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Parental Involvement Typologies in Rural Community Schools:  
A Qualitative Investigation

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Amy Hurst Case

May 2009

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Keywords: parental involvement, families, schools, communities

## ABSTRACT

### Parental Involvement Typologies in Rural Community Schools: A Qualitative Investigation

by

Amy Hurst Case

There are a number of pressing issues facing today's educational society. Among the most controversial is the research and information surrounding the perceived positive or negative effects of parental involvement and barriers that restrict parental involvement. The purpose of this study was to examine 6 parental involvement typologies and their use and existence in 3 East Tennessee elementary schools. The Epstein (1987) typologies were used to classify parent involvement modalities. Parents who had a child enrolled in the 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade during the 2007-2008 school year were interviewed. The interviews followed an open-ended interview guide and the research is qualitative in nature.

Research findings in this study were consistent with findings from a number of previous parental involvement studies. Research participants displayed an appreciation for the educational process and voiced strong opinions on parenting, communication, volunteering, decision-making, learning at home, and collaboration with the community. Barriers to parental involvement practices were addressed as were suggestions for improved parental involvement opportunities and modalities.

## DEDICATION

Families are the compasses that guide us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights,  
and our comfort when we occasionally falter.

Brad Henry

This research study is in honor of, my Daddy and Mom, Mr. and Mrs. Warren and Marie Hurst. Thank you for your untiring belief in me. Your strength and guidance have made me the person I have become. I am eternally grateful for your support and selflessness.

The study is dedicated to, my Husband, Rodney William Case. I love and appreciate you more than any words can express. Thank you for your patience throughout this seemingly endless endeavor.

The study is dedicated to, my Son, Jackson William Case. You are my sunshine. My support for you is endless, and my love for you is inconceivable. I pray that your future is filled with protection and blessings from Our Heavenly Father.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Consider the following three scenarios:

A single, working mother of two elementary children is asked to volunteer at the school's annual field day. The tired mother is filled with guilt and anger as she must decline due to a demanding job that serves as the only support for her family.

The illiterate parent of a fourth grade student receives a notice from her child's teacher that if some help is not given at home, the child will fail the fourth grade reading curriculum.

A construction worker and hotel housekeeper, who rarely visit the school, are called in to meet with the principal, teacher and "some other school officials" to discuss possible testing for their child who is showing signs of dyslexia. The two parents do not respond to the meeting due to lack of understanding.

The previous examples are just a glimpse of the many barriers that face parental involvement in education. Often, educators and administrators connect low levels of parental involvement with uncaring feelings and apathetic attitudes by parents or guardians. However, educators must understand that there are certain barriers that prevent some parents from becoming involved in their child's education (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Research by Finders and Lewis indicated that different teaching styles, limited educational attainment, economic difficulties, and time constraints are some of the reasons that limit parental involvement. Language and cultural barriers also prevent parents from taking an active role in understanding their child's educational needs (Finders & Lewis).

In order to offer America's students the best educational opportunities available, educators and administrators must understand the barriers that decrease parental involvement. Procedures must be created for all interested parties to participate in the educational process. Unless educators involve parents and other community members in developing the standards and implementing the new teaching strategies, what may begin

as a journey toward promising change will probably end in frustration, failure, and community conflict (Dodd, 1996).

### *Background of the Study*

A growing body of research suggests that when parents and school personnel collaborate effectively, students are likely to behave and perform better in school (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Reynolds, 1991; Walberg, 1984). Over the years, there has been a movement to research new approaches and ideas to gain insight into parental involvement. These approaches have several features in common: programs that focus on parenting skills and the development of home conditions that support learning; school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children's progress; the use of volunteers at school or in other locations to support the school and students; and participation by families in decision-making, governance, and advocacy (Bauch, 1994; Davies, 1991).

Under section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), parents were given the right and responsibility to see that their children go to a good school and receive a quality education. Through this newly passed educational endeavor, parents are encouraged to partner with their children's school to ensure that their child is achieving academically and that the school is making adequate yearly progress.

Rural communities face these challenges and others. Research has shown that rural communities face the challenges of isolation, poverty, and lack of job opportunities (Maynard & Howley, 1997). With just these few factors in mind, it is important to take a closer look into parental involvement programs for rural communities.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine specific parenting practices and parental involvement practices of families from rural communities in one school district in East

Tennessee. Parents were interviewed to find out the perceived positive and negative effects of parental involvement in their children's school. Also, parents were asked to identify and discuss barriers to parental involvement in the school. The study followed Epstein's (1987) six important types of collaboration between families, schools, and communities.

Epstein's six types of school-family-community involvement (1987) are defined as:

Type 1- Parenting

Type 2 - Communicating

Type 3 - Volunteering

Type 4 - Learning at Home

Type 5 - Decision-making

Type 6 - Collaborating with the Community (p. 119)

Purposive sampling was employed to select a representative sample from the population. The population included parents of third, fourth, and fifth grade students during the 2007-2008 school year. The chosen parents had children in one of three schools in one East Tennessee school district.

### *Research Questions*

To examine parental relations using Epstein's six types of school, family, and community involvement from the targeted rural communities, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What parenting problems do parents report they are most uncomfortable with and how can educators address and help parents find solutions to these problems?
2. How can educators improve communication skills with parents and what impact do they perceive this will have on student achievement?

3. What reasonable opportunities do parents have for volunteer work and how might these opportunities be increased?
4. What practices for learning at home are employed by parents and what can be done to help them increase these opportunities?
5. What decision-making roles in the educational process are being encouraged and how can these roles become more commonplace?

### *Significance of the Study*

This study added insightful information to the knowledge base surrounding parental involvement in their children's learning. The parental involvement of rural families is a common challenge and must be further addressed in order to reach out to families in all regions and economic classes. Findings from this study presented valuable information to school districts with large rural populations.

### *Definitions of Terms*

1. *Parenting*: The process of helping all families establish home environments to support children as students (Epstein, 2001).
2. *Communicating*: The process of designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about schools' programs and students' progress (Epstein, 2001).
3. *Volunteering*: Recruiting and organizing parental help and support at school (Epstein, 2001).
4. *Learning at Home*: Providing information and suggestions to families about how to help children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein, 2001).

5. *Decision-making*: Including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives (Epstein, 2001).
6. *Collaborating with the Community*: This includes identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2001).

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

The results of this study are not generalizable to any other school district. The data were delimited to three public schools in one remotely located East Tennessee district. The study included parents of third, fourth, or fifth grade students for the 2007-2008 school year. Data were delimited to parents who volunteered to take part in the study. Limitations included the possible lack of honesty and exaggeration by the participants. It must be noted that results may have been skewed due to various personal factors on the part of the participants.

### *Overview of the Study*

This investigation took place using a qualitative research method. The research was conducted using open-ended interviews that focused on parental involvement in their children's schooling in rural communities. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, background of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 includes a review of the related literature. Chapter 3 presents an outline of the methodology and procedures that were used. Chapter 4 includes an introduction to the participants and an analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### *Historical Overview*

Parental involvement in the education of children has been present since prehistoric times. Children accompanied their parents on forays and learned to obtain food through hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants, or, in more recent periods, by growing crops. Parents also taught their children rules for participating as members of both the family group and the larger society. Primitive societies did not develop schools; the primary educators were the family and community (Berger, 2000).

For thousands of years, children have learned and internalized the important customs, rules, values, and laws of their societies so they could function within their cultural groups. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) recognized three levels of systems that related a child's development to experiences in the entire environment:

1. The microsystem includes face-to-face relations with family and peers, with parents as the major influence on a child's interactive ecological system (p.22).
2. The mesosystem involves face-to-face relationships with more formal organizations such as school, scouting groups, recreation facilities, and religious groups (p. 22).
2. The exosystem, which is further removed from personal interactions, still influences children through their parents and their parents' employment and government actions and offerings that impact the schools and other agencies concerned with children (p. 22).

These levels of functioning clearly indicate that family and parental interaction are the first and most influential sources of teaching and learning for a child.

### *Education in Ancient Civilizations*

In ancient civilizations such as Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt children were mainly educated in the home; however, there were indications of schooling outside the home (Frost, 1966; Osborn, 1991). Artwork depicts Egyptians as having held their children in high esteem. Boys and girls were treated equally and children were portrayed as carefree and spirited.

In Greece, philosophies were generated regarding the rearing and education of children. Plato questioned theories of child-rearing in his dialogues in the *Republic* (390 BC). Plato stated that children should be controlled and molded to fit the needs of society. Plato designed an ideal-city-state in which genetics and procreation would be controlled by the state to produce children who, when grown, would be capable of administering affairs of the state (Chambliss, 1982). Parental education was not for the benefit of the family: rather, it was designed to strengthen the communal state. According to Berger (2000), family life in Rome was flourishing and Polybius and Cicero wrote of the importance of family in the development of good citizens. Cicero believed, as Aristotle had, that man was a social and political creature and that human virtues were developed through social participation (Cicero, 51 BC).

As stated in Bell and Harper (1980), the early Roman mother had a great role in academic education. She taught the children to read and taught her daughters the obligations, responsibilities, and skills necessary to be homemakers. The father encouraged his sons to learn to read and write, develop physical skills as well as business acumen, and practice citizenship.

### *Education in the Middle Ages*

During the middle ages, family life became difficult and a distinct social order emerged for the population. Children were among the lowest priorities in society. Children of serfs and peasants learned what they could from family and peers. Formal education, suitable living conditions, and family life in general were challenging (Aries, 1962). Poorer children learned customs, values, and means of existence merely from participation in everyday life.

