Despite these negative experiences, Nathan believes that he can make the connections and build family-school relationships.

## **Results**

Interview questions for this study were designed specifically to describe the novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. Kolb's (2015) ELT, the theoretical framework for this study, emphasizes the role experience plays in an adult's learning process. Prior to developing themes, the focus group and individual interviews were transcribed. Horizontalization was used with each individual and focus group transcription, treating each statement with equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Through analysis of data, reduction occurred, grouping information into themes. These same steps were followed with all transcriptions and writing prompts. The focus group interview, individual interviews, and all writing prompt data were triangulated and analyzed following Moustakas (1994) steps.

### **Theme Development**

Four fundamental themes and 11 sub-themes emerged through data analysis. The four fundamental themes include 1) prior professional experience, 2) level of parent involvement, 3) barriers to communication, and 4) college preparation. Sub-themes connected to corresponding themes are displayed in Table 6 below.

**Table 6***Themes & Sub-Themes of Novice Teachers & Parent Involvement*

<b>Theme Number</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>
<b>Theme 1</b>	Prior Professional Experience	<u>Sub-Theme 1: General</u> Education Work Experience  <u>Sub-Theme 2: Experiences</u> with Parent Interaction
<b>Theme 2</b>	Level of Parent Involvement	<u>Sub-Theme 1: Negative</u> Interactions  <u>Sub-Theme 2: Positive</u> Interactions  <u>Sub-Theme 3: Personal</u> Experiences with Parental Involvement  <u>Sub-Theme 4: Attempts to</u> Increase Parental Involvement by Novice Teachers  <u>Sub-Theme 5: Role of Title I</u> Elementary schools in Increasing Parental Involvement



<b>Theme 3</b>	Barriers to Communication	<u>Sub-Theme 1: Parent-Teacher Communication</u> <u>Sub-Theme 2: Teacher-Parent Communication</u>
<b>Theme 4</b>	College Preparation	<u>Sub-Theme 1: More College Preparation Needed</u> <u>Sub-Theme 2: More Novice Preparation Needed</u>

**Theme 1: Prior professional experience.** Paraprofessional, high school intern, YMCA afterschool worker, school-aged coordinator, or teaching assistant emerged under the Prior Professional Experience theme when participants were asked during individual interviews about prior experiences to full-time teaching. Most participants were hired with some experience other than student teaching, aside from Felicia who taught full-time while achieving her student teaching credits, and Erin who only had her student teaching experience. However, this theme is going to be broken down further into those individuals who had opportunities to work in the field of education, experiencing the Title I learning environment prior to teaching full-time, and those individuals who were given ample opportunities to engage with parents prior to working full-time. Therefore, the sub-themes aligned with this theme are general educational work experience and experiences with parent interaction.

***Sub-Theme 1: Experiences with parent interaction.*** “I worked and got my provisional license, and I was still working in the school system while I was getting my college credits,” explained Felicia. Despite not having a student-teaching experience, Felicia did work at a

YMCA for three years in the afterschool program, and for six years as a paraprofessional at a local preschool. “I did have in-depth experience with parent involvement while working at a YMCA. I had to interact with parents every day.” Felicia felt as though prior experience interacting with parents benefited her once she was hired on as a full-time classroom teacher. “I knew in a way that they were willing to help me instead of feeling like I was complaining about their child.” Charlotte, like Felicia, worked as a paraprofessional. Charlotte worked with special education students for three years before becoming a full-time teacher herself and seeing students’ “lightbulbs going off.” Isabelle was a special education paraprofessional for six months, working with students all day and interacting with parents on a regular basis.

Becky worked as a paraprofessional as well in Missouri for a few years, and while going through her master’s program she described her student teaching experience as extremely meaningful because of her mentor teacher. She “allowed me to be part of the back-to-school event, meet the parents, introduce myself, and then basically if there were any issues I contacted the parents.” Communicating with parents was part of Becky’s daily responsibilities. Additionally, Becky described parent conferences as being a team effort between her mentor and her. Parent conferences “was a greater benefit for me than actually anything in the program if that makes sense.” Becky being able to have this experience was extremely significant as explained by D’Haem and Griswold (2017), as various teacher candidates described having obstacles with family-school relationships due to numbers of coursework related with this topic. Heather worked as a school-age coordinator for a local daycare learning center, interacting with parents daily.

Ann’s student teaching was not as positive, as she depicted her communication with parents as being “limited to phone calls and parent volunteers for field trips. I did not have a lot

of contact with parents.” After student-teaching, Ann became a teaching assistant in a Title I school, which provided her many more experiences with parents. She was able to assist with hosting a variety of parental involvement events, such as muffins for mom, doughnuts for dad, and pumpkin carving. Ann stressed the significance of having prior experience in addition to student-teaching before becoming a full-time teacher to assist with success and preparation.

Being an assistant in a Title I school prepared me. I knew what I was getting into before I got into it. I always told everybody that I felt like you should have to be an assistant before you could be a teacher, because it prepared you so much more than even student teaching because you were there all year not just for half a year.

Jacqueline was also a teacher assistant for two years “in the second grade and a teaching assistant for pre-k.” Donna’s undergraduate degree is in interdisciplinary studies; however, she became a 4-H extension agent, allowing her to educate children but in a nontraditional setting. “If there were a lot of youth interested in cooking, we could start a cooking club, and there is a 4-H curriculum on cooking, or if there were a lot interested in volunteering, we would start a volunteering club.” Donna, as a 4-H agent taught a lot of hands-on curriculum, including subjects listed above and archery. Not only did her work with youth and lessons plans prepare her for what she is doing now, but also her continuous communication with parents. “I was taking their children with me away from them for a weekend or for a week long, and so we were very close.”

***Sub-Theme 2: General education work experience.*** In addition, candidates many times have limited opportunities to interact with parents (de Brüine et al., 2014). Gina substituted for a year within the public and Title I school setting before acquiring a full-time teaching job. Even though Gina did not have direct experience with parents, she was exposed to the Title I learning

environment and its varying demands. Erin's prior experiences were unique from the others in that they occurred while she was still in high school. Her junior year in high school she took a course, early childhood education, which enabled her to work in elementary classrooms for a block a day. "In senior year, I took teacher cadet and early childhood education II, and those two overlapped so it was eight weeks that time but I got to go for two blocks a day. I was there with the kids for a very long time." Additionally, Erin completed student teaching through her college program. "I had to do half of it in a lower grade, half of it in an upper grade." Other participants served as paraprofessionals in special education, second grade, or pre-k classrooms. Isabelle "was a paraprofessional for about six months for special education."

**Theme 2: Levels of parental involvement.** Becky, Ann, Erin, Heather, Isabelle, Lora, Mallory and Jacqueline each expressed concern when asked to define parental involvement, identify preconceived notions of involvement, and explain whether there have been any changes in those their perceptions since receiving their first full-time teaching job. Prior to teaching Erin, Ann, Heather, Mallory and Becky thought parents would desire to be involved in a child's education; however, after teaching a few years in a Title I elementary school, their preconceived notions were altered. Heather was under the impression that parental involvement was non-negotiable. "I believed that if the teacher called or written a note to the parents, that it was no questions asked." However, after gaining some teaching experience, Heather soon came to realize that some parents were bothered by all of the actions she took, while others did not want to be bothered at all.

I realized that you have some parents who will not show up to anything and will not help or contribute, but you also have those parents who do want to come and do want to help, but just can't due to reasons beyond their fixing.

Additionally, she described having parents, who were wonderful and would bend over backwards for her and the school. Parent involvement is “very important for the simple fact that if there’s not that communication between the teacher and parent, it’s going to be a struggle.”

***Sub-Theme 1: Negative interactions.*** According to Ann, over the last four years it appeared as though maintaining parental involvement in Title I schools has become more of a teacher responsibility than parent. Ann supported her statement by describing all her methods of communication: “Our district struggles to maintain parental contact, much less involvement. I have to work harder to keep in contact with parents by writing notes, calling parents, grandparents, aunts, etc., and I even use ClassDojo.” Jacqueline had parents come and meet her if students were in trouble, but “I only had maybe three parents the whole year that were very involved and wanted to help and volunteer.”

“When I started teaching my first year, I had no parents volunteer to come to the school for anything, not even to go on an out-of-town field trip. I alone took my students,” explained Erin in disbelief. She went on to describe how only five or six parents that year kept in contact with her regarding their child’s academics and/or behavior. Parent involvement has grown for Erin since her first year of teaching, which she attributes to experience. “I am growing as a teacher in letting parents be more involved. I am better now at reaching out to parents, building a relationship with them in my weekly classroom experiences, or how to handle parents who are not happy.” Ann described some of these parents who are not as involved with a harsher tone. “Some parents have a ‘I don’t care’ attitude when it comes to their kids. They don’t show up for meetings. They don’t push their kids at home and don’t make sure they have things that they need and some of it they could make sure they have those things.” Isabelle entered the education field under the belief parents and guardians would be more involved. “In elementary school it

felt like my mom or somebody was always there.” Isabelle has had parents who are involved and others not. “They can’t be contacted and when they are contacted, it’s very quick and to the point.”

Becky has always strongly believed that parents need to be involved, because of the link with parental involvement and student academic success. What has changed for Becky was her “disappointment that there are some parents who really don’t care and don’t encourage their students.” However, Becky considered other contributing factors to the lack of involvement such as, confusion with curriculum, single-parent households, long work hours, and low socio-economic status coupled with low education. Therefore, “I feel like we need to better communicate with parents what we’re teaching so that they can be a greater support.” Becky valued parent input, believing parents and educators should work as a team. Heather described parent involvement as “very important for the simple fact that if there’s not that communication between the teacher and parent, it’s going to be a struggle.”

Mallory went into teaching thinking it was going to be the most rewarding experience and “parents are going to love you, and then I remember my first year of teaching the parental involvement was not there.” Her parents did not become involved until receiving students’ first report cards and only wanted to discuss the negatives with her. Regarding parent involvement, “it’s crucial at the sped (special education) level. I would like more parent involvement,” expressed Lora. She felt this especially true when students need to bring schoolwork home and require support to complete it. She went on to explain how in preparation programs it is discussed how parental involvement is typically present with special needs students, but “I feel like that’s not the case once you’re actually in the classroom.”

*Sub-Theme 2: Positive interactions.* While Becky, Ann, Erin, Heather, Isabelle, Lora, Mallory and Jacqueline expressed concern or disappointment with levels of parental involvement in their classes, Felicia, Donna, Charlotte, and Gina described positive experiences with parents. Felicia at one time was frustrated with the lack of parental involvement in her classroom and at her school, but then switched schools and since has had parents knocking at her door continuously. “If you keep parents involved from the get-go, in making sure that their children are cared for, it’s going to go smooth.” Donna saw a lot of success with parents and chalked it up to transparent communication.