Also during the Middle Ages, children of nobility were taught in their homes until approximately age 7. Children were expected to act as miniature adults and were educated for future noble duties. After age 8, boys from the upper class were sent to work as apprentices with another family member. They learned skills and duties befitting a nobleman and the art of chivalry, whereas commoners were apprenticed to learn a craft (Handel, 1989).

The Reformation, coupled with the invention of the printing press, brought about a world of change in Europe. The printing press, invented in 1439 by Johannes Gutenberg, made books available to a much larger segment of the population. This increased number of books brought about great changes in society. The change from 14<sup>th</sup> century apprenticeships was underway because of the rising number of books on etiquette and child rearing. Family life was geared for change as many of the new books related directly to parents in regard to child-rearing and proper discipline techniques (Aries, 1962).

### *Education in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

Modern parental education began to emerge during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. New ideas about education and the importance of the home in the education of children were developed by social thinkers such as Comenius, Locke, Pestalozzi, and Froebel.



John Amos Comenius (1657) pointed out the basic goodness of each child, as opposed to the concept of original sin. In *Didactica Magna*, he discussed the importance of the infant's education. He emphasized that education begins at home and described in detail the manner in which young children should be educated (Comenius, 1657).

John Locke had far-reaching and innovative ideas concerning government and education. He stressed that a child is born with a blank slate at birth and all ideas developed from experiences. Locke noted that strong family involvement and exposure to a variety of experiences would prove valuable in the education of a child (Locke, 1693).

Locke strongly supported the concept of "hardening the child." He believed that an optimum environment and valuable experiences must be present in order for the child's mind to thrive (1690).

Pestalozzi (1801), a Swiss educator, focused on the goodness of children and struggled for many years teaching and caring for poor children in his home. Pestalozzi based his teaching on concrete objects and self-activity. His aim was to educate the whole child and he stated that intellectual education was only part of a wider plan. He looked to balance the three elements of hands, heart, and head (Pestalozzi). He stated that recreation and play were significant to a child's learning ability and emphasized the importance of the mother. Pestalozzi could be hailed as the father of parent education. Pestalozzi noted that "for children, the teachings of their parents will always be the core; as for the schoolmaster, we can give thanks to God if he is able to put a decent shell around the core" (p. 26).

Froebel (1826) was the father of the kindergarten concept and was most noted for his development of a kindergarten curriculum. He also recognized the importance of the mother in the development of the child. Froebel spoke of the mother as the initial educator and wrote a book for mothers to use with their children at home. Froebel's curriculum centered around family life with the mother as the first educator. The mother became a meaningful part of Froebel's curriculum. The curriculum was not standard;

however, it was designed to take each child individually and focused on specific needs (Froebel).

Froebel (1826) believed that humans were essentially productive and creative, and fulfillment came through developing these in harmony with God and the world. He sought to encourage the creation of educational environments that involved practical work and the direct use of special materials such as blocks and balls. Froebel was concerned with the teaching of young children through educational games in the family. In later years, he became involved in creating care centers or facilities for young children outside the home.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century brought about great change in child-rearing practices and education. Families tended to fit into one of three categories: wealthy, emerging middle class, or poor.

The wealthy families allowed others to care for and rear their children. Wet nurses and country women cared for the children of the wealthy until age 2 or 3 (Lorence, 1974). According to Lorence, the emerging middle class preferred to guide, direct, and mold their children in specific patterns. Middle class families held the concept that children must be totally obedient to parents to grow properly. Children of the poor families were often sent to workhouses or foundling homes. As soon as the children were old enough to work, apprenticeships were found and the children were misused as a source of cheap labor. (Lorence)

In the 1800s three major theories of childrearing were followed. The first organizations, termed ‘Maternal Associations,’ were comprised of parent groups that generally consisted of middle-class members of Protestant-Calvinist religious persuasions (Brim, 1965). This theory of childrearing mainly focused on proper moral training and included methods of childrearing that included discipline and “breaking the child’s will” (Sunley, 1955, p.61).

The second theory of child-rearing was the idea of “hardening” the child—an idea that stemmed from John Locke (1690). Sunley noted, “Children should become strong vigorous, unspoiled men like those in early days of the country” (p. 61).

The third theory, rooted in Europe, had a more modern ring on nurturing (Sunley, 1955). Children were treated with respect, gentleness, and understanding. This theory was credited to the philosophies of Pestalozzi and Froebel and was thought to enable children to reach their full potential (Sunley).

Family life and educational practices continued to change with the times. In the middle 1800s, the kindergarten movement gained strength and attention. As noted in Berger (2000), Henry Barnard, Secretary of the Connecticut Board of Education and later United States Commissioner of Education, became enthused about the Froebelian materials of teaching, and Elizabeth Peabody, an American teacher and writer, became a strong supporter of the kindergarten efforts concept. Peabody campaigned to have Froebelian kindergarten ideas spread throughout the land and later opened the first English-language kindergarten in the United States. Kindergarten was firmly established in the United States because of the great stature these educators held in the country. Kindergarten was a way for all children, wealthy and poor, to learn proper health habits and cleanliness.

Toward the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growing belief in the perfectibility of man and society. Kindergarten was believed to be a strong instrument in perfecting man, beginning at an early age. Free Kindergarten Associations were established throughout the United States and worked with children of lower socioeconomic status (Trawick-Smith, 1997).

In the 1880s, two sources were gaining emphasis to improve education. Women’s associations such as the Child Study Association of America and the child study movement led by G. Stanley Hall centered on the family’s well-being and defined roles for all members of the group (Trawick-Smith, 1997).

## *Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on the family. Great changes in education and childrearing were established during this period. John Dewey and G. Stanley Hall emphasized the need for change in education. These educators believed learning should shy away from structured practices and focus on problem-solving and learning by doing (Trawick-Smith, 1997).

John Dewey made a significant contribution to the development of educational thinking in the twentieth century. Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, concern with interaction, reflection, experience, and interest in community and democracy, were brought together to form a highly suggestive educative form (Dewey, 1916).

G. Stanley Hall was influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It provided the basis for the scientific examination of child development. Darwin's emphasis on the survival behavior of different species stimulated an interest in observing children to identify their adaptive behaviors and to learn about the inheritance of human behavior (Hothersall, 1990).

In 1909, the first step regarding government's concern for children was created. Poverty-stricken children were the topic of concern at the first White House Conference on Care of Dependent Children. In 1912, The Children's Bureau was created as a result of the conference (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1962).

Soon after the conference in 1909, the government's efforts began to expand to many other areas of society. College researchers began to study the development of children throughout the United States. Nursery schools became popular during this decade as well. Margaret McMillan (1919) introduced the concept of the nursery school in Europe, in order to educate children of poverty. The concept soon spread to the United States and middle-class families embraced the idea (Taylor, 1981).

The discipline practices of love and nurturing were soon to be diminished. Parents in the early 1900s were encouraged to punish their children through strict discipline

practices. This practice was intended to establish more character in the child. Numerous magazine articles were published about unhealthy habits such as thumb sucking and masturbation. Many articles also focused on rigid scheduling for infants. This structured and somewhat harsh phase of child-rearing lasted until the close of the 1920s (Schlossman, 1976, p. 462).

In the 1920s character development was a strict focus. Children and teenagers were viewed as generally bad and behaviorists warned that parents should “do it right early or else.” (Schlossman, 1976).

During this time parents were led to focus solely on the proper physical and social development of their children. Children were to lead very structured, disciplined lives and learn as they were told. Many of the earlier parent-established education programs and kindergarten associations were booming within the middle class population (Schlossman, 1976).

In addition, parent cooperatives were emerging all over the country. In the 1920s, five cooperatives were established in order for children to obtain a high-quality education. In order for their children to participate in these programs, parents had to be involved in some capacity and share responsibilities (Berger, 2000).

The Parent-Teacher Association and other organizational memberships were flourishing. The PTA was formed in 1926. Parents were looking for ways to further their knowledge on childrearing and educational practices. This rise in involvement by parents was a definite sign of increasing interest in parental participation (National Society for the Study of Education, 1929).

As the 1920s drew to a close, interest in education was on the rise. Parents were optimistic and genuinely concerned about the all-around prosperity of their children. However, the nation was about to experience economic hardships and life-styles were about to change. The Great Depression of the 1930s came with varying viewpoints on childrearing that ranged from strict scheduling to self-regulation (Schlossman, 1976).

In November of 1930, the White House held a conference on child health and protection. The conference strongly centered on the idea that educational associations, organizations, and states include parent education as part of the public system (Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, 1935).

Parent education was on the rise and continued at a high rate until about the middle of the decade. Poverty was on the rise forcing families to focus on survival and well-being. Families, especially in rural areas, were struck hard and depended on all members to survive. Education was declining as a major concern; however, articles and information on childrearing and parent education continued to be distributed throughout the United States (Goodykoontz, Davis, & Gabbard, 1947).

In the 1940s, childrearing practices focused more on the child as an individual. The strict disciplines of the past were diminishing. Spock (1957) published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. In this book, he noted that the rules and regulations imposed on parents during the 1920s and 1930s were unnecessary and his publication urged parents to enjoy their children. Spock's book, which continued to flourish into the 1960s, answered questions about feeding, toilet training, management, and illnesses (Spock).

Although the Great Depression and World War II caused many hardships on family life, parent programs and federal support for educational programs were still emerging. At the close of the 1940s, family life was on the upswing and the emphasis on child and family relations was rising (Goodykoontz et al., 1947).