All of my students, with the exception of a few, their parents are very involved with their child and with their studies. They want to know what the homework is and what else can we do at home to help them in this area.

Donna believed that parental involvement is significant to a child’s academic success. In addition, her belief was if a child is not motivated at home to do well, then he/she will not be motivated at school. Therefore, home life can have a huge impact on academic life.

“I have some that are very – actually more involved than my parents were,” said Charlotte. She described many of her parents as being extremely involved, supportive, and staying on top of their child’s academic/behavioral needs. “They have made sure to stay in contact, come to any event that the school is having and even come eat lunch with their child.” Despite the easy going, there have been challenging parents Charlotte has had to work with. “For the parents that can be and are involved their child’s grade have improved since the beginning of the year.” Her thoughts on parental involvement have not changed since acquiring her first teaching job, just the experiences. She went on to express how the most important people in a child’s life aren’t the parents, as they are the motivators and encouragers. “If

that child knows their parent is involved and is checking up on them or knows that the teacher is in contact with their parent, then I feel like that child is going to do their best to do what they need to do.”

Gina took a slightly different approach to her thoughts on parental involvement, in saying she believed schools are a more welcoming environment for parents/families than when she was a child. Therefore, Gina’s preconceived notions of parents only being involved in schoolwork or home-based involvement were dismissed. “Today’s students, especially those in my school, a Title I school, long for someone to share their accomplishments with, as well as someone to help build them up when they are struggling.” Gina continued to express how unfortunately many times it is the teacher who the students share accomplishments with. However, she believed a majority of parents care about their child’s progress but are not aware of its importance. “I have noticed throughout my teaching experience, that the students who have the most involved parents always seem to perform better in and out of the classroom.” Nathan attempted to “develop a one-on-one relationship with each parent trying to get their contact information, being able to contact them whenever.” He had positive experiences with building family-school relationships, and a lot of the parents would contact him with any concerns.

***Sub-Theme 3: Personal experiences with parental involvement.*** Almost all participants had parents who were involved in their education. Involvement consisted of assistance with homework, studying for tests together, attending conferences, and attending PTO meetings. Gina described her parents as being uninvolved in her education, and only going as far to ask how her day was. Her parents’ actions led Gina to have preconceived notions that home and school were two separate entities. “My parents were never at the school for anything,” stated Gina. Her parents never assisted her with homework. “I feel like the only time parents were



invited to the school was for parent-teacher conferences.” Whereas, Gina’s preconceived notions have been overturned; she now views schools as wanting parents actively involved. “I call parents to talk them about how well their students are doing.” She believed when students felt safe with her and went home talking about her, a trust and feeling of safety with the parents was being built. Therefore, “if they need something or they need extra help, helping their student, because some of my students’ parents maybe didn’t complete fifth grade math or it was a lot different then,” the parent will contact her. Gina also described how other parents have praised her in front of the students, which assisted with management, relationships, and respect.

Some participants had more intense involvement than others as individual parents held teaching or administrative jobs within the district or even school they attended. “My dad was my administrator one year, and my mom worked at the same school with me for all of my elementary and intermediate school years, and so my parents were right there through it all,” laughed Felicia. Having her parents as a teacher or administrator showed Felicia the importance of strong communication between teachers and parents, and how it can make for a good or bad school year. Charlotte’s mother worked for the same elementary school she attended as well. Charlotte had to ensure her behavior and academics were at the top, otherwise she knew what would happen. Therefore, prior to her first teaching job, she thought every parent would be willing to participate in his/her child’s academics, not realizing every parent was not the same as hers.

Ann’s parents did not hover, but reviewed her homework to ensure it was complete. “If we didn’t make the grades that they expected us to make, then they stayed on us. We had consequences,” expressed Ann with regards to her parents. Unfortunately, “I learned that all parents are not the same as mine, that a lot of parents can’t or don’t want to be as involved in

their children's lives." Becky described her parents as always being involved in her education as well. "They knew my teachers very well because they were always coming to the school to offer help. Anytime we had programs, they were always there to support those." In addition, Becky remembered her parents being members of the PTO, attending assemblies, field trips, and parent-teacher conferences. They were always active in the school system. Heather's mom was always volunteering for field trips and brought snacks for her class. Erin's parents were also very involved in her schooling, especially at the elementary level. "My mother was a frequent face at my school building." Erin knew most of her classmates' parents because they were always around as well, in classrooms or the school building. Her friends' parents or mother could be seen eating lunch with students, volunteering to make copies, working with students, helping in the office, or chaperoning field trips. "As I began teaching, I imagined having those parents in my room and school."

Going from extreme involvement at school and home to limited involvement at school but not at home, was the case for Donna. According to Donna, her parents maybe spoke to her teachers a few times each year "when we went to meet the teacher, on parent conference day, and then maybe at the end of the year." However, they were very concerned with academics.

We sat down every night and did homework, and whenever I had a test, my mom and dad – I remember sitting at kitchen table doing spelling words with them because we had to do spelling tests, and I remember just they would read the word and I would spell it. So they were big time on studying and getting your homework done. We always did that every night.

Isabelle's dad was a truck driver, and so he found his time at home limited. "He didn't really understand a lot of what I was doing in school, but he always made sure if he didn't know he

could find somebody that he could help me.” However, Isabelle’s mom sat with her nightly to assist with homework. Jacqueline’s mother helped her with homework as well but was limited at the school-level due to being an educator herself.

***Sub-Theme 4: Attempts to increase parental involvement by novice teachers.***

Individual interview participants were asked about any strategies they had developed to increase parental involvement, as well as the success rate of those strategies and participants: Ann, Becky, Charlotte, Donna, Erin, Felicia, Mallory, and Nathan each discussed how they use ClassDojo. One particular Title I elementary school used ClassDojo as a part of their PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention Support) system to assist with behavioral management in the classrooms. Ann began ClassDojo before this school year after a friend showed it to her, and ClassDojo had contributed to improved class management for her, as well as alleviating uncomfortable phone calls to parents. “I don’t have to call, and so I just message them on there. . . A friend told me about it and I decided to try it, and now our whole school does it because we do it for PBIS. . . . I think the parents like that a lot more.” Ann believed the consistency of a school-wide system aids in the process being strong as well.

Felicia agreed with Ann when she described the convenience of ClassDojo. “The convenience of the chat feature, where you don’t have to call and wait for the teacher to call back – that has helped a lot,” expressed Felicia. Her mentor teacher opened her eyes to ClassDojo, which has assisted her a lot in the classroom. Charlotte explained how she used ClassDojo in conjunction with student planners,:

I get them to write their homework or if I need to write a note in their planner they have to get it signed. Well, then in order for the parents to sign, they have to read and they have to know exactly what it says. So I’ll tell my kids, ‘If you get your planners signed,

I'll get you a piece of candy or you'll get a Dojo point. If you don't get your planner signed, then you won't get a Dojo point and you won't get candy'.

Parents contacted Charlotte on Dojo about planners and other things going on in the classroom.

At the beginning of the year Donna did not have much luck with parents signing up for ClassDojo, but she kept sending the form home and updating the contact list until it became a success. "ClassDojo is the perfect platform to deliver messages as a whole, to keep parents involved on what is going on in the classroom day-to-day, and to message parents privately when need be." ClassDojo gave teachers the opportunity to post daily homework assignments for parents to view, keeping them up-to-date with classroom information. According to Donna,

The whole school uses it. I never heard of it until I started this job, but I like that parents have a way to message you. They don't have your personal phone number but they can still be connected to you on a moment's notice. I mean, I get a Class Dojo message and I get a notification straight to my phone. That is really helpful.

Charlotte reiterated in her interview the importance of staying in contact with parents by trying different means if one does not work: letter, email, or home visit. She even said she would go as far as sending a smoke signal to signify the importance of parent-teacher-school communication. "Like I said, letter home, whatever, just to keep on it."

Erin believes open house is an educator's first experience with the student and parent, and where a student creates that family-school relationship. Class Dojo was the behavioral management system used school-wide, as discussed by other participants. With Class Dojo, "parents know what to expect, . . . they know you are going to be on the other end. Having frequent contact with parents is a skill that I've slowly learned to pick up." She learned about ClassDojo through a Dojo mentor at the school. Erin reiterated how keeping in contact with

parents is a way of building that relationship. “If you’re not in contact with the parents, they’re not going to contact you most of the time.” She posted pictures and/or stories about what was going on in the classroom, allowing parents to comment on what they saw.

I took a picture of the kids the other day in gym playing with the parachute to post because that was always the best day in gym, and I put that on there for the parents They will comment back and say, ‘Oh yeah, that was the best day.’

If more administrators held conversations with parents/guardians in Title I elementary schools, but not necessarily in her school, Erin felt as though parental involvement might increase.

Isabelle was concerned about availability and stated,

My biggest thing was just to always try to be available. I wanted my parents to know that no matter when they needed me, whether they needed me, whether they needed to come to the school after hours, whether they needed to call me or they needed to text me.

Becky believed some of the ways to increase parental involvement may be to open more opportunities/options up for those parents who work different hours in order to encourage participation for all. She also made the key point, “Increasing parental involvement may take some creative thinking and sacrifice, but this is what you do when you love your students and want to see them succeed.”

Heather described a different method she used with her students other than ClassDojo, incentives. “If this many people come, the whole class will get this, or those of you who do come, you’ll get chips the next day.” She explained how the students receiving something, tended to reinforce the idea of them reminding their parents about an event. “I also find if you feed them, they will come.” According to Gina,

(I have) found the best way to increase parental involvement is by fostering relationships with the children. Personally, if my child came home talking about his/her teacher every day and how much they liked them, how much the teacher listens to them, I would be dying to meet this person for myself.”

Gina also established that the best way to engage parents in their students’ education is inviting them to see projects, performances, provide incentives for students, and supply food. In addition, Gina reiterated the significance of using “these times constructively with parents... You should make sure you are being genuine . . . Once parents and children realize that you are investing your time into them, they will invest more of their time into getting to know you.” Mallory learned how to use ClassDojo from her mentoring teacher. Nathan used ClassDojo along with email correspondence with his parents. Jacqueline expressed how she could have concerted more effort into communicating with parents with a variety of other methods, “but whenever I was contacted by email or through ClassDojo, I always responded and followed through with reaching out to them.” ClassDojo was the only way participants were reaching out to parents maintaining that line of communication aside from what the school as a whole was doing.

***Sub-Theme 5: Role of Title I elementary schools in increasing parental involvement.***

“I think getting parents to come to the school is the biggest thing,” expressed Felicia. Erin explained,

administrators here want parental involvement, they want frequent contact with parents, and they encourage parents to come to eat lunch with the kids, to come to after-school, or whatever chances they have to come in, they encourage parents to play a part of it.

Ann's principal communicated to parents through the phone system Alert Now and newsletters, when family nights are going to occur, such as family book fair night, STEM night, a spring concert, and PBL nights. Isabelle's school had these same family nights, along with parent-teacher conference days. Isabelle believes that administrators play a part in increasing parental involvement by actions and attitudes. She felt as though both of her administrators were "very personable." Felicia's school attempted to create a family culture, build partnerships, and engage involvement with these same types of family nights. They love hearing the students sing. "A lot of times when we do have family nights, we feed them and that will get a lot of them here too." "My administrators have tried everything incentives, doing the call system, and sending letters home throughout the week," communicated Heather.

Furthermore, Gina felt as though if administrators offer incentives, such as door prizes or create programs where the parents have something to view that their child made (STEM or art), they will come back to the school. "They may provide a meal to have the families come to the school, and I feel like that's one of the biggest things. If students know that they're going to get free food, a treat, or something when they come back, they'll beg their parents to bring them back." Donna described schools creating engaging events, where families had to partake, "that will keep their participation up and keep their communication lines open." "School skate is a great event for teachers to go somewhere off grounds so that they can see parents and teachers and have a good time." Becky discussed inviting the parents to come in at the school level and ensuring they know they are appreciated. "Just thank them for their involvement."

Looking beyond their own districts, Erin believed other administrators "could talk with parents more." She felt it was important for the administrators, "just being a voice in a school that they hear." Administrators could also play as a moderator between parents and novice

teachers, “because a lot of times the parents don’t know what’s going on with the new teacher, and the new teacher doesn’t know how to handle the parents,” described Ann. Charlotte believed administrators are doing all they can to encourage parents to be involved. “You can only offer so much.” “There has to be . . . a point to where there’s nothing you’re going to do to make them come,” expressed Heather.

**Theme 3: Communication barriers.** Participants were asked what they foresee, as a novice teacher in a Title I elementary school, to be the biggest obstacle(s) related to parental involvement based on their experiences thus far. Participants expressed frustrations regarding back and forth communication between parents and themselves. Becky specifically expressed frustration with those parents who are not involved and do not stay in contact by stating, “parents who are not involved at all, no matter how many times I try to contact them.” She went on to explain how the parents do not communicate in planners either. Becky even had a child stand up in front of the class and yell, my mom said, “School sucks!” which “broke my heart because I know if he has that perception at home,” it will be a long road for him. “A teacher can’t do it all on her own. I think the parents and the teacher need to be a team.” An importance of two types of communication derived from this theme, breaking it down into two sub-themes, parent-teacher and teacher-parent communication.

**Sub-Theme 1: Parent-teacher communication.** Mallory explained her vivid dream of her first teaching job where parents and students would love her, only to walk into her first teaching job with the image quickly going away. She saw how some parents come to back-to-school night, and then they are nowhere to be seen the rest of the year. “No matter what you send home or how many times you tried to call, even if you try to do a home visit, they won’t participate,” expressed Gina. Gina went on to conclude that she felt as though there is no



remedy to the situation. Nathan reiterated these same feelings: “they want to be involved when they come to open house, and then three weeks in they’re not checking emails; they’re not checking messages; they’re not answering the phone.”

Felicia articulated the same frustration or obstacle as Mallory, Nathan, and Gina, in getting in contact with parents. Her concern lies with the number of times phone numbers change, leaving continuous non-working numbers. “The kid that you need to get in touch with mom or daddy or someone, the phone numbers don’t work, and then you have to talk to aunt or grandma. Most of the time, they don’t directly know what’s going on.” Felicia defined this as her biggest obstacle, because if an academic and/or behavioral issue arises and no one can be contacted, how can the issue be addressed or resolved? Isabelle communicated these same concerns: with numbers changing and no return emails. “I try to make it as easy as possible, and if it comes down to it you can call me personally.”

Continuing with the theme of communication barriers, when asked to describe obstacles faced with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools, Charlotte, Ann, Erin, Donna, and Felicia each explained difficulties with reaching parents/guardians. Felicia liked sending notes to parents but felt that there were times when a phone call was most appropriate. “I think sometimes there are some parents that—mental capacity may not be what it should, and sometimes if you try to explain something to them it’s not clicking with them.” Therefore, it is better to meet or speak with them on the phone. Donna also expressed how difficult it can be to get parents on the phone. “You call one phone number, then you call another phone number, and then you call a million phone numbers and no one answers.” She also mentioned how some parents might not be allowed on school grounds for select reasons. This was where ClassDojo was essential at her school for those parents who had internet access or internet on their phones.

“Some parents don’t want to call back, some parents, you can’t even get in touch with them. They’ll put down a number for their contact but it’s out of service, or they just don’t answer or their mailbox is full,” concluded Charlotte. Ann expressed the same ideas as many other participants when communicating how teachers do not know what number to call or parents do not regularly answer the phone. According to Ann,

A lot of them change their numbers constantly and you don’t know which number to call and when you do call, they don’t answer the phone, they don’t call you back . . . When you get a hold of them, it doesn’t seem like that big of a deal or they get really defensive sometimes,

As far as a Title I elementary school as a whole, Erin described her school as having issues with parental involvement, not only with academics but also extracurricular activities. According to Erin, “When we need volunteers for something, we have a lack of (parent participation.” The PTO meetings had mainly teachers attending, rather than parents. “There are very hands-off parents in this school.” Most participants viewed parent communication or lack thereof as being the leading challenge in parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. Becky drew further conclusions into why some parents are not involved, specifically looking at income and household situations of students.

Number one, both parents have to work or there a lot of single parents and that single parent is having to work. The parents tend to have less education, and so all of those things together kind of factor into they may not have time or knowledge to provide support to their student at home.

Katie described the significance of parental involvement in being a special education teacher, “Because we’re special education, and sometimes we – I mean, we have to have

signatures on things, and we literally have to chase parents down sometimes, and that's a little aggravating because, I mean, you want your parents to be more involved."

***Sub-Theme 2: Teacher-parent communication.*** While many of the participants expressed lack of parent communication as their own biggest obstacle, other participants expressed their biggest obstacle as their own lack of communication skills with parents. Ann described herself as a true introvert, who does not like calling people and gets quite nervous in meetings. In addition, she is not from southern Virginia, which forced her to learn a brand-new culture completely different from her upbringing. "I always say I had culture shock when I moved here." Ann explained the intimidation she felt from parents when making a phone call.

They get really defensive sometimes, when you're not trying to fuss at them. You're just telling them what their kid did, and they are really defensive about it . . . I don't want them to think I'm looking down at them. I don't want to sound hostile or anything like that . . . That's how it makes me feel when they react that way that I'm like picking on them or something.

Donna, on the other hand, voiced another kind of obstacle she faced with parents. Donna is concerned by those parents who really get disgruntled when their son/daughter gets a bad test grade:

I would say there are some parents who they only want to talk to you when something is wrong. They don't want to – well, I don't know if they don't want to. If their child gets a good test grade, that's great. But if they get a bad test grade, the whole world is going to end.

She described this as her biggest obstacle, because she always wants parents to be involved.

Charlotte's barrier in oral communication with parents also deals with grading. She has had to

figure out how to deal with “parents who feel that their kids do no wrong or they feel that because their kids made straight A’s last year in fourth grade should be making straight A’s in fifth grade.” “I have been blamed for things I didn’t think a teacher could be blamed for.” Eventually, as described by Charlotte, the parents saw her point of view, and the year ended with each party being on good terms.

**Theme 4: Preparation.** This section will focus on the participants’ responses regarding the preparation they received either at the collegiate or district level.

*Sub Theme1: College preparation.* Some participants had powerful student teaching experiences, which was significant in preparing them for the teaching profession. Becky had a mentor teacher who allowed her to be part of back-to-school night by meeting the parents and introducing herself. Becky was also able to contact parents if there were any issues, write notes home, and stay in communication. Being able to communicate with parents and practice building family-school relationships was significant skill-building for Becky.

According to Heather, she was well-prepared following college, with an amazing program behind her, one of the top 10 programs in the State of Virginia. She was placed in two grade levels in a local district and given excellent feedback through her program. “They put us in situations that we might see, might not see, and gave us different scenarios.” Therefore, Heather felt well-prepared but also because she returned to her hometown to teach. Jacqueline expressed how she left college and was hired on as a substitute and then a teaching assistant. “There wasn’t much parental involvement.” Isabelle, “felt prepared for the classroom management aspect of things, and the diverse piece.” but ill-prepared for classroom management and requested more insight on teaching the content. “We learn more about how to teach, rather than what to teach.”

Ann's university started sophomore classes with tutoring elementary students. Then, while in her junior year her class was in an elementary classroom once a week for internship, and then Ann's senior year the cohort resided in an elementary school. "I was in a classroom every single day, and so I felt pretty prepared." This gave Ann plenty of classroom experiences. However, she expressed how classroom management had to come with time. There was also no mention of parent interactions. Erin explained how she had internships throughout high school and college. For student teaching "I had to do half of it in a lower grade, half of it in an upper grade," which Erin thought important because an educator never knows where he/she will be placed.

***Sub-Theme 2: More college preparation needed.*** Novice teachers interviewed were asked in what ways they felt they could become better prepared for their first teaching experience. Nathan expressed,

I believe at my university we didn't really talk about parental involvement as much as I think we could have talked about it because, I mean, there's so much other stuff to learn. Definitely having a time to talk about what could happen, what might happen as far as parental involvement, and especially with Title I schools, having that parental involvement piece is a very crucial part to the school's success and to continue the Title I program.

Ann was in Title I elementary schools from sophomore to senior year in college. "I think that is what prepared me the most, and being an assistant in a Title I school." Therefore, Ann felt she had a sense of what she was getting into. In addition, she felt that cooperating teachers must give their student teachers opportunities to work with parents, such as conferences and/or making phone calls. "You've got to give them that experience or they're not going to learn, even

throughout the teacher program.” Ann was also asked, how might novice teachers become better prepared when it comes to cultivating family-school relationships in Title I elementary schools? Again, she voiced concern over college programs, and the “lack of education on how to cultivate the family-school relationships.” She communicated, “the biggest way to learn about a culture is just to be in it,” which exhibits the significance of experiences.

Donna’s response to how novice teachers can become better prepared for Title I elementary schools was very similar to Ann’s. Just like Ann, Donna believed experience was key, aligning with Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning theory. The ELT provided a framework exhibiting the significance experience plays on adult learning (Kolb, 2015). “When I’m in college, I need to see a Title I school. I need the highest of the high school and the lowest of the low.” Facing all possible circumstances is important when it came to proper preparation. Charlotte took this same viewpoint, “Go into the classroom as much as you can. I know student teaching is one thing, but I feel like it doesn’t matter. Get in the classroom as much as you can before you actually start teaching.”