The 1950s brought an increase in the number of children enrolled in schools. Families were very involved with schools, often acting as room parents and hosting fundraisers. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) had more than 9 million members and was quickly expanding. Parents were leaving the basic teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic to schools; however, they played a large role as volunteers and supporters (Brim, 1965).

The 1960s brought about sweeping changes in parent involvement, social and civil rights, and family characteristics. The United States was moving from a rural nation into urbanization. Many families were now dependent on sources other than themselves for support and income. Better jobs and higher educational levels were becoming motivators causing families to relocate in search of improvement. More women were entering the labor force to help support the family. Children were beginning to be viewed as financial liabilities rather than economic assets (Brim, 1965).

In 1965 many changes came about because of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, the *Civil Rights Act of 1965*, and the formation of Head Start. As part of the War on Poverty, the Office of Economic Opportunity opened Head Start centers in the summer of 1965. This early intervention effort helped many economically disadvantaged families learn about health, nutrition, and education. Many disadvantaged children were given a head start on formal schooling (U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1962).

After the formation of Head Start, several government offices, including the Office of Education and Department of Health, undertook direction for the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Public schools were now getting twice the amount of federal funds as before. These federal monies helped to alleviate biases toward disadvantaged children and equalized educational opportunities for all children. Title I that stressed parent involvement and Title IV-C that promoted innovative programs to enrich educational opportunities were included in this act (Conant, 1968).

*The Civil Rights Act of 1965* had a significant influence on the educational world. The demand of equal rights for women and minorities had profound effects on their understanding of themselves, their relationships within the family unit, and their concern for equal opportunities (Berger, 2000).

The Vietnam War created major stress on family life and the 1970s were filled with continual change. Parents and educators continued to take an active role in

education. Schools were an important part of a child's daily life and parents began to turn to researchers and professional educators to carry out fundamental teaching methods. Researchers consistently demonstrated the importance of family involvement, enriched early childhood, and early interventions such as Head Start. Federal funding continued to increase, as a strong link between Head Start and public school was proven to be successful. Schools, government agencies, and families were all concerned with educational programs and support systems for children and parents. Parents showed genuine concern for their children's education as well as their children's future success (Tiffin, 1982).

By the close of the 1970s, there were multiple social, political, and educational issues that affected American families. The outlook for education was promising; however educators and political leaders continued to seek new and innovative educational practices.

The 1980s brought about the White House Conference on Families. This conference, which was held in Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles, struck the interest of many families. The conference focused on many issues such as child-care services, parent job schedules, and other family support avenues (Steiner, 1981).

Although Head Start continued to receive federal funding, many other areas of social life started to rapidly decline. Drug abuse, poverty, poor nutrition, and financial issues began to build causing stress in the family structure. Inflation rates skyrocketed and families in the lower socioeconomic class found themselves falling below the poverty level. Minority groups were feeling the crunch and homeless and church shelters were overcrowded (Edelman, 1987). Also, in the 1980s, social and political classes were continually developing, changing, and forcing views and opinions on the educational world, as well as, the general public.

Well into the 1990s, drug use, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, poverty, abuse, and violence were rampant. According to Darling-Hammond (1996), educational efforts were



made to improve society as a whole through character-education programs and drug abuse programs. Parent involvement was on the rise and viewed by many as the most important factor in children's education. The Department of Education emphasized strong school and family partnerships and encouraged family participation through Title I funds, Even Start, and the *Elementary and Secondary School Act*. Home schooling and charter schools were on the rise in order for parents and the community to be in control of the educational process. Choice was a major factor and many public schools were looked upon as inadequate. The 1990s were a stressful period not only for students, parents, and community members, but also for educators and educational political figures as negative stances from society were commonplace regarding the success of public education (Darling-Hammond).

### *Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

After the turn of the century, parental involvement practices were heavily scrutinized. President George Bush introduced and implemented the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2001). The act consisted of four major points and focused on increased parental involvement and awareness. The Act stated that parents were to be well informed of their children's progress and if their children's schools were not performing up to set standards, then the parents had many educational options. School report cards, school accountability, and research-based curricula are among a few of the standards that were implemented by this law (U. S. Dept. of Education).

Parent involvement continues to be among one of the most talked about issues in the educational community. Parental involvement practices have changed over time. Some practices have shown positive results while others have been unsuccessful. Positive parenting practices must continue to be nurtured in order for the American society to thrive.

### *Six Types of School-Family-Community Involvement*

Epstein (1987) identified six important types of cooperation between families, schools and community organizations. More recently, Epstein (2001) referred to parental involvement at school for the purpose of emphasizing the shared interest, responsibilities, and overlapping influences of family, school, and community. These partnerships are instrumental in maintaining the success of the current educational system. According to Dauber and Epstein (1993), one of the most important findings in studies conducted by the Center of Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning is that the involvement of parents in their children's schooling depended more on how schools seek to involve parents than on status of the parents.

Each type of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. Researchers Epstein and Lee (1995) suggested that just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are fearful about trying. This creates a rut in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action (Epstein & Lee).

### *Parenting*

The first typology, parenting, includes the basic level of support for helping all families establish home environments to support children as students. This typology ensures that:

1. a child's basic need of health is being met
2. a child's basic need of safety is being met
3. parents develop the skills that prepare children for school
4. parents develop child-rearing practices that prepare children for school

(Epstein, 2001)

Families and schools traditionally have been viewed as the institutions with the greatest effect on the development of children. In the past, home and school were viewed as two separate institutions. Schools were responsible for the academic education, whereas the home environment was solely responsible for moral and ethical education. This viewpoint has changed over the years and now both institutions are working more cooperatively to meet each child's holistic needs.

Until the 1960s, sociologists maintained that school performance and intelligence were immutably connected with socioeconomic status and family structure. However, the ideas of Dave (1963) and Wolf (1964) demonstrated that differences in children's performances could be explained by specific conditions and parental behaviors including parents' roles as language models, parents' press for achievement, and provisions for general learning.

Many families face major challenges or downfalls. All families are not on a level playing field financially, physically, mentally, or academically. All families face unique challenges based on the complete makeup of the system. Educators must provide information to all families who want it or need it, not only to the few parents who attend workshops or meetings at the school buildings (Epstein, 2001).

Families must be enabled to share information about culture, background, and their children's talents and needs. This ability to share personal information ensures that the parent feels comfortable to build a strong, trustworthy, and personal relationship with the school staff.

A final important challenge for parenting is in the school's capability to send clear, useful, and pertinent information home regarding each specific child's success in school (Epstein, 2002). This challenge can be difficult for educators as the basic school structure is expected to adequately meet a wide variety of educational abilities and backgrounds.

Clark (1983) added significantly to our understanding through an intensive study of 10 African-American students from poor homes, half of whom were successful academically and half of whom were not. The researcher discovered that parents of high-achieving students had distinct styles of interacting with their children. They created supportive home environments and provided reassurance when the youngsters encountered failure. They viewed school performance as being accomplished through regular practice and work. They accepted responsibility for assisting their children to acquire learning strategies as well as a general fund of knowledge.

Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) found that the home environment was among the most important influences on academic performance. Three types of parental engagement at home that are consistently associated with school performance have been identified. According to Wang et al. these were (a) actively organizing and monitoring the child's time, (b) helping with homework, and (c) discussing school matters with the child.

The exact form that each of these activities takes may differ from one family to another, but researchers have shown that each is important (Finn, 1993; Masten, 1994; Peng & Lee, 1992). In fact, studies of student resilience indicated that many of these same behaviors explain why some students succeed academically despite the adversities posed by poverty, minority status, or native language (Finn; Masten; Peng & Lee).

Successful parenting practices can lead to positive results for students, parents, and teachers. Students' respect for parent and family awareness can be greatly increased. Positive personal qualities and habits, beliefs, and values as taught by the family can be expected. Positive parenting practices can lead to successful self-discipline habits and personal motivation for students. Finally, students will achieve a lifetime of rewards for good school attendance and more importantly, gain a raised awareness of the importance of school (Epstein, 2002).

Parents can garner positive results through a genuine confidence and understanding of successful parenting practices. Challenges in parenting and the rewards of working through difficulties raise parental awareness and understanding. Many rewards are gained through the feeling of support from school and other parents.

Educators will also benefit from positive parenting practices. Parents who choose to communicate freely with educators open the door for understanding the family's background, culture, concerns, goals, needs, and parents' personal views of their children. The educator can gain a new respect for families' strengths and needs and better understand student diversity. Finally, after parents begin to communicate comfortably, educators begin to better understand the diversity of children and raise their own awareness skills to share information on child development.

### *Communication*

The second type of involvement identified by Epstein (2001) as one of the six basic typologies is communication. Communication is defined as the designing of effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and student progress. Communication practices are often overlooked in the general training of teachers and administrators. The communication skills of educators, parents, and students must be a major focus in order to ensure strong academic success for the student (Epstein).

Of the many professional responsibilities teachers assume, none is more important than establishing a productive working relationship with the parents of their students. Home and school too often are perceived as distinct and unrelated elements in a child's life. The gap between the two may at times seem wide and impossible to cross. In some instances the home-school relationship is viewed by parents or teachers as troublesome or adversarial. The importance of productive, ongoing involvement between parents and teachers is clear and readily acknowledged by most teachers, but the means by which

such relationships are sought and secured is less clear and often an area of great concern (Fielstein & Phelps, 2001).