Charlotte went on to express the significance of exploring various grades with student teaching and observations, because each grade was different in both curriculum and student behaviors. She explained that novice teachers become better prepared for cultivating family-school relationships by learning about different cultures and taking the time to learn about those students from various backgrounds. Students in her class had to do oral presentations on their culture at the beginning of the year, and she had two students from different cultures; “I allowed them to definitely give something special, something that was special and close to them, from their culture.” Charlotte wanted these students to feel appreciated and part of a classroom family, as well as build a family-school relationship.

Gina wasn't very prepared coming out of college for being in the classroom either. "I feel the only time you really learn what you're going to do in the classroom is when you're in the classroom, especially with the family involvement." Family involvement was never part of her coursework. Gina felt as though internships at Title I schools would be beneficial, becoming "more exposed to the students and the parents of Title I elementary schools because they're definitely different than the parents and the students of schools that are not Title I schools." Isabelle found the same to be true. "People don't always understand what it means for a school to be Title I." She believed college professors should describe educator roles, as well as "differences in schools, in districts, in states," so there is a clear understanding coming out of college.

"I don't recall having a class dealing with poverty. I think it might be a good idea to incorporate that into the studies that teachers have to go through, just like we have to take special education classes," explained Becky. During Becky's program heard mention of Title I, but never received a full explanation until receiving her first job at a Title I elementary school. Therefore, in her opinion, a class on student poverty should be added to teacher education curriculum program, because poverty has an immense impact.

***Sub-Theme 3: Novice preparation needed.*** Erin, Donna, Felicia, and Katie each conveyed similar critical points on how novice teachers can become better prepared for cultivating family-school relationships. Each communicated the importance of receiving support services from mentor programs, building-level administrators, and/or central office staff. Erin thought it might be helpful if novice teachers were given statement stems to assist with parent conversations and/or "some ideas you can do with your parents." Novice teachers "need somebody to instruct them on how to have relationships with their parents and families."

Additionally, Erin thought it would be helpful if there was a professional development during the mentor program, or at the collegiate level to speak with parents, how to involve them in weekly classroom experiences, and/or communication techniques for disgruntled parents. Donna also believed in getting assistance from someone such as a mentor, administrator, or whomever to discuss situations with and when to contact parents. “I’ve always been a big believer on know who to ask a question to, whether it be your mentor, principal, or whoever, just ask.” Katie also agreed:

I think parents can be very intimidating . . . They’re there for their child usually, and I think it’s important to just remember to just have as much communication with them as possible throughout the year for the sake of their child.

She went on to explain that whether it be a negative or positive conversation, do not be afraid to ask another teacher to be in on the conversation.

Furthermore, Felicia believed mock trainings with different types of situations might assist novice teachers in becoming more prepared for Title I elementary schools. As far as building novice teachers’ ability to cultivate family-school relationships, Felicia thought it would be beneficial if mentors sat with these teachers the first few weeks to make positive calls and any other calls needing to be made. “I mean that can be very, very stressful.” It was suggested by Mallory that new teachers have two mentors. “I feel like it’s great to have a seasoned teacher but maybe have also a novice teacher as well to kind of feed off of.” She went on to describe how her mentor was older and had kids giving her a different perspective, and a novice teacher having no kids and newer in the building, like her, provided various other viewpoints.



### Research Question Responses

The central research question sought to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. The question was applicable to all themes and sub-themes. Gina described parents as being more welcomed into the school environment than when she was in school. However, having all parents participate has become a large obstacle for many novice teachers. "The students that need their parents or want their parents to come to the school, or just to communicate with you period I think getting them to realize how important their involvement is, is probably the biggest obstacle." Despite these obstacles, Gina had an epiphany two years ago after hearing Manny Scott speak at the school districts annual welcome back convocation. Scott spoke about relationships, and how the biggest difference in his schooling was his teachers and the relationships they built with him. Gina expressed,

This is the first year that I started off the school year trying to make sure I created a relationship with every single student . . . I feel like they responded to everything I did this year better because they wanted to make me proud of them.

Gina went on to describe that once her students felt safe with her, the parents then felt safe. Some of those parents felt safe enough to call her up and ask for assistance with homework or studying. If these same parents come into the school they praise Gina in front of the class, which in turn has assisted with respect from other classmates. Additionally, elementary students are very impressionable to their parents' actions and words, telling teachers and administrators things that are said at home. "At the elementary level the kids listen too closely to what their parents say, and that can definitely affect their perspective on what's going on, like, 'Oh well, my mom said this,'" expressed Mallory.

“Oh, it’s beyond words. Academics. I mean, when you have that parent support with you and you two are working together, the academics of that child just skyrocket,” described Heather. A positive relationship is key, as students work hard for those they have relationships with, not wanting to disappoint (i.e. teacher and/or parent). However, Heather described some parents she has had as combative, “who just aren’t going to listen to you,” and the community as uninvolved in the school. “They feel like they don’t have to be, or some of them don’t have the money to come or the transportation to come, or some of them work late, or there’s just some parents who just don’t care.” Ann described much of the same disenchantment:

I thought all parents were concerned about how their children were doing at school and that if something happened, they would ask questions or push their kids at home, help them with homework, that kind of thing, because that’s what my parents did.

However, much to Ann’s dismay, parents change their numbers constantly, don’t call her back, and when she gets a hold of them, “it doesn’t seem like that big of a deal or they get really defensive about it.” Ann began the implementation of ClassDojo to better communicate with parents, where she can send daily messages to individual parents and they send messages back.

As a Title I elementary school, “The whole school has issues with parent involvement, I think with involvement with their child in the classroom, but also in extracurricular activities, like when we need volunteers, for something we have a lack of,” expressed Erin. Erin went on to describe the parents as very hands-off. She felt as though parents do not come by the school as much as they came by when she was in school. However, she realized as the year passed on “having frequent contact with parents is a skill that . . . helps . . . keep a relationship because if you’re not in contact with the parents, they’re not going to contact you most of the time.”

Erin did not have parent volunteers her first few years of teaching. However, throughout her next three years of teaching parental involvement tended to increase as Erin learned to communicate with parents from Title I schools, especially those who were upset. “I am better now at reaching out to parents, building a relationship with them from the beginning of the year, and staying in close contact with them. I still have parents I never met.”

Erin made it a point to articulate how she was never educated on proper methodologies for involving parents in classroom experiences and managing irate parents. “I believe that I could have had more parental involvement in my first few years of teaching if I had received some kind of professional development or class on parental involvement.” In the end, Isabelle learned regarding parents, “they’re all different, and all their situations are different . . . you have to learn what they’re going through and see it through their eyes so that you are more understanding.”

Felicia was frustrated with not being able to get in contact with parents as well in order to get them involved with their child’s education.

If a child is having an academic issue or behavior issue, you can’t address it if you can’t get in contact with anybody . . . I have a hard time getting in touch with parents, I like to send notes . . . but I feel like a phone call, having a conversation is better than sending a note.

The first month of school Felicia spends much time trying to make initial contacts, and assisting parents in understanding her classroom and expectations, as well as establishing ClassDojo. “I’ve seen a lot of growth in students that the parents are involved, and there’s a partnership with the school and the parent, either through the teacher or other school personnel.”

“My experiences with parental involvement have been both positive and negative,” explained Charlotte. She expressed how many of her parents were very involved, ensuring their children were on top of their studies, attending events, or eating lunch with their child. However, there were also a few who were difficult to stay in contact with. Charlotte expressed,

I have even had some parents become extremely upset with me because they feel that their child ‘does no wrong’ or that I’m the reason that they are not doing so well in class. I have been blamed for things I didn’t think a teacher could be blamed for.

Donna described a positive experience with parents as seeing how involved the parents actually are in a Title I school. She went on to say,

I want parents to feel free to contact me with any comments/questions/concerns that they have about their child and I want to be able to contact them about anything going on in the classroom. My school, I feel, does a great job at encouraging parent contact and parental involvement.

Title I schools can face several different challenges due to low-income neighborhoods, according to Becky, especially with both parents having to work or single-parent households. In addition, parent educational levels might lead to further challenges. However, “a teacher can’t do it all on her own. I think the parents and the teacher need to be a team.” Therefore, “I try to make that first contact a positive so that they don’t have negative feelings every time the phone rings.” For Becky and the rest of the novice teachers in this study, it was more of an issue of achieving involvement and maintaining contact with regards to parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. The parents they do get in contact with result mainly positive interactions, leading to positive academic impacts on the students.

The first sub-question this study attempted to answer was to find the role novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have in building family-school relationships. This question applied the themes, levels of parental involvement and communication barriers. Most participants described it being an obligation of individual Title I schools to have engaging family nights to receive more parents, as well as going above and beyond to reach parents. Donna believed if schools keep the families interested with events, such as STEM and project-based learning night where the parents/guardians can participate, they will want to attend and keep communication lines open. “School skate is a great event, as teachers go somewhere off grounds so that they can see parents and have a good time.” Charlotte also expressed the necessity for family nights or some type of event. “The school system’s got to do all they can do to keep these kids and these parents motivated in order to stay involved.”

Erin believed that schools must try to develop family nights/events in order to build family-school relationships. Schools “have to put forth some nights, some days where families are allowed to come to the schools to be part of the school because if it’s just left to the teacher, they’re not going to.” The school is “a safe environment for not only the child but for the family to come in and feel safe and to see how their child is doing,” exclaimed Isabelle. Erin made sure to stress that it should not be the teacher fostering relationships all the time. Felicia shared the same views as other participants about family nights, but also believed that some parents want to come to the events but have no means of getting there or have schedule conflicts. Therefore, some novice teachers who participated in this study believed Title I schools need to engage parents with family nights to build family-school relationships.

The second research sub-question this study attempted to describe prior experiences for novice teachers in Title I elementary schools in teacher preparation programs when building

family-school relationships. This question applies to themes prior professional experience, preparation, and sub-themes college preparation and more college preparation needed. Several of the participants had a variety of educational-related work experiences before teaching full-time, in addition to student-teaching, allowing them to become better prepared for teaching in a Title I elementary school in southern Virginia. Heather worked as school-age coordinator at a local day care, as well as finding her student teaching experience to be extremely meaningful. “They put us in situations that we might see, might not see, gave us different scenarios.” Felicia went the non-traditional route, obtaining her licensure while teaching. However, she gained in-depth parental involvement experiences while working as an after school teacher at a local YMCA. “I knew how to talk with parents in a way that they were willing to help me instead of feeling like I was complaining about their child.”

As a 4-H coordinator prior to teaching, Donna worked closely with parents daily. “I was taking their children with me away from them for a weekend or for a week-long trip I just wanted to be as transparent as possible.” She believed a child’s home life can greatly affect academics. Donna has since carried this philosophy of transparency, from her days as 4-H coordinator, over into her classroom. “I want parents to feel free to contact me with any comments/questions/concerns that they have about their child and I want to be able to contact them about anything going on in the classroom.”

“I always told everybody that I felt like you should have to be an assistant before you could be a teacher, because it prepared you so much more than even student teaching . . . You were there all year not just for half a year,” expressed Ann. Ann was able to work closely with parents, communicating with them daily and assisted with hosting Title I parent events.

Jacqueline worked as a teaching assistant for two years collaborating with second grade and pre-

k. “I was very blessed to work with a very great teacher as my mentor during my student teaching . . . At the beginning of the year, she allowed me to be part of the back-to-school event, meet the parents, introduce myself,” stated Becky. Becky learned that communication is key from her mentor, and provided specific examples:

At the beginning of the year on back to school night, I set out a volunteer sign-up, let them know opportunities they'll have to volunteer and get their contact information if they would like to volunteer. Something else that she did that I do, and again I got it from her, is having the parents to write a positive note to their child for the first day of school at Back to School Night.

Although these participants had strong prior experiences, others did not feel the same. Charlotte believed college taught her how to solve math problems and write, “but when I get here I’ve got to teach children how and I don’t feel like I was very well prepared . . . I had to learn more and dig deeper.” Through this first years’ experience, Charlotte has also learned “to approach every parent in a different way,” nothing a textbook would have taught her. Gina, who has taught for five years, communicated the same, “The only time you really learn what you’re going to do in the classroom is when you’re in the classroom, especially with the family involvement. That’s something we never talked about when I was in college.” Therefore, Gina believed novice teachers might be better prepared for Title I elementary schools by having exposure to the environment during their preparation programs.

“Leaving college, I felt like I knew how to run a classroom, but I don’t think I knew how to handle the families and the parent involvement,” stated Erin. She explained how the parent involvement piece came as time passed, “because I don’t think I was ever taught how you handle parents or parental involvement.” Teammates, mentors, and administration have helped her over

the years to learn more about parent interaction, whether positive or negative. “Every year, I gain a little more insight on how to reach out to parents.” Erin wishes she could have received professional development her first year or two on parental involvement. “This could have happened during college courses or during new teacher programs or mentor programs. If I had been shown ClassDojo or weekly newsletters, I could have begun those much earlier to reach my parents from my classes.”

The third research sub-question attempted to answer what academic challenges novice teachers observe in Title I elementary schools with those students lacking home- and school-based parental involvement. This question relates back to the themes communication barriers and levels of parental involvement, both of which relate to the academic challenges novice teachers observe with students in Title I elementary schools as it relates to parental involvement. Becky made a strong confirmation that teachers are not a one-person team, that they need parents to be part of the team to make a successful impact on a child’s academic career. Erin was also a firm believer in parents and teachers being a strong team.

Novice teachers, Erin and Charlotte, observed noticeable differences with those students whose parents/guardians were involved. “It is a clear difference when they have parents who are involved,” stated Erin. “Parents who can be and are involved, their child’s grades have improved since the beginning of the year,” explained Charlotte. She also stated how the most important people in a child’s life are his/her parents, and without parents it is hard for a child to feel motivated for an education. However, Charlotte made a significant point, in saying it is not that some parents do not want to be involved but life does not allow them to right now. Felicia’s levels of frustrations begin with initial point of contact. A teacher cannot address an academic or behavioral issue if he/she cannot contact a parent or guardian. Further academic challenges stem



not only with the students but also parents. “Sometimes there are some parents that – mental capacity may not be what it should.” Therefore, Felicia went on to example how these mental capacities could hinder them from supporting the student(s) at home. Erin described how difficult it is for teachers to reach some students when there is no parental support. However, Gina stated that in some cases she has seen where it is better when the parents are not involved. “I think a lot of times the school may be their safe place where their home may not be . . . You kind of just have to learn what students to have their parents involved and what students (should not)” Katie shared,

I’ve also seen it where the parents aren’t involved and the student still does well because they’ve seen, ‘Oh well, this is what’s going to happen if I don’t do well. So I want to make sure that I’m doing what I need to do.’

Academic challenges faced by novice teachers of those students with a lack of parental Involvements are differences in achievement, varying levels of parent contact, and varying levels of parental education.

The fourth research sub-question this study attempted to answer was to describe successful academic and social experiences novice teachers observed with students having home- and school-based parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. This question aligns with the theme levels of parental involvement. Each participant was in agreement that student achievement increases with regular levels of parental involvement, with some providing specific examples. Heather described an astonishing difference with those students who have parental support at home, and how student progress just “skyrockets.” She also explained how the students are not afraid of failure. Students are more willing to take risks with their learning when

they know a relationship exists, “when they know that you and the parent have a good relationship.”

In the same breath Erin made the statement, “normally the students that either succeed from the beginning . . . they . . . are the ones that work really hard and have the motivation to succeed, because they have parents that support them.” Additionally, Felicia believed that with strong parental involvement there is not only growth in student achievement but also school and family partnerships. “I actually had one child who went from not being able to pass a test, not even last year. . . and she’s been passing every test since November,” exclaimed Charlotte. Charlotte also explained how she met with the young lady’s parents, developed a plan, and as a team they met throughout the year monitoring the young ladies progress as a team. Additionally, parent volunteers are key assets to teachers. Becky had a young lady in her class become one of the highest achievers, which she attributes to the mother’s home and school-based involvement. The mother encouraged her to do everything she could to be a good student. Donna had a father reach out to her regarding his daughter’s struggles in math. “I was able to give him a whole list of things they could do at home . . . it made it easier to kind of reinforce her learning at home and school when we were both on the same page.” This scenario reinforces the significance of family-school relationships, with the comfort-level the father felt going to the teacher for assistance.

Ann also had a father approach her at lunch when his son was struggling with reading. She conferenced with him describing in detail his son’s work ethic and resources available at the school level. Due to the Dad’s support, the child’s reading level continued to grow, and he was on track to be reading at grade level by the end of the year. Parents, who are involved, when contacted, “about any kind of concern you have, they like to stay on top of it, and they want to

help their child. They want to help their child to succeed, just like you do,” explained Isabelle. Other participants had success with ClassDojo and its messaging feature when staying in contact with parents throughout the year and student progress. Successful academic and social experiences novice teachers experienced in Title I elementary schools are due to parental involvement and relationship building.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided short narratives on each individual interviewed, as well as focus group participants. Four themes: (a) prior professional experiences (b) levels of parental involvement (c) communication barriers and (d) preparation were drawn from data gathered and analyzed, and described, in addition to 11 sub-themes using participant quotes and narratives. Chapter Four concluded with the use of data gathered from participants in an attempt to answer the central research question by utilizing participant quotes and narratives: How do novice teachers describe their experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia? Additionally, data was also gathered to answer the following sub-research questions by utilizing participant quotes and narratives: (a) What role do novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have when engaging parents in family-school relationships? (b) How do novice teachers in Title I elementary schools describe prior experiences in teacher-preparation programs when training for building family-school relationships? (c) What do novice teachers perceive as academic challenges with students when observing a lack of home- and/or school-based parental involvement in Title I elementary schools?, and (d) What successful academic and social experiences can novice teachers describe with students in Title I elementary schools when parents are home- and/or school-base involved?

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to attempt to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Chapter Five includes a summary of findings broken down by each research question. Following an explanation of results is a discussion of each framework: theoretical, practical, and empirical. Chapter 5 then describes implications and recommendations for different stakeholders from a theoretical, practical, and empirical standpoint. Following implications, delimitations and limitations of the study are reviewed, as well as recommendations for future research. Lastly, Chapter 5 will close with a summary highlighting significant findings from the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The central research question: How do novice teachers describe their experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, was answered using themes and sub-themes acquired through data analysis. The four themes that submerged through data analysis were (a) prior professional experiences (sub-themes: general education work experience and experiences with parent interaction) (b) levels of parental involvement (sub-themes: negative interactions, positive interactions, personal experiences with parental involvement, and attempts to increase parental involvement) (c) communication barriers (sub-theme: parent-teacher communication and teacher-parent communication) and (d) preparation (sub-themes: more college preparation needed and more novice preparation needed). In analyzing the data through the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) the essence of the phenomenon was found to be that novice teachers find there to be a lack of consistent parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, and there is a lack of training in

teacher preparation programs to build skills necessary for family-school relationships and proper parent communication. According to Moustakas (1994) a textural description of data is the *what* of participant experience, represented here as what the novice teachers are experiencing of the phenomenon. The phenomenon was that they are all novice teachers in Title I elementary schools. The *what* is that they are all experiencing a lack of parental involvement. In addition, it is also important to review the *how*, or structural description (Moustakas, 1994), of participants or how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon. The *how* can be broken down into identifying in what way each participant perceived their challenges and looked for ways to overcome it. This data revealed a lack of preparation in college coursework when it came to properly preparing teacher candidates for communicating with parents or building relationships with families. Rather, skillsets for many with regard to working with parents were developed through educational-related jobs prior to teaching full-time. Additionally, novice teachers entered their first full-time teaching jobs with pre-conceived notions of what parental involvement was based on their own upbringing or other experiences prior to teaching.

### **Response to Research Questions**

**Central research question.** The central research question was: How do novice teachers describe their experience with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia? The overall sentiment with novice teachers was that parental involvement is more of a teacher responsibility, as well as struggling with the reality of how different a Title I environment is from their own upbringing. Some had parents who attended fieldtrips, parent-teacher conferences, and assisted with homework/studying. These same individuals, but now novice teachers, are faced with parents who show-up for back-to-school night never to be seen again, as their phone numbers disappear along with them. Those parents who are involved in

their child's education are few and far between and when they are, their child blossoms in the class both socially and academically. Though this is disheartening, it has become reality to Title I elementary school novice teachers in southern Virginia as they struggle to remedy the situation, and continue to work to ensure all students succeed parent or not.

**Research sub-question one.** Research sub-question one was: What role do novice teachers perceive Title I elementary schools to have when engaging parents in family-school relationships? Novice teachers overwhelmingly felt it was in the best interest of Title I elementary schools to engage families with a variety of activities/events in the form of family/community nights. One teacher even suggested having some during the day to accommodate those who work different shifts. Family/community nights may consist of showing off student projects/presentations, choir concerts, family book fair nights, and/or STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) night. Family nights serve as an opportunity to open or maintain lines of communication and build family-school relationships.