The basic communication responsibility of the family is challenged in a number of ways. Teachers have highly specialized knowledge that allows them to recognize areas that need attention. However, communication must be tactful so that parents do not feel that they are being “talked down to” or lost in professional jargon (Bluestein, 1989). School personnel must take extra caution to ensure the clarity, readability, and frequency of all written communication sent to the homes. This type of communication includes notices, letters, and memos. Also, many parents face a brutal language barrier. Parents who do not speak English well or read well must have extra measures taken in order to ensure successful communication. One essential member of the parent-teacher-child triad is often missing: the child. Including the child in communication between these important adults is fundamental, but relying on the child to negotiate this relationship may make for confusion, miscommunication, and frustration (Ricci, 2000). Students need to share in the responsibility for their learning. When parents, teachers, and the student join together as a team, it is much easier to move away from blaming and toward solving a problem (Ricci).

Parents should feel comfortable talking to educators and should not feel inferior. When cooperative rather than adversarial attitudes prevail, teachers and parents can work out most of the problems faced by young people. Fundamental to the process of establishing a common purpose are goodwill, competence, and shared responsibility.

When teachers and parents meet to discuss a problem about a child, each should assume the other person with whom they are talking with care about the child and wants him or her to do well (Howe & Simmons, 2000). Teachers and parents may have different ideas or no ideas about the best way to resolve a problem; however, when two or three caring adults put their heads together in a child’s best interest, they most likely are able to find a workable solution. Once the parents feel their input is valuable, they

will likely stand ready to reinforce school expectations and monitor their children's behavior in appropriate ways (Orlich et al., 1998). When mapping out a plan to help a student in academic areas, it is most useful to assume joint ownership in the solutions. Parents, teachers, and students must cooperate and participate in the solution. The task is to work as a team, not to lay blame on the shoulders of another (Howe & Simmons, 1993).

Finally, clear two-way channels for communication must be established from school-to-home and from home-to school. This dialogue keeps the school-to-home and home-to-school lines of communication open and flowing (Epstein, 2001).

The involvement of communication in the educational process has many positive results for students and parents. Students profit from the open communication lines through an awareness of academic progress and actions that are needed to maintain or improve grades. In addition, open communication lines between school and home lead to a better understanding of school's policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct (Epstein, 2001) Finally, open communication leads to an awareness of the student's own role in the educational process and allows the student to feel as if he or she has a say in his or her education and future (Epstein et al., 2002).

Parents also gain from open lines of communication. Communication, whether written or oral, gives parents a better and more thorough understanding of school programs and policies. The parent is able to monitor and maintain ongoing dialogue about their child's progress and respond effectively to problems. Positive interactions with teachers and administrators allow for successful educational experiences and may boost community involvement (Epstein, 2001).

### *Volunteering*

Volunteering, the third identified typology, is defined as the recruiting and organizing of parents for help and support (Epstein, 2001). Increased workloads,

demanding schedules, and overall busy lives have greatly cut down on parents' volunteer time.

Although families may encourage and be supportive of their children's education, many parents are not able or likely to become actively involved in their children's school careers. Variation in participation has been attributed to the perceptions and expectations of parents' roles concerning their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1998). Researchers indicate that certain groups of parents are less likely to attend school events, volunteer in the classroom, and participate in parent education programs (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones).

Griffith (1996) reported finding lower parent participation rates in school activities, including serving as classroom volunteers, in families with the following characteristics: ethnic minority (Hispanic, African American, and Asian American), low socioeconomic status (low parental educational, income, and occupational levels), and children with special needs or circumstances (having children in special education classes or in English-as-a-second language programs). Barriers to parental volunteers include less money to pay for transportation or childcare, as well as, inflexible work schedules, and lack of paid leave (Heymann & Earle, 2000).

Volunteering practices range from school and classroom volunteer programs to PTA meeting volunteers and career-day volunteers. Volunteering practices should be nurtured and parents should be recruited so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome. Quality, not quantity, of parent volunteering in the classroom is an obvious issue. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, over 39% of all kindergarten through eighth grade schools provided some training for classroom volunteers either at the school or through the district. Of those schools, 51% indicated that they were satisfied with parents' response to the training. Schools in cities, large districts, and with more minority students were more likely to have training for classroom volunteers (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).



Schedules should be flexible enough that volunteer opportunities, assemblies, and school events can be attended by working parents. Finally, schools should organize volunteer work and train volunteers to match their time and talents. These efforts make parents and community members feel like important assets to the educational community.

Teamwork and collaboration are more likely to produce positive results than are school systems and families working independently (Mapp, 2002). Volunteering results in many positives, not only for the school, but the students, parents, and community as a whole. Students gain valuable communication skills when working with various members of the community and society. Students also gain useful knowledge about a variety of career paths, occupations, skills, and talents. Many students gain targeted attention and receive valuable tutoring from parent and community volunteers (Epstein, 2001).

As parents become involved and begin to volunteer, a clearer understanding of the teacher's job and the many different roles in the classroom becomes evident. The increased time at school allows the parent to feel more comfortable being at the school and in many cases school activities will carry over to the home. Parents become more self-confident about their ability to work in the school setting and assist other children. This comfort level carries over and parents have better overall attitudes about the educational system. Finally, as parents become more involved and volunteer more readily, student achievement begins to rise. Families become more comfortable with the educational process as a whole and feel more welcome and valued at school. When parents serve as volunteers, adult-child ratios improve greatly and children can receive much more individual attention and encouragement (Epstein, 2001).

### *Learning at Home*

If educators expect more children to be successful in the literacy experiences at school, they must strive to form lasting partnerships with parents (Fried, 2001). The fourth type of involvement described by Epstein (2001) is learning at home. Learning at

home provides the necessary information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decision-making, and planning. Learning at home can be valuable to students of all ages and abilities. Families must receive guidance and materials from schools for all grade and ability levels. Parents must receive useful information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss school work at home. Learning at home also includes information about how to assist students to improve skills in various classes and on school assessments such as grades and organizational practices (Epstein, 2001). Parents are encouraged to discuss with students what they are learning in class and participate in family math, science, reading, and language activities that correlate with school activities. Finally, parents can be a valuable tool in the participation of setting student goals and planning for future endeavors such as college or work. Although parent education, occupation, and income have been found to be related to children's reading outcomes, the actual characteristics of the atmosphere that is created by the parents of the child may be more important (Raz & Bryant, 1990).

The home environment has been considered critical in the development of a variety of cognitive and linguistic skills that have been shown to be important factors in early literacy development (Saracho, 1997). Adams (1990), in her extensive review, identified reading aloud to children as one of the most important activities for building the skills necessary for early reading. Shared reading is believed to aid in the development of word knowledge, understanding the meaning of print, and awareness of written letters and words (Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Adams (1990) estimated that children who are read to approximately 30 minutes each night will have acquired at least 1,000 hours of print exposure when they begin kindergarten. Young children who are guided through the reading process by their parents learn strategies related to information processing, gain more advanced vocabulary, and are assisted in understanding aspects of the reading experience that are not well understood when reading alone (Leseman & De Jong, 1998).

Many challenges are faced when trying to properly implement learning at home. Educators and administrators must take extra time and effort to design and organize a regular schedule or an interactive homework procedure that gives students the responsibility of discussing important things they are learning and helping families stay aware of the content of their children's class work. These interactions allow families to share with the students how regular classroom work relates to real life situations (Epstein, 2001). Teachers must be willing to coordinate homework schedules and assignments if several teachers are involved. Families must stay involved with their children in all important curriculum-related decisions and must remain informed about decisions made by educators.

Many students and parents will respond positively when steps are taken to personalize the educational process. Often students gain insight on skills, abilities, and test scores from the added concern at home. Many homework assignments are completed correctly and a positive attitude toward school work is put into place. Finally, students usually become more self-confident in their learning abilities and many times improve familial relationships through positive learning at home (Epstein, 2001).

When parents begin to gain knowledge of how to support, encourage, and help their student at home, it generally gives the parent a genuine knowledge of his or her child's level and ability as a learner. Discussions of school, class work, and homework should give the parent a true understanding of what is being taught and what the child is learning in each subject. The parent often develops an appreciation for teaching and learning.

### *Decision- Making*

Historically, schools in the United States have been governed at the local level by elected school boards, and finances have been raised primarily through local property taxes. Although local control theoretically allows for greater responsiveness to local

concerns, it does not take into account the vast inequality among communities in the United States, nor does it take into account the ways in which poverty can limit the ability of parents to influence decision making in the public schools that serve their children (Noguera, 2004).

Decision making, Epstein (2001) defined as the fifth typology, includes parents in school decisions and developing parents as leaders and representatives of the school system. Parents should be encouraged by school staff to actively participate in the PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or school committees. Parent leadership and participation in these groups can lead independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements. Parent and community involvement will lead to positive networking to link all families with a school representative and connect uninvolved parents with local and national government choices dealing with school and education.

When involving parents in decision making, great care must be taken to involve leaders from all racial and socioeconomic groups. While affluent communities generally have little difficulty eliciting community participation in school board elections, site decision-making councils, and other avenues for civic involvement, low-income communities often encounter obstacles in enlisting and sustaining the involvement of parents and a diverse cross section of community members in such activities (Epstein, 1995).

Low levels of parental and community participation in public schools is frequently interpreted as an indication of little interest in education. Yet, there is no evidence to support such an assumption. Patterns of parental involvement follow trends that are common to other forms of civic engagements such as voting, participation within political parties, and community organizations in low-income communities (Putnam, 1995). The reasons suggested for lower involvement range from lack of time and information (Gold, 2001) to feelings of powerlessness and a low sense of individual and

collective efficacy (Lareau, 1989). Whatever the explanation, it is clear that where poverty is concentrated and poor people are socially isolated, the parents of the children who experience the greatest difficulty in school also tend to be the least involved (Noguera, 2004).