**Research sub-question two.** Research sub-question two was: How do novice teachers in Title I elementary schools describe prior experiences in teacher preparation programs when training for building family-school relationships? Novice teachers gained more meaningful experiences from positions held prior to their full-time teaching positions, such as paraprofessional, teaching assistant, and/or 4-H Coordinator, rather than student teaching. These positions better prepared them for teaching in a Title I elementary school along with building family-school relationships. Those novice teachers interviewed with no prior work experience in education and just student teaching, had a more difficult time with initially building family-school relationships, as well as communicating with parents. College did not provide them with

enough field experience in a Title I learning environment and managing parents in all situations, as well as coursework in dealing with poverty and Title I students/parents.

**Research sub-question three.** Research sub-question three was: What do novice teachers perceive as academic challenges with students when observing a lack of home- and/or school-based parental involvement in Title I elementary schools? Different ideas were gathered as data was analyzed and themes created. Idea one consisted of the parent and teacher needing to be a team, rather than the teacher being solely responsible for the student's education. Secondly, there are those parents who want to be more involved but have obstacles in front of them, whether it be their level of education, work schedule, or some other hindrance. Despite the reasoning, academic challenges are observed with students when parents are not involved in a child's education. Novice teachers expressed the importance of the presence of parents in a child's life, as they serve as the motivators in a child's educational journey. These teachers are often times left without resolutions to academic and behavioral issues when phone numbers are left in a constant state of flux.

**Research sub-question four.** Research sub-question four was: What successful academic and social experiences can novice teachers describe with students in Title I elementary schools when parents are home-and/or school-based involved? Novice teachers described a definitive difference with those students whose parents were involved and those not. Specific examples were given by some participants, who observed significant progress with standardized test scores, math, or reading once they were able to get a parent involved at the school level. ClassDojo was a successful method of achieving parental involvement at the home-based level with other novice teachers. The messaging feature allows teachers to talk back and forth with parents about homework and class performance.

## **Discussion**

In order to understand the overall results of this study, it is imperative to comprehend the results broken down into theoretical, practical, and empirical framework discussions outlined in Chapter Two. This study's findings extended, as well as corresponded with, existing literature regarding parental involvement in Title I elementary schools and teacher preparation programs.

### **Theoretical Framework Discussion**

This transcendental phenomenological study's theoretical framework was based around the Kolb's (2015) ELT. His learning theory is based around the philosophy that experience plays a significant role in the adult learning process (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002; Matsuo, 2015). Additionally, learners who are more active and motivated to learn take part in the learning process (Mainemelis et al., 2002). Through the ELT, learners take new knowledge gained over various experiences, and analyze it into the larger context or make it applicable to the real world. Through data gathering and analysis it was observed that those participants who had prior educational career experiences or meaningful student teaching were more comfortable coming into their first full-time teaching position. When it came to classroom management and building family-school relationships, participants felt prepared, because the significant piece was having prior exposure to Title I classrooms and building family-school relationships. Many novice teachers are not experiencing family-school relationship building while in college (Collier et al., 2015; de Bruïne et al., 2014; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Epstein, 2013; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zion & Sobel, 2014), and Kolb's (2015) theory of experience with adult learning with this study has been shown to be significant.



## **Practical Framework Discussion**

Literature revealed that teacher candidates were not receiving ample preparation when it came to building family-school relationships, specifically regarding diverse families (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016). Some educators lack the ability or experience when it comes to reaching out to parents (Mahmood, 2013). In addition, it becomes a concern to parents when an educator only communicates negative issues, never recognizing the positive ones (Young et al., 2013). Literature also conveyed how parents' educational levels and lack of familiarity with the curriculum decrease their engagement and levels of involvement (Hindin & Mueller, 2016). Becky discussed the need for teachers and administrators to break down the content in a way parents will understand.

Data gathered from this study found some participants struggled with building family-school relationships. Those participants with no prior educational experiences, lacked skillsets necessary in building relationships. Additionally, student-teaching did not provide the proper exposure to community relations. Erin thought it best that a professional development be required for novice teachers as part of a new teacher mentorship program, preventing them from grappling with unsuccessful ideas as much as she did. She struggled during her first few years of teaching with developing family-school relationships, because she had no coursework or strong student-teaching experience. Therefore, structured field experiences are vital in the creation of a strong teaching candidate (McMahan & Garza, 2017). These experiences, if strong, allow candidates to develop required competencies and skills (McMahan & Garza, 2017). Ann struggled with being an introvert, and it was not until she served as a teaching assistant that she was able to communicate with parents and learn the true meaning of a Title I environment. Additionally, this study showed the significance of relationships as Gina built strong ones with

her students, which enabled parents to trust her and communicate with Gina freely and regularly. Some educators struggle when it comes to communicating with parents/families due to lack of training or opportunities have requested more role playing and field experiences (de Bruijne et al., 2014).

### **Empirical Framework Discussion**

The literature explained that teacher candidates feel as though preparation programs are not effectively equipping them to communicate with families (Brown et al., 2014; de Bruijne et al., 2014; Collier et al., 2015). Teacher candidates sometimes lack in the abilities to build collaborative partnerships (Collier et al., 2015). Communication between family and school is vital, as each side equally values one another's input, and work together to resolve issues (Lang et al., 2017). Schools must initiate and foster positive relationships with families, as well as create opportunities for teachers and families to learn from one another (Iver et al., 2015). The research gathered from this study coincided with the literature, but also built upon it.

Participants felt prepared to teach content and manage classrooms upon graduating college, but lacked preparation when communicating with parents. Most participants were speechless, and expressed high levels of frustration when discussing the number of times, they would reach out to parents/guardians and numbers had been changed or disconnected and/or emails never responded to. The question was raised by participants, what is to be done to address any academic/behavioral issues, when no parent/guardian can be reached? It was observed through data analysis that most participants are engaged in the program ClassDojo and relying on it as their method of consistent communication to parents.

One novice teacher stated a need for support from a mentor when it came to making positive calls the first few weeks, as well as the first negative calls, because no prior training

existed with this and found some parents to be intimidating. Additionally, through this it was found that Title I elementary schools are creating opportunities for family involvement with STEM night, PTO meetings and events, choir/band concerts, PBL nights, and/or family book fair night. These family nights enable openings for family-school relationships to be created.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. Therefore, its results leave implications for various educational stakeholders: parents, community members, colleges/universities, novice and seasoned teachers, and Title I and non-Title I schools and their corresponding districts. This section will address theoretical, empirical, and practical implications and specific recommendations for various stakeholders to assist in preparing teacher candidates.

### **Theoretical Limitations**

This study used Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory as a method to stress the importance of teacher candidates and novice teachers gaining prior experience with building family-school relationships. This study revealed that novice teachers felt more prepared when they entered their first full-time teaching job at a Title I elementary school with prior educational work experiences. For example, Ann and Jacqueline worked as teacher assistants prior to teaching full-time. Ann described it as the best experience in preparing her for communicating with parents and setting up parent nights. She even went so far as to recommending it as a requirement, in addition to student teaching, before becoming a full-time teacher. Charlotte was employed as a 4-H Extension Agent, allowing her to work with parents on a continuous basis and develop her communication skills.

Kolb's (2015) learning theory attempts to explain individual learning by stating that an individual gains empowerment through trusting in the experience, as he/she gains mastery of the subject. One of the last modes or steps in Kolb's learning model is active experimentation, where learners take their experience(s) and apply it (Kolb, 2015; Mainemelis et al., 2002) to a new environment or learning experience (Murphy, 2007). Thus, it is imperative that teacher candidates have meaningful learning opportunities, specifically in college, prior to obtaining their first teaching job. Erin described the struggles she faced developing family-school relationships at the beginning of her teaching career, as she had to chaperone her first overnight field trip alone. There was minimal to no parental support her whole first year. It was not until her third year of teaching that Erin got into her comfort zone with parents, as she improved with communication techniques, and gained a lot more parent support.

In addition to experiences with creating family-school relationships, teacher candidates also need experience with Title I schools while in college. Many of the participants explained how the meaning of Title I was cloudy all through college or unheard of, and its reality and meaning did not come clear until they ran a classroom. Isabelle believed there should be a course describing the differences in states, schools, and districts, because she was unaware of what Title I meant until hired. Becky did not realize the true meaning of Title I until she moved from Missouri and received her first teaching job in Virginia at a Title I elementary school. She and another participant expressed the importance of adding a course on poverty in college for candidates to understand its meaning and impact.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to observe the impact experience has on learning, even adult learning, in the case of teacher candidates. Therefore, colleges/universities must review and reflect on teacher preparation programs, and ask themselves the following questions: are

candidates exposed to varying school environments, are candidates able to build relationships with parent/community members, and what does the coursework look like with regard to relationship building, Title I schools, and poverty? School districts, Title I or not, should review and reflect on mentorship programs and whether they are providing sufficient support to novice teachers in the areas of communicating to community members, in both positive and negative situations.

### **Practical Implications**

Literature uncovered that some teacher candidates are finishing preparation programs, with limited, if any, understanding of how to develop family-school relationships. These relationships can be the vehicle to increase parental involvement (Lang et al., 2017). Mahmood (2013) explained how this relationship should be created with mutual understandings, “The parent-teacher partnership should be formed by a mutual aspiration to understand and consider diverse viewpoints through dialogue with each other” (p. 80). It took Erin three years to learn how to build family-school relationships. Almost all of the participants learned through educational experiences prior to full-time teaching how to build family-school relationships: para-professional, teaching assistant, YMCA afterschool worker, school-age coordinator, 4-H extension agent, and/or substitute teacher. Through these experiences they were able to communicate with parents regularly, allowing them to enhance their relationship-building skills. Participants reported having no coursework on family relationship building or parental involvement during their preparation programs. Gina explained how she did not feel prepared coming out of college for the family involvement piece.

Therefore, colleges/universities need to reflect on preparation programs; are courses providing opportunities, as well as support to teacher candidates for building family-school

relationships, do programs support ample experiences for building relationships, and are various environments in which to build the relationships provided? Two participants recommended colleges/universities offer coursework on poverty and Title I schools, as mentioned earlier.

Novice teachers requiring more experiences or support regarding family-school relationships should express concerns during mentorship programs. In addition, they should never be afraid to ask questions of administration, mentors, and other seasoned teachers. For example, Isabelle explained how she was never fearful to ask questions of any of her colleagues. Mallory compared the faculty at her school like that of a family, who made her comfortable to ask questions. Fellow faculty members were not hesitant to provide Mallory with the assistance.

As for administrators and school districts, these findings, as well as the literature, exhibit required support for novice teachers when it comes to building family-school relationships, specifically in Title I elementary schools. This assistance would be beneficial in the new teacher mentorship program, which should be an ongoing support program through the novice teacher's first and second year on an as needed basis. It was even suggested by Mallory that novice teachers be assigned a seasoned mentor along with a new mentor to provide two different perspectives. Recommendations for building-level administrators is to check-in with novice teachers regularly to ensure their year is moving along progressively in a positive sense and further support is not required.