To make informed decisions, parents and educators must have current, state-of-the-art information that is accessible, relevant, and time efficient (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). Training workshops can be offered to train parent representatives to go out and get input and information from all parents. Educators must lend support to parent leaders and view education as a partnership. Educators must see shared partnerships as a step in the right direction and as actions toward a shared goal, rather than a power struggle between conflicting ideas.

Students can receive positive results if parents and educational leaders share the common goal of bettering education. Students will begin to see the common work of school staff and parents and develop a new appreciation for the educational system. Students may become more aware that school and family can come together to protect their rights as students and understand there are specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations. Students' experiences can be greatly enhanced by the cooperative work of parents and educators (Epstein et al., 2002). Parents report a great sense of pride and accomplishment when teaming with educators on important decisions regarding their child's education. Helping to create and enforce educational policies allows the parent to feel a sense of ownership in the school. This ownership in turn raises awareness of parents' voices in school decisions and allows parents to share positive experiences and connections with other parents. Many parents, in the end, have a broader and deeper awareness of school, district, and state policies (Epstein et al.).

### *Collaborating With the Community*

Community collaboration, Epstein's sixth typology, identifies and integrates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein et al., 2002). Many times, schools and communities are faced with logistical problems such as location, funding, and staff maintenance when trying to organize efforts to improve education. Educators must take the extra step to coordinate efforts and inform families of community programs for students such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships. Scheduling and equity of opportunities for all families to participate in community programs must be ensured. Community efforts must be positively and promptly recognized as making a difference in the educational community.

Community is defined as all who are interested in or affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in schools. Communities need not be categorized by social or economy qualities but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools (Epstein, 2001).

Families and communities are primary venues for youth development; yet, the capacity of families and communities to support such development varies greatly (Newman, Smith, & Murphy, 1999). Family influences have a positive impact on youth development in a variety of ways (Larson, 2000). Family values can be transmitted and parents can have a significant impact on the way in which their children think about responsibility, obligations, and their role in the helping of others (Pancer & Pratt, 1999).

Because some researchers believe socialization strategies in the broader community may be more influential than youths' perceptions of their families (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998), the role of community appears to warrant further investigation. When looking at "at-risk" youth who ultimately became successful in school, several common characteristics appear: caring adults, high expectations, and opportunities to participate (Pittman & Irby, 1998). Community has an important

influence on problem behaviors in that it may provide the context in which problems express themselves; conversely, communities contribute resources to healthy adolescent development in a number of ways.

Communities provide opportunities for youth to learn how to act in the world around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence through such venues as school-sponsored programs, national youth-serving organizations (i.e., 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs), and religious and volunteer organizations (Newman et al., 1999). Other examples of community opportunities conducive to successful development include access to locations for constructive leisure-time activities such as parks, libraries, and community centers (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Parents can be great collaborators between schools and communities. Useful knowledge and use of local resources by family and children can increase awareness of careers and options for future education and work. Parental interaction with other community members allows increased social interaction among community members and raises the awareness of the school's role in the community and the community's role in the school.

Students gain increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular activities. Community collaboration increases the awareness of careers and options for future education and work (Epstein, 2001). In order to develop a sense of connectedness and productivity and to begin making decisions from a perspective that is less egocentric, young people need opportunities to participate in groups of interconnected members (i.e., clubs, teams, churches, and theater groups) that encourage them to take on responsibilities and master challenges (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Youth also need opportunities to try new roles and contribute to family and community (Pittman & Irby, 1998). When "healthy" opportunities to belong are not found in their environments, youth will create their own (often less healthy) alternatives. Similarly,

Zeldin (1995) notes that youth appear to get into serious trouble when they have too much unsupervised time.

Community collaboration increases the well-being and the positive interactions between the community members. Children are aware of the positive and negative aspects of the community in which they live. Positive community communication and interaction with school personnel usually leads to more positive attitudes in children.



## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

### *Focus of the Inquiry*

The purpose of this study was to examine specific parenting practices of families from rural communities in East Tennessee. The study followed Epstein's (1987) six important types of collaboration between families, schools, and communities. Epstein has recognized school-family-community involvement through parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Research techniques included open-ended questions and interviews using the interview guide approach (Patton, 1990). The participants had children that attended rural elementary schools in one East Tennessee school district.

### *Participants*

Eighteen parents, both male and female, each of whom had a child in the third, fourth, or fifth grade during the 2007-2008 school year were asked to participate in the study. The names of the parents were selected through purposive sampling in order to select a representative sample from the population. Purposive sampling was implemented in order to gain insightful, thick, rich information (Patton, 1990). Parents were chosen from one of three rural elementary schools in a single school district in East Tennessee. The three schools were similar in terms of student population; therefore, many of the same obstacles and strengths are addressed throughout the interview process. Each participant must have met two specific criteria for this study: (a) The parent must have had a child in the third, fourth, or fifth grade during the 2007-2008 school year, and (b)

the child must have been enrolled in the targeted school for at least 160 of 180 days of the 2007-2008 school year. Theoretical saturation was ascertained using the constant comparative data method in the field (Patton, 1990).

### *Instrumentation*

In-depth interviews were used as the data collection source for this research study. A qualitative research method depends greatly on in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are primarily conversations rather than structured question interviews. The researcher guided the question and answer flow in a relaxed manner. The participants were encouraged to talk freely, openly, and honestly about their experiences and opinions concerning parental involvement. The researcher allowed the participants to express themselves fully and attempted to avoid researcher bias or opinion.

After the initial interviews took place, the participants were asked to meet again for the purpose of member checking. The process of member checking is to ensure that participants were interpreted accurately and researcher biases were not evident. After the process of member checking was complete, the researcher looked for common themes throughout the interviews. These common threads were used to make recommendations to administrators, teachers, and parents on improving the parental involvement practices in rural elementary schools.

### *Data Collection and Recording Modes*

The interviews were collected in a comfortable and private setting. The participants in this study were informed that everything being said was recorded and

transcribed by the researcher. Extensive, detailed field notes were recorded throughout the interview process. The raw data were organized into useful narratives in order to derive themes and commonalities from the gathered information. The findings, understandings, and themes that emerged throughout the interview process are included in this study.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The analysis of the study began with the gathering and organizing of raw data. Through constant comparison, significant categories emerged through the collected data. Data were then coded into the QSR Nonnumerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theory-building (NUD.IST) software system. NUD.IST was designed to search and organize qualitative data through common threads and themes (QSR International, 2007). Each common theme was coded and developed according to the raw data gathered. After the raw data were organized, relationships between the themes began to emerge leading to theoretical saturation. The grounded theory approach, as described by Strauss (1987) and Glasser (1992), was followed throughout the process. The grounded theory approach allowed the researcher to draw on constructs from the immediate data rather than pulling from existing theories. Triangulation consisting of interviews, member checking, and a literature review were used to ensure the validity of the research findings (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

### *Logistical Issues*

In the initial stage of the research study, the researcher contacted the Director of Schools to summarize the research study and secured written permission to continue with

the study. The researcher then contacted the principal from each of the elementary schools from which participants were drawn. The principals were given an interview guide and asked for guidance in selecting possible research participants. The researcher worked closely with each principal in the selection of participants so that purposive sampling was employed.

In order to guarantee confidentiality, the researcher initially approached the research participants by phone. The researcher described the research process and the general objectives of the study. The researcher attempted to secure interviews from both male and female potential participants; however, only female participants agreed to interview for the study. After the parent participant agreed to take part in the study, a consent form and an interview guide were sent by mail for review. Consent forms were secured from all participants prior to the interview process.

#### *Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Data*

In the attempt to ensure trustworthiness of the collected data, the researcher employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic epistemology techniques to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility is a researcher's attempt to establish compatibility between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents and those that are attributed to them. Credibility must be established through prolonged engagement and persistent observation. The researcher must engage in the study until data saturation occurs. Triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking are imperative to the credibility of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability, as viewed by the naturalistic researcher, maintains that no true generalization is really possible and that all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. The naturalistic researcher does not maintain that knowledge gained from a study will have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another time frame. Transferability was maintained through thick rich descriptive language and purposive sampling. These strategies of precision were used in order to allow the reader to make accurate judgments about the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability, the ability to account for changes in the design of the study and the changing conditions surrounding what was studied, was achieved through the use of an auditor. The auditor, a graduate of the ELPA program, ensured honesty and accuracy of the collected data. The auditing process evolved after the data had been collected, organized, and analyzed. Procedures, as outlined in Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), provided the foundation for the auditing process.

Conformability, the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the focus of the biases of the researcher, was established through a thorough audit trail.

### *Summary*

This study was conducted in three rural elementary schools in a school district in East Tennessee. Because of the nature of the study, the researcher operated under a naturalistic paradigm and employed a qualitative methodology. Parents who had a child in the third, fourth, or fifth grades for the 2007-2008 were asked to participate in the

study. The parents were identified using Patton's (1990) purposive sampling so that rich, thick descriptive data could be drawn. Interviews were led using an interview guide. Information gathered through the qualitative interview process was organized and analyzed to identify commonalities and specific similarities. Credibility and trustworthiness was attained through triangulation, peer debriefings, and member checking. Dependability and conformability was ensured through the use of a confirmable audit trail (Patton, 1990).