### **Empirical Limitations**

Literature revealed teacher candidates receive limited training and/or experiences on communication techniques with parent/guardians while in their teacher preparation programs. It also stated the important role communication plays between parents and schools. Therefore, a lack of communication can impede the interrelationship required for successful student learning

(Young et al., 2013). Communication between school and parents, especially with students having IEPs, is important for problem-solving and/or goal-setting (Elbaum et al., 2017). Additionally, consistent lines of communication need to remain constant throughout the school year (Epstein, n.d.). Literature speculates that parents are more likely to become engaged in their child's learning if the school exhibits a more welcoming environment, which would mean schools need to reach out to all families with various activities, not just to those families whom they know will attend (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

Furthermore, this study revealed participants coming out of their college programs prepared for classroom management and running classrooms, but not parent communication. Ann described herself as a true introvert, and a transplant to the southern Virginia area. Ann's experiences as a Title I teaching assistant are what prepared her more than anything. It was not until Erin's third year of teaching that she felt truly comfortable communicating with parents. Therefore, colleges/universities need to reflect on teacher preparation programs and whether candidates are receiving enough experience with community/parent communication. Ann explained that through her student-teaching experience, she really did not communicate with parents.

Felicia requested more assistance for novice teachers when it came to making positive calls and the first few challenging ones, describing how intimidating parents can be. Felicia's statements make possible implications for additional needs in mentor programs at the district level due to lack of coursework and/or experiences at the collegiate/university level. Charlotte explained being blamed for things she thought a teacher could never be blamed for, needing additional support from administration.

One of the additional obstacles most participants described having was maintaining contact with parents/guardians as phone numbers change frequently or contact drops off shortly after back-to-school night. In addition, small numbers of parents show up for family nights, PTO meetings, book fair night, and STEM night. Therefore, a recommendation for the community/families is to remain in consistent communication and engagement with the schools, as they are educating tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, and so forth.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations are an aspect of every research project based on intentional choices made by myself, the researcher, as I designed the boundaries of this transcendental phenomenological study (Divergent Web Solutions, 2018). One of the clearest and most common delimitations is a participant exclusionary criterion. A delimitation included limiting the study to Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Title I elementary schools were targeted because of many preconceived notions held regarding parent involvement and the teaching environment. Southern Virginia was the area chosen due to proximity for the researcher. A second boundary set was having only novice teachers, those with five years or less experience, participate. This qualification was set for participants, as it takes five years to receive tenure in the state of Virginia, and so teachers are considered novice or provisional until then. Therefore, in using novice teachers, they would have just completed preparation programs, enabling them to give insight on the effectiveness of these programs.

Limitations are potential weaknesses outside the researcher's control, such as time, participant drop-out, and/or gender (Divergent Web Solutions, 2018). Limitations have the possibility of limiting the ability to answer certain questions or make inferences about findings. This transcendental phenomenological study had a few limitations develop throughout its



progression. Out of the 14 participants only one of them was male, which was just how circumstances fell. Originally there were 15 participants, but a schedule conflict developed with one of the focus group participants. Therefore, there were only four focus group participants rather than the scheduled five, and she could not be replaced. Prior to IRB approval, the researcher reached out to other school superintendents, who were not interested in having their districts work with the study. One district wanted to change ways in which the data would be gathered from novice teachers, and the other thought the data collection techniques would take up too much of their teachers' time. Two other superintendents were emailed and phoned, but correspondence was never received.

Further limitations came from a district where the researcher was given permission to work. Several different principals were emailed and phoned in order to get a variety of novice teachers with differing years of experience and grade levels. However, not all principals responded, limiting the number of novice teachers willing to participate.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. Therefore, due to the limitation of gender and delimitation of a setting, a recommendation for future research would be to use schools other than Title I elementary schools, such as Title I middle schools or regular elementary schools. Using different school settings might give different findings, as well as assist in ensuring more of a mixed gender population and mixed grades.

A second recommendation, based on the delimitation of novice teachers, for future research is to open the participant window to teachers with over five years of experience at the

Title I elementary level, and then compare it to the findings in this study. Further research studies could also compare teacher preparation programs of large universities and colleges with those of small universities and colleges. Lastly, extending the delimitation setting, is comparing novice teacher findings in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia with Title I elementary schools northern Virginia.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. From this study four themes (a) prior professional experiences, (b) levels of parental involvement, (c) communication barriers, and (d) preparation, as well as 11 sub-themes, developed which will enable stakeholders, such as universities/colleges, administrators, novice teachers, and school districts to make better informed decisions when it comes to teacher preparation and mentor programs.

Additionally, the findings of this study also revealed the interrelatedness that exists between novice teachers' lack of skills when building family-school relationships, as well as confidence when communicating with parents, and their collegiate coursework and experiences. These skillsets can certainly have a substantial effect on levels of parental involvement novice teachers obtain within their classroom. Therefore, several of the participants developed their skillsets with educationally related jobs, prior to receiving their first full-time teaching job, such as paraprofessional, substitute teacher, and/or teaching assistant. These positions allowed them to work with parents on an almost daily basis.

Despite skillsets being in place, working in a Title I elementary school was found to have its downfalls as far as parental involvement was concerned. Many participants were frustrated

with ever-changing phone numbers and a lack of involvement in family nights, and so the question remains regarding a possible solution to the problem. This especially becomes true when academic and behavioral challenges arise and parents/guardians are unable to be contacted. Therefore, the findings of the study address reflections needing to be made with teacher preparation programs, as well as new teacher mentor programs within school districts. Teachers play such a significant role in today's world as spoken by Henry Brooks Adams (2018) when he stated, "teachers affect eternity; no one can tell where their influence stops."

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A – JOURNALING/EPOCHE NOTES

(These notes were written in a notebook, but for neatness typed up.)

12-4-17 – I defended my proposal successfully to my committee!

12-7-17 – reached out to a superintendent of a local school district in an effort to use the Title I elementary schools; as there are many schools within the district

12-8-17 – information was passed on to the assistant superintendent of instruction, who said data collection required too much time for their teachers at this time

12-7-17 – also reached out to superintendent of another local school district in an effort to use their Title I elementary school, which are abundant in number as well

12-22-17 – received an email from Executive Director for Accountability & School Improvement after being passed from Superintendent to Chief Academic Officer to her, where it was recommended that another method of data collection be used. Therefore, I thank her for her time and moved on.

12-10-17 – an email request was sent out to another superintendent of a local district requesting the same

12-12-17 – approval was granted

(I do not remember the date) However, I reached out to a district 40 minutes north of where I live at the suggestion of my district superintendent by email, but no response after a week. Therefore, I emailed him again and waited a few days before trying to call him, with no response again.

Thus, the new year began and I was frustrated and yet another stand still. Therefore, I reached out to Dr. Bowman to see if I could use my district minus the Title I elementary school I work at. She said yes as long as I ensured I bracketed out.

1-11-18 – I received permission from the superintendent to commence with the study, and so IRB would come next.

2-13-18 – My IRB made it through the initial process.

3-10-18 – IRB approval letter sent!

3-10-18 – I started working right away trying to get interviews scheduled emailing out both of the superintendents, letting them know I received IRB approval attaching a copy of the letter.

-In addition, I emailed a copy of the superintendents' letter, IRB approval letter, and a letter explaining the study to principals of all Title I schools in their district, hoping they would contact me back within a few days with teacher's names or anything to go off of.

3-11-18 – One of the principals emailed me back asking if I wanted her to contact the teachers or me contact the teachers, I asked her to send me a list of the novice teachers with email addresses and I would send out the information.

-The principal replied with the list and email addresses, and so I asked if March 14<sup>th</sup> would be okay for her.

-There are 16 novice teachers in her building. How exciting if I could get all of them. I can use some of them for a focus group.

3-12-18 - I emailed the teachers, with a letter explaining the study, a copy of the consent form, IRB letter, and letting them know in the email that the principal knew I was contacting them. Additionally, I set up a day where I would be coming to meet in the library after school to answer questions and set up an interview time if interested.

3-13-18 – I emailed those same teachers today, rescheduling the meeting to March 15 since Renee is going to be out of the building, and so I will not be able to leave early to get over to the school with her out.

3-14-18 – Spoke with one teacher from the school I am going to and she has a schedule conflict for the 15<sup>th</sup> but wants to interview, but I am going to have to get her another time.

3-15-18 – I know the school and I know some of the teachers going into the building, but I do not know them personally. I only know what I have heard about the school, and I am not want to go off what others say. I like to make my own judgements. I have heard they have better students than the students we serve at my school, but how can you say that if you have never been in the school. Again, they are Title I and I just know of the teachers in general, not personally.

-Only 2 teachers stayed to meet with me in the library, which was disheartening out of 16 novice teachers. I want to think it is because I changed the meeting date. I went through the consent form with them and let them ask questions. One of the teachers scheduled an interview time with me, in her classroom, because that is where she is most comfortable. The other one would touch base with me another day. I was so excited to have my first interview scheduled, but at the same time overwhelmed if this is how getting participants was going to be, an uphill battle.

3-26-18 – I called two more principals from the other district, with one contacting me back. He asked me to call him after May 11<sup>th</sup>, when testing was complete. I also emailed his assistant principal since she was my principal at one time.

3-29-18 – I have not been able to interview anyone yet. I was supposed to interview the one novice teacher from the meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup>, but she had to reschedule and we never set another date.

4-9-18 – I have decided to reach out to more schools within the other district because I am having a hard time getting interviews. One principal emailed me names of novice teachers, and only one scheduled an interview with me. Another principal said she was going to email me

names, and she never did, despite my follow up email. Another principal never returned my calls or emails.

4-20-18 – My first interview, prior to going into it I wanted to write down these thoughts. I only know of her by name and that she is very quiet based on a professional development I went on with her. Again, I do not know much of the school, although they are the other Title I elementary in my district. I just know what people talk of. I am anxious and nervous, because I have never done this before. What if the tape recorder messes up?

-I think she was just as nervous as me. Then, of course I left my phone at work and someone brought it and we had someone come into the meeting bringing me my phone, haha, what an ordeal. I learned some interesting things about this participant. I recorded her words and after tomorrow's scheduled interview, I am going to send them off to be transcribed and will save them on the computer and work on analyzing them. I gave her the writing prompt also. I am going to name her Ann.

4-21-18 – I am meeting this participant at the Daily Grind coffee shop early on a Saturday morning at her request. I don't mind and offered to buy her breakfast. I am not sure what to expect. She is coming from a county school that I know nothing of, except that they are a Title I elementary school. I love meeting new people, so this should be great. I got my first one under my belt so the nervousness has dwindled away. Okay here she comes, she looks like a career switcher, about my height and very friendly.