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine specific parenting practices and parental involvement practices of families from rural school communities. Parents were interviewed to find out the perceived positive and negative effects of parental involvement in their children's school.

Twelve parents of students enrolled in the third, fourth, or fifth grade during the 2007-2008 school year were purposefully selected to participate in this research investigation. The parents were chosen from one of three rural schools in one East Tennessee school district. The schools from which participants were chosen were the schools with the lowest student enrollment for the 2007-2008 school year. Each of the 12 parents willingly chose to participate in qualitative, in-depth interviews with the researcher. The 12 interviews took place in the fall of 2008.

Over the past decade, the researcher has taught third grade at a small rural elementary school. The researcher has experienced many types of parental involvement, as well as lack thereof. These involvement experiences aided the researcher in preparing the interview guide and conducting interviews conducive to adding depth to the parental involvement knowledge base.

The information collected from the parents was inductively analyzed and the feelings and opinions described by the participants are not generalizable to all rural school systems. Chapter 4 presents an introduction to the participants, participants' perceptions of parenting, participants' perceptions of communicating, participants'

perceptions of volunteering, participants' perceptions of learning at home, participants' perceptions of decision-making, participants' perceptions of collaboration with the community, and an analysis of the data.

The location of the interviews was a small, conference-like room in a school library. The room was completely private and had little or no décor. The walls were generally bare with the exception of a wall-mounted magazine rack and a clean white board. A table was centered in the room and four chairs were placed around the table. The interviewer sat on one side of the table and the interviewee directly across the table. The audio cassette recorder was placed in clear view and was accessible by both the interviewer and the interviewee.

The researcher and participants agreed on predetermined times to meet at the school. The participants were met at the front door of the school by the researcher and led discreetly to the interview room. The researcher introduced herself before beginning the interview process. Participants were reminded of the anonymity of the research process and were reminded that they may stop the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions. Before the interviews began, the researcher once again asked for verbal permission and went over the basis for the study. Consent forms were turned in to the researcher by each participant and reviewed for any final questions or concerns by the participant.

### *Introduction to the Participants*

The motivation for this study was based on the concerns of the researcher as an educator. Many studies have been conducted surrounding the positive and negative effects of parental participation; however, few of those relate directly to rural schools.



## Participant #1

Prior to the interview session, Nina was contacted on the telephone to discuss the possibility of her participation in the research study. Nina was hesitant to participate in the study and asked the researcher to give her a bit of time to think about the interview. The researcher asked Nina if she would like a copy of the interview guide and asked Nina if she would like a return call in a few days. The researcher left her telephone number and assured Nina that her decision to participate or not would be kept confidential and respected.

Nina contacted the researcher the following day and agreed to be interviewed. The researcher once again offered to send Nina a copy of the interview guide, but Nina declined saying that she was “fine without seeing a guide.”

When Nina arrived to the interview, she seemed a bit apprehensive but agreed to continue with the interview.

Nina is a 34-year-old stay-at-home mother. She has been married for 11 years and has one child. Nina’s daughter, a third-grader, is involved in many activities at the school including basketball and girl scouts. Nina’s daughter has attended Chapel Elementary School since Kindergarten. Nina stated, “being a stay-at-home-mom has been a dream come true. I enjoy spending time with my family, attending church and working out with friends.”

## Participant #2

Wilma is a 38-year-old, single mother of two sons, ages 8 and 16. Wilma has been divorced from the father of the two boys for 7 years. Wilma’s younger son is a third

grader at Center Elementary School, where he has attended since the 2nd semester of Kindergarten. Wilma is a hostess and cashier at an area restaurant and has held the position for 2 years.

Wilma was extremely interested in participating in the research project. She stated, "I feel cheated because I was unable to finish college. I had completed 2 years when I got married. I had to work and put my husband through his last year of college. He never allowed me to finish my college." Wilma showed disgust and irritation as she expressed her regrets. Wilma also expressed with visible glum, "we divorced after 16 years of marriage and I became a single mom."

### Participant #3

Dara is a 30 to 40-year-old, stay-at-home mother. She declined to reveal her exact age. She is very proud of her children and was extremely free with information about her children and their educational experiences, both present and past. Dara is married and has two children: a daughter who is 6 years old and in first grade and a son who is 10 years old and in fifth grade. The children attend Cove Elementary School where they have attended since Kindergarten. Dara stated, "In my free time, which is very little, because I am always running the kids, I enjoy reading, spending time with my family and volunteering at school."

Dara was attractively dressed and eager to participate in the interview. She spoke with candor and was informative about her children's educational experiences, school administration, and teaching staff.

#### Participant #4

Patsy is a 31-year-old mother of two. She has a son who is 9 years old and in fourth grade and a daughter who is 5 years old and in Kindergarten at Cove Elementary School. Patsy is married to the father of the children and considers her occupation to be a “stay-at-home mom.” Patsy and her husband own a catering business that Patsy is primarily responsible for. Patsy stated, “It is a small business, but provides me with extra income and allows me to adjust to the schedules of my kids.”

Patsy arrived a bit late for the interview. She was a bit frazzled but assured the researcher that she felt like proceeding with the interview. Patsy was informative about her experiences with the educational system. She spoke highly of her children’s educational experiences and stated that she was “very involved with the school.” She explained, “I served on the PTA council, and did a lot of volunteering like RIF, headed up fundraisers for the school and I have served as room mother several times.”

#### Participant #5

Donelle is a 29-year-old single mother of two daughters. Her daughters, ages 8 and 10 years, are third and fifth grade students at Center Elementary School. Donelle grew up in the Center community and said that she has a good perspective of the school and the community’s progression over the years. Donelle has been divorced from the girls’ father for 7 years and has basically “raised my girls by myself with some help from my mother.” Donelle works as a desk clerk and has had multiple desk clerking positions over the past 8 years. Donelle seemed a bit timid and somewhat reserved at the beginning of the interview but relaxed as the interview progressed.

#### Participant #6

Patricia is a 54-year-old grandmother of two children. She has legal custody of her son's two children. Patricia's grandson is 6 years old and in first grade and her granddaughter is 8 years old and in third grade. Patricia's grandchildren attend Chapel Elementary School. Patricia has worked in a factory for the past 10 years. She and her husband have been married for 14 years; however, her husband is not the biological grandfather of the children.

During the interview, Patricia was tired and easily distracted. She stated, "I don't have no hobbies that I can think of, I am too tired to enjoy anything." When speaking of the children's experiences at home, Patricia was resentful. She explained, "I have to be the mother and father and can't just be the grandmother."

Patricia was somewhat difficult to engage in conversation and appeared to have other things on her mind. Her answers were short and direct.

#### Participant #7

Debbie is the mother of one daughter who is 9 years of age. Debbie's daughter is in the fourth grade at Center Elementary School. Debbie, who is 34 years old, is married to the father of her daughter and is a stay-at-home-mother. Debbie regularly substitute teaches at her daughter's school and stated, "Being a teacher's assistant is my dream." Debbie is very interested in the "goings-on" at her daughter's school and regularly volunteers in her daughter's classroom, other classrooms, the library and computer lab.

Debbie was eager to participate in the interview and happily shared her story and experiences about her daughter's educational experiences at Center Elementary School.

#### Participant #8

Stacy is a 32-year-old single mother of two daughters. Stacy's daughters are third and fifth graders at Cove Elementary School. Stacy has been employed at an area grocery store for 2 years and works part-time at an area snack shop.

Stacy, who looked much younger than 32, was visibly tired. When asked about hobbies or enjoyable activities, Stacy replied, "I don't have time for any hobbies. I work so much and barely have time for my kids, so there is no time at all for myself."

Stacy made no reference to the father of her children and responded "single" when asked about her marital status. Stacy stressed the important role her mother played in the lives of her children. She explained, "If it were not for my mom, we couldn't make it. She helps out so much and keeps the kids a lot, especially at night and on weekends when I have to work."

#### Participant #9

Kimberly is a 30-year-old mother of two children. Kimberly's son is a 6-year-old Kindergarten student and her daughter is a 9-year-old fourth grader. Kimberly is married to the father of the children. The children have attended Chapel Elementary School since Kindergarten and will continue to go to Chapel Elementary School despite the fact that Kimberly has to drive them to and from school each day. Kimberly and her family live outside the bus radius for Chapel Elementary School but insist that their children will continue to attend the school.

Kimberly works as a sales host at a local theme park and has been employed at the park for 3 years. “Sales management is what I am after. The money is a lot better and the hours are not as bad. Other than the summer, I would have more time off with the kids and my husband.”

Kimberly stated that she enjoyed “reading, camping, and hiking” during her free time.

#### Participant #10

Tracy is a 38-year-old mother of three daughters. Tracy’s children are 20, 18, and 9 years of age. Tracy’s nine-year-old daughter is a fourth grade student at Center Elementary School. Tracy is a single mother and has been divorced from the girls’ father for 5 years. She has worked as bookkeeper and secretary for 4 years. Tracy was very outspoken during the interview process and numerous times stated how she “would do things different if I was in charge.”

Tracy stated that she enjoyed “meeting new people on the internet and hanging out with friends.”

#### Participant #11

Dolly is a 49-year-old grandmother of two grandsons ages 8 and 9. The boys are third and fourth grade students at Center Elementary School. Dolly and her husband are the primary caregivers of the boys; however, they do not have legal custody of their son’s children. The boys reside with Dolly and her husband. Dolly assumes full financial responsibility for the children, as the boys rarely see their father. The boys do not know

their mother and as Dolly stated, “Mom has been out of the picture since the boys were babies.”