-We had a great time through the interview and conversing afterwards. We found out she is doing the same book study as I am.

-I went home and plugged up the recording device into my USB and went on transcribeme.com and uploaded the files.

4-22-18– Transcribed files were sent back to me to be worked with. I went through the files labeling where the researcher spoke verses where the participant spoke.

5-7-18 – I am going to interview a third participant who I know nothing about personally except for where she works. It is the other Title I elementary school in my division and might have stronger parental involvement for some things over us, but I think we are about equal.

5-8-18 - I emailed the files to the participants, asking them to read over the files to ensure their words were captured correctly (member checking).

-I had also started analyzing for themes in the participant writing prompts and transcriptions by marking with colors individual ideas, horizontalization.

No specific date written down, as this I did this over several days- As I interviewed participants, files were sent off to be transcribed and writing prompts were analyzed. Key words were pulled out of each and made into rows. Whereby which overarching themes were developed.

-writing prompts were looked at individually to pull ideas and themes and matched to interview transcriptions

-Ideas-paraprofessional, teaching assistant, substitute, 4-H Agent could be a theme-Prior Professional experiences in the educational field (how is the playing into their success?/ is it helping more than the preparation programs)

-look at their experiences growing up with parental involvement could it be a theme is there enough to go on?

-phone numbers are changing, parents are not emailing them back, trouble with disgruntled parents, parents not showing up for family nights, these could be a theme of parental involvement or something like that

-each time I am finishing interviews I find it best to wait until I finish a few for money sakes before sending off for transcription if I have a few scheduled, and then am able to review two and put them under my headings in my notebook

-I have finished 8 interviews and am going to start writing Chapter Four. I have developed my themes of Prior Professional Experiences, Levels of Parental Involvement, Communication Barriers, and College Experience.

-Novice teachers' experiences are summed up by these factors

-As I finish the other interviews I will add to my chapter, but I wanted to start writing.  
6-15-18 – I am writing this while sitting in a library waiting to meet my focus group. I am nervous because it is going to be four against one, and I do not know any of them. It was supposed to be five, but one had something come up. I was nervous about that situation, but it worked out. I do not know anything about their school or them. I know it is Title I.

Well, it worked out they were great. All, but one, were straight out of school. The other just finished her second year. Two of them were special education teachers. I wish I could have working alongside my wonderful teachers, they were so upbeat and full of life. I am going to send my transcription off tonight and pay extra to break it up for each speaker.

6-25-18 – I gave Tammy my transcriptions along with Chapter four to read over to see if I am on track with themes and containing no bias, but told her it was real rough. I just wanted her to read for the purpose I gave her.

6-28-18 – She returned the document and said it seemed as though I was on the right track. Therefore, I am going to start working towards edits.

7-5-18 – I am going to email Chapter 4 to Dr. Bowman for review, as I continue to work on Chapter 5, which I have begun and want to finish by the end of the week of July 9<sup>th</sup>.

**APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL FORM****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 9, 2018

Kelly Jean Wilson

IRB Approval 3171.030918: A Transcendental Phenomenological Investigation of Novice Teachers' Experiences With Parental Involvement in Elementary Title I Schools

Dear Kelly Jean Wilson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

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**APPENDIX C-  
EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS**

May 30, 2018

Dear Potential Study Participant(s):

Greetings, my name is Kelly Wilson. As a graduate student and doctoral candidate in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, and so I am writing to request your participation in my study.

Those teachers having five or fewer years teaching experience, novice teachers, at Title I elementary schools within the school who are willing to participate, will be asked to participate in open-ended interviews and a writing prompt. In addition, a separate group of novice teachers will be asked to participate in a focus group interview and writing prompt. It should take approximately one and a half hours or less for teachers to complete the procedure[s] listed. Data gathered from these sources of evidence will be analyzed for commonalities, differences, and themes. Novice teacher participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed study. I am available to answer any questions or address any concerns you have regarding the study. If you choose to participate, please contact me as soon as possible with a day and time that is convenient for you.

Sincerely,

Kelly Jean Wilson, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
kwilson43@liberty.edu  
(434) 228-3580

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
3/9/2018 to 3/8/2019  
Protocol # 3171.030918

### CONSENT FORM

A Transcendental Phenomenological Investigation of Novice Teachers' Experiences with  
Parental Involvement in Title I Elementary Schools

Kelly J. Wilson, Principal Investigator  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kelly J. Wilson, a doctoral candidate of Liberty University School of Education. The study involves novice teachers, those having five or fewer years teaching experience, and parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant due to your status as an adult (18 years of age and older) and your five or fewer years of experience in a Title I elementary school, as well as the economic breakdown of those students which your district serves. Please read over this form in its entirety and feel free to ask questions at any time before agreeing to participate in the study.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following:

1. Descriptive writing prompt on parental involvement to supply the researcher with detailed information on any prior thoughts/feelings of parental involvement and teacher preparation programs. It will last approximately one-hour.
2. Participate in an interview with the researcher-- lasting one-hour. This interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon neutral location. Additionally, the interview will be audio recorded.
3. Possibly participate in a follow-up focus group interview with four other individuals, as needed. The focus group interview will be located in a neutral location for all involved, recorded with the permission from participants, and saved on a hard drive. It will last approximately one-hour.
4. After interviews have been transcribed, participants will be asked to read the interviews for accuracy and to correct any misunderstandings.

#### **Risks:**

There are no known risks associated with this study aside from risks encountered in daily living.



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**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to participants.

**Benefits to society:** Findings from this study may be published and prove beneficial to new teacher mentor programs at individual districts and teacher participation programs. School districts can analyze the information provided to overcome the barriers hindering many families from becoming involved. Additionally, the study could provide Title I elementary schools qualitative data for evaluating mentorship programs for new teachers and ensuring professional development on the fostering of parent-teacher relationships, as well as creating a welcoming environment. Also, by hearing the voice of these novice teachers, teachers can use the data to self-evaluate personal relationships and interactions they have had with parents. Reasons for lack of involvement can also be shared with current educators so that they may assist families with overcoming as many of the obstacles as possible. Additionally, the results of the study can identify professional development opportunities to individual school districts as a method for increasing family-school relationships among all faculty within Title I schools. Finally, this study can provide insight for colleges and universities with regard to the significance of teacher preparation programs.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Writing prompts, recordings, and related transcripts will be stored securely in password protected data files. In addition, the researcher will be the only individual to have access to data, and information will only be used for purposes of this study. If other purposes are desired, additional consent will be retrieved from participants. Furthermore, pseudonyms will be given to participants and used in

The Liberty University  
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3/9/2018 to 3/8/2019  
Protocol # 3171.030918

all written and electronic records to protect identity. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with person outside of the group.

Data will be destroyed following the three-year federal regulation mark from the password protected computer. Data will be dragged to the recycle bin and then permanently deleted. Any paper data sources existing will be shredded.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether or not you decide to participate in this study does not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, your current place of employment, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Kelly Wilson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [kwilson43@liberty.edu](mailto:kwilson43@liberty.edu) or (434)228-3580. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Rebecca Bowman, at [rbowman3@liberty.edu](mailto:rbowman3@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX E-OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What made you want to enter the field of education?
2. What is your current job placement? Please do not give the name of the school or city.
3. How many years have you been teaching?
4. With what other placements have you had experience?
5. What has been your most rewarding experience as a teacher thus far?
6. How did you define parental involvement prior to receiving your first full-time teaching job?
7. What do you remember about parental involvement through your own schooling experience?
8. How have those thoughts of parental involvement changed as you have worked in the field or if they have not changed, explain why?
9. Explain the level of preparation you felt leaving college and arriving at your first classroom, for not only a diverse set of students but also the necessity of building a partnership with their families.
10. Describe the specific positive interactions you have had with regard to parent involvement in these few years of teaching experience and the partnerships developed.
11. Describe any learning experiences received with regard to parental involvement in these few years of teaching experience in a Title I elementary school.
12. What academic and social success have you observed with students in your Title I elementary school with those parents who have been involved?

13. What has been your biggest obstacle related to parental involvement thus far being a novice teacher in a Title I elementary school? Why do you identify this as your biggest obstacle?
14. Describe specific challenges faced with parent involvement in a Title I elementary school.
15. Explain any strategies you have developed to increase parental involvement, as well as the success rate of those strategies in a Title I elementary school. From where did those ideas derive?
16. What experiences and/or strategies have better equipped you to develop the skills necessary in creating family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
17. What role have your administrators played to increase parental involvement in your Title I elementary school?
18. What role, if any, might administrators play in Title I elementary public school settings to better assist with encouraging parental involvement?
19. What role can administrators play in assisting novice teachers with creating partnerships with families in a Title I elementary school?
20. What role do you perceive Title I elementary schools play in facilitating a family-school relationship?
21. How might novice teachers become better prepared for Title I elementary schools?
22. How might novice teachers become better prepared when it comes to cultivating family-school relationships in Title I elementary schools?

**APPENDIX F- WRITING PROMPT**

“Describe any experiences with parental involvement in your teacher preparation program, as well as your thoughts on parental involvement before receiving your first teaching job and explain how these notions may have changed through your teaching experience.”

**APPENDIX G- OPEN-ENDED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

## Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. How many years of teaching experience do you bring to us?
2. What grade level do you currently teach?
3. What were your biggest motivation factors for entering the field of education?
4. Compare and contrast your preconceived notions of what parental involvement was during your teacher preparation program to what it is now that you are employed as a full-time educator in a Title I elementary school.
5. How have your experiences, both positive and negative, influenced how you develop family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
6. How do you perceive student social and academic experiences to be affected by family-school relationships in a Title I elementary school?
7. Based on your experiences as a novice teacher, what recommendations would you make for new teacher/mentor programs with regard to preparing novice teachers for cultivating family-school partnerships in Title I elementary schools?

**APPENDIX H- LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS/  
BUILDING LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS**

December 7, 2017

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Greetings, my name is Kelly Wilson. As a graduate student and doctoral candidate in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' experiences with parental involvement in Title I elementary schools in southern Virginia, and so I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in school district inviting novice teachers within from Title I elementary schools to participate.

Those teachers having five or fewer years teaching experience, novice teachers, at Title I elementary schools within the district who are willing to participate, will be asked to participate in open-ended interviews and a writing prompt. In addition, a separate group of novice teachers will be asked to participate focus group interview and writing prompt. It should take approximately one and a half hour for teachers to complete the procedure[s] listed. Data gathered from these sources of evidence will be analyzed for commonalities, differences, and themes. Novice teacher participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed study. I am available to answer any questions or address any concerns you have regarding the study. If you choose to grant permission, please—respond by email to [kwilson43@liberty.edu](mailto:kwilson43@liberty.edu). I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Kelly Jean Wilson, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University



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(434) 228-3580