Dolly enjoys caring for the boys and showed little resentment when asked about the responsibility of rearing them. Dolly stated, “They are a lot of work and I am older, but I rest better at night knowing that they are safe, fed, and warm.”

Dolly stated, “I am always tired, but I try to get up every morning and walk. I feel like I need to stay in shape and try to keep a healthy heart in order to make sure that the boys are taken care of.”

#### Participant #12

Amanda is a 23-year-old mother of three children. Amanda and her husband have two babies ages 3 and 1 year. Amanda is the stepmother of a 9-year-old boy who is a fourth-grade student at Chapel Elementary School. Amanda’s stepson is her husband’s son from a previous relationship. Amanda is employed at a local bank where she has worked for 2 years. Amanda recently graduated with her associate degree in banking and was proud of her achievement.

Amanda and her husband are responsible for the care of their son on a part-time basis and “stress the importance of education” as often as they can.

Amanda and her family enjoy traveling and spending time outdoors. Amanda and her husband “enjoy going to our children’s games and dance recitals.”

Each parent participant interviewed in this study can be described as possessing varying characteristics and each participant’s parental involvement experiences differ

considerably from the others. The following sections reveal each participant's opinions and perceptions on their parental participation experiences.

### *Parenting*

Epstein (2001) defines parenting as the process of helping all families establish home environments to support children as students. The research participants added much insightful information about their experiences as a parent or guardian.

When asked about the relationship between parenting and education, Dolly replied:

Well, I believe education and our kids are the keys to the future. We insist that our boys do homework, first thing when they get home every night. We make them do it neat and then one of us [Dolly or her husband] checks over their work to make sure it is done right.

When asked if the boys were rewarded or punished for good or bad grades, Dolly responded:

My boys are expected to do their best, no matter what. They do not get a reward for doing good work, except for maybe the end of the 6 weeks, sometimes. I expect them to do good without money or toys behind it. We didn't get money for good grades when I was growing up, we was just expected to do good and if we didn't, well then we knowed what was coming to us. I think too many parents give their kids too much stuff for doing good and then the kids expect a prize every time they turn around.

Amanda stated that her idea of parenting and school collaboration in the following way:

An involved parent makes contact with the teacher to make sure they are on the same page with the child's learning process. They [the parents] also bring up any issues or concerns they might have. An involved parent also takes part in helping with parties, fundraising and any school activities.

Amanda proceeded to say regarding parent involvement:

At our house, we find education very important. We think it is important to make good grades and go to school and have good attendance. Also, we try to make sure he is at school on time. After he is picked up from school or the Boys and Girls club, he starts his homework while dinner is cooking. If he is done before dinner, one of us checks it and he



is allowed to play. If his homework is not done before dinner, we make him finish after dinner. If there is a test or something during the week, we go over the study guide several times before he is allowed to play. If no study guide is provided at school, we make him one and then we go over it a bunch of times each night. If he brings home bad grades, his punishment is not TV or play station, but if he brings home straight A's, then his mamaw gives him 50 bucks. I don't believe education is as important at his mother's [biological mother] house. He is split between our house and hers and I know the enforcement of homework is much more relaxed there. He is tardy to school a lot and even misses school on avoidable occasions. This makes it a lot harder for us to teach him the importance of a good education.

Tracy's idea of parental participation was "someone who talks to with the teacher on a weekly basis to see how their child is doing." Tracy stated that she "rarely gets to meet with the teacher because of her work schedule. I work from 8 to 5 and by the time I get off and get back to the school, everyone is already gone." When asked if she participates in the parent-teacher conferences, Tracy responded, "when I remember about them."

Tracy expressed the following thoughts about her involvement at school:

I want my girls to get a good education. I try to tell them that they have to try hard at school and do good in order to get a good job and make a lot of money. I do all I can to help with homework, but I don't have anybody else at home to help with supper or laundry, so usually my evenings consist of housework and not too much time with my girls. Sometimes I feel bad about this and wish things were different.

Kimberly described parental involvement as "being familiar and comfortable with my child's teachers and principal and knowing what is going on at school, like games and just all kinds of activities." She stated, "A good education improves the quality of your life." Kimberly explained, "Both of my kids will be given the chance to go to the college of their choice, so it is their responsibility to do their homework."

Kimberly describes herself in the following way:

I am a pretty relaxed parent, I guess. There are no specific homework rules at our house. The kids just kind of do what works for them, as long as the work gets done. The children choose their own study routines. I do not mind if they watch TV or listen to music or even take a lot of breaks along the way. Just so the homework gets done. Not doing the homework is not an option, so I do step in if there is a problem. I do not reward or punish my kids for grades; good grades are just expected, as is going to school.

Stacy described her ideas of parenting and involvement by stating ‘involved parents come in and help out, and go to ball games and other things at school.’ She stated that:

I believe my kids should get a good education. I try to encourage them at home to do their best in school. If my kids get bad grades, then they are not supposed to watch TV until their grades improve. Sometimes, if the kids do good in school or get an extra good grade, then my mom will take them out to eat or whatever they want to do. My mom helps out so much with the kids. I work a lot so she has to help them with their homework the best she can. She tries, but sometimes the stuff they bring home to do is even tricky for me and her.

Debbie added this about her parenting experiences at school:

Parental involvement to me means staying active with everything your child does in school. I help my daughter with her homework when she is having trouble with a certain area in a subject. She does her work, when she is finished, then I check over it and the ones she has done wrong, we go over together so she can understand the problem. When she is having trouble in a subject, I go online and find worksheets or activities and have her do extra work so she gets more practice where she is having trouble.

Debbie stated that she does reward and punish her daughter for grades:

When report cards come out, if she has grades that went down, then she loses her extra activities, like girl scouts and getting treats from the store. When the grades go back up, then she gets to go back to girl scouts or pick whether we go out and eat or get some other reward for doing a good job. We want to instill in her that working hard will pay off in the end. My husband also feels education is very important and she should always try to do her best.

Nina stated that, “I always volunteer at any parties or special events and help anywhere I can. I also like to go on field trips and if I can, I go to PTO meetings.” Nina encouraged her daughter to “set aside a special time to do homework before she watches any TV.” Nina assists her daughter with homework as much as she is capable. “I try to explain how to do things to her. I don’t just give her the answer. I try to get her to check out books from the library, so she can learn to read good and get a high-paying job.”

## *Communicating*

Epstein (2001) described communicating as the process of designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and student progress.

The participants conveyed their ideas of school communications in a variety of ways. The communication forms included oral or written as deemed convenient by each participant.

Donelle expressed that communication was a necessary component in the educational process. She felt that “writing notes” and “an occasional phone call to the teacher” was adequate for her children. Donelle stated, “Some parents might want to talk to the teacher more, but I try not to take up much of her [teacher] time. I know she is busy and will call me if something is wrong.” Donelle suggested:

It would be nice if we [parents] could get a list of times to call or an e-mail address to ask the teachers questions. I think I would use e-mail more to communicate with the teacher if I had her e-mail address or knew a good time to call her.

Patsy shared her view of communication and had this to say about the success she had with parent to teacher communication:

As for communication between home and school, I always attend parent-teacher conferences. Also, one of my kid’s teachers did a monthly newsletter that was always sent home. I loved the newsletter because it let me know what was going on in the classroom and what to expect that was coming up. It helped me plan my work schedule better.

Patsy spoke very positively of her communications with the school her children attend and stated, “I always feel welcome to call the teachers if I have any questions or concerns. They are always willing to go out of their way to help my children and our family.”

Patricia was less satisfied with her school-to-home-communication experiences. She stated:

I talk to the teacher about once every six weeks or so. I either call or go in to the conferences. I usually have questions about the homework. The kids say there is no homework, and then the grades come home and they [grades] are awful and then I have to either call or go by [the school].

Patricia stated that she would like to “have a weekly report card on grades and class activities or their progress.” Patricia commented on the school-to-home communication, “I think the school tries to communicate with me, but I am so busy trying to just raise the kids that I don’t have much time or energy to go up to the school to talk.” Patricia stated once again, “I wish I could just be their mamaw. I love them and want what’s best for them, but I get so nervous trying to help them because I don’t know half of what I’m doing either, especially with this new math.”

Dara was eager to share her communication experiences with the school. She stated, “I attend everything I can at the school, no matter what. My kids come first and I will make sure of that.” Dara works as a volunteer when she has free time and “wants to serve on any committees or fundraising teams that I can.” Dara stated that she would “love to volunteer in her children’s classrooms, but the teachers never ask me.”

Debbie commented on her avenues for successful communication with the school. Debbie expressed, “communication at school takes place through talking with her teachers, I write notes, and being a substitute teacher, sometimes, and hearing announcements. Also, I go to the PTO meetings sometimes when I can get back up to school.”

Debbie’ eagerness to communicate with her daughter’s teacher is evident. She stated:

I try to talk to Mrs. A [her daughter’s teacher] at least once a week. I am usually at school and if I am not there, then I just send a note with B [her daughter]. A lot of times I just

need to ask about what fundraising activities we are going to work on next and start to try and come up with ideas for that.

When asked about the communication from the school to home, Debbie responded, “The teacher has contacted me on several occasions. Usually just in the hallway or even sometimes, she will send a note home asking about fundraising or could I sub for her.”

Debbie is persistent in her efforts to communicate effectively with the school. She said:

I believe communication with the school about my daughter’s education is great. I know if my daughter is having trouble, I would be contacted and if I thought there was a problem that I could contact the school or teacher and a meeting or note would be sent and everything would be taken care of.

Debbie concluded her high regard for communication by stating:

I can honestly say that if I needed to talk to a teacher or the principal, I could do it very easily because at my daughter’s school, they are a great bunch, who care and want any problems corrected in a timely manner. Also, they are flexible with their schedules so it couldn’t be any easier to talk with them.

Kimberly’s idea of communication was revealed as “most communication takes place through notes from the school office and the classroom teacher.” She claims that:

My work schedule prevents me from going to most parent-teacher conferences, so my contact with the teachers has been either after school or before school starts or when I drop off or pick up the kids. There has not been a need to contact my children’s teachers. I receive the report cards and a lot of notes about what is going on at school. I feel sure that if I need to know something about my children, that someone would call me.

Kimberly stated more about communication efforts by the school:

I would like to donate my time, but it’s easier for me to just donate supplies or money. Because my time is valuable, I respect the teachers’ time and do not call or e-mail, even though they assure us [parents] to do so. I learned early on that participation in the PTO meant that they needed volunteers and I do not have time to volunteer, so I quit attending the meetings.

## *Volunteering*

Epstein (2001) defined volunteering as recruiting and organizing parental help and support at school. The research participants described their experiences as volunteers at their children's schools.

Nina described her volunteer experience as "I help with holiday class parties and work the games at fall festival, if I am asked to. I always attend any school events that I possibly can."

Donelle's views of volunteering included more than time. Donelle stated, "I volunteered to send supplies for the PTO dinner and I work concessions for the ballgames when I can. I let the people in charge know when I am available and that I am willing to help and then they can let me know if they need me to help." Donelle expressed that she was willing to do most any type of volunteer work, but she was limited due to her "work schedule."

Patricia's volunteer experiences were limited due to a demanding work schedule. "I could not volunteer much because I work from 7 to 3, five days a week. The kids are in after school sports, so I just run them and that's about all the volunteering I get done."

Wilma states her experiences with volunteering at her children's school:

I do not get to do volunteer work at school, during the day, due to my job. Now I do get to volunteer some in the library after school and when I am laid off. I told the teachers and the principal the days and times I am off and when I was available to help out. I did volunteer by bringing in party items and I would like to have volunteered to read with children in the classroom.

Stacy expressed her volunteering regrets by stating:

I don't have time to volunteer because I work all the time. I did send in some cupcakes for a bake sale last spring because the teacher sent home a note asking for bake sale items. I wish I had more time to help, but I just don't have time.

Dara spends a lot of time volunteering and seeking out opportunities to help at school. "I always let the teachers know I'm available to come in and help.

Dara expressed:

I have helped out with the PTA fundraising, as the classroom mother, copying papers for the teacher and so many other things I can't even think of right this minute. I am a born volunteer and I think every parent should take the time to help out their child's school.

When asked if Tracy did any volunteer work at her daughter's school, she curtly responded, "no," with no further explanation. Tracy was then questioned as to ways that the school may be more accommodating to parent volunteers. She firmly responded, "They can pay my bills, so I don't have to work and then I will come in and help out."

When questioned if volunteering opportunities were more convenient to her work schedule, Tracy agreed that she would be more willing to help and "I wouldn't be picky about what I help out with."

Dolly was also questioned about her opportunities to volunteer at her grandsons' school. She candidly responded:

I don't have time for extra work with the kids. It is about all I can do to get them ready to go to school of a morning. Volunteering is out of the question with my age and health. Let some of the younger generation volunteer. I did when my son was little.

Amanda discussed her volunteer experiences in the following manner:

Yes, I've volunteered at the school this year. Our son's mother signed him up to be the class representative for the fall festival, so I helped out in the fundraising for that. Also, since I work at the bank and all, I volunteered to help count the money at the festival.

Amanda stated regretfully the following about her volunteer initiations:

I didn't necessarily initiate the volunteering for this [fundraising], but I also was not totally aware of what was going on. I don't mind assisting in events or helping with school activities, but I am not usually aware of everything that is going on or know what to do. If papers are sent home when he is not at our house, then I have no way to know anything that is going on at school. Many, many times in the past I had no idea that help

was needed at school, and I hate this so much because we want to be involved. I would definitely be more willing to help out more if I had enough notice to ask off work or if the activities were scheduled at a different time than my work.

Debbie stated, “Volunteer work at school is important. I volunteer as much as I can.” When asked to explain her volunteering experiences, Debbie stated:

I volunteer mostly in the library. I help shelve books, help with RIF, and the book fair. Kindergarten goes to the library every day, so I try to stay and help do activities with them. They get so restless, that it is hard for one person to handle them for a whole hour. I’ve also helped a lot in the lunchroom and everywhere else I am needed. Sometimes the principal or resource officer will ask me to help with different activities. I always feel good when they ask and I can help them.

Debbie stated:

I love to help out in the library or helping teachers with activities in their classrooms. I want to be a teacher’s assistant so bad I can’t stand it. I have been trying to get on for like three years, but they say they’re not hiring any more assistants, so I don’t know if I will ever get on or not. I just keep hoping.

### *Learning at Home*

Epstein (2001) defined learning at home as providing information and suggestions to families about how to help children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. The participants added insightful information on their experiences and interactions with school staff involving learning at home.

Dara explained her ideas about learning at home:

We set the stage early that school is number one over every other activity. We make activities for learning at home fun and try to find things that are hands-on for the kids to do that helps them with their schoolwork. We always enter the science fair, whether their teacher requires it or not. My kids do not always like to do the work on the science board, and I help them with that a lot, but they love to do the experiments. I wish more kids got involved with the science fair. My kids, just love to win the trophies.

Stacy responded to the learning-at-home inquiry in the following manner:

If my kids make the honor roll, my mom takes them somewhere fun. My mom helps them with their homework when she takes care of them. I try to tell them to do their best



because I do not want them to end up like me, working for minimum wage at two jobs just to pay the bills.

Stacy stated the following about her children's experiences with homework:

I think the kids do have way too much homework. Sometimes my mom says they work on homework for three hours at night. That's just too much. I don't think they should have over one hour of homework.

Wilma stated that her boys are encouraged to do well at home and school and voiced a few of the encouragements she finds successful:

My boys love to go to McDonald's and love to use the sticker chart. When they do well in school or do something good at home I give them a sticker on the chart. After they collect so many stickers then we have a special reward like, eating out or getting something from Wal-Mart. They love this and it seems to work for us.

Wilma explained that she was "happy with the ideas she gets from school about how to help and encourage the boys. I can't think of anything else the school could tell me to help the kids."

Patricia gave insight to her ideas of learning at home:

I talk to the kids about how important it is to get a good education and go to college and how it will affect their lives. I help them with as much homework as I can, but now days things are different than when I was growing up. We just had to read and do a little math, but these kids are expected to know a whole lot more. I think about too much, too soon. Kids can only remember so much at one time.

Patricia stated the following when questioned about additional information the school could provide for learning at home opportunities, "I really don't know how the school could help. Time is the biggest thing for me. I would like to be more involved, but I just cant right now. I am doing the best I know how to do."

Debbie felt strongly about the idea of learning at home and had this to share about her experiences:

Our daughter is encouraged to do well at home, school, church or wherever else she might be. We use praise, special extras, and family night for encouragement. We want

her to feel like that doing things at home is just as important as being out in public or school and learning. We tell her that she can learn things everywhere.

Debbie added, “She responds good to extra praise and loves family night. We take her out to eat and sometimes, if the weather is nice, we might play putt-putt.” When asked if there was anything that the school could do to make learning at home easier, Debbie responded:

I do not have any problems being involved with my child’s education. It is the most important steps in her life. It’s not the school’s problem to be accommodating to the home. I believe it the parent’s job to make sure their child, no matter what, gets an education and there are no excuses. I may be in my own world, but it is my job to raise my child to do her best and get the best education that I can give her.

Tracy stated that she did “feel like the kids are encouraged to do well at home.” She explained that she helps her children with their homework during “study time or homework time.” She stated that she assists her girls with homework on a daily basis and that she “will always be there to support my kids in school and in sports.”

Amanda stated that her son “is definitely encouraged to do his best at our house.” She also reinforced the fact that, “homework and study is first priority.” Amanda’s son is involved in basketball and she stated, “We are very involved with his sport.”

Patsy stated:  
I definitely feel that my children were encouraged to do well at home. I started reading to my kids at a very early age and I think that helped a lot. I help my kids with their homework, but I think it is very important for the kids to take responsibility for their own work.

Dara added what learning at home meant to her family:  
I always reward my kids for making honor roll and good attendance at school. I try to stress how important it is to be a good student and act right at school. I want my kids to accept responsibility for their own actions at home and at school. I think the sooner kids learn to take responsibility for their own actions, the better. Too many moms and dads get their kids out of trouble and I don’t think that is a good idea. Just because you might have a lot of money or be a bigwig in town, doesn’t mean that your kid shouldn’t be punished

the same as mine. I get so tired of the double standard, but I guess that's why they say, 'life's not fair'."

Donelle stated that her girls "usually make the honor roll." She rewards them with "praise and sometimes material rewards, but I think good grades should be their own reward." Donelle explained that her children were involved with other extra curricular activities and that she felt like the school "does enough to help me with ideas on homework, after school stuff, and fundraising."

### *Decision-Making*

Epstein (2001) defined decision-making as including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. The research participants shared their experiences and decision-making opportunities at their children's school.

Nina described her decision-making experience, "The school has an open-door policy for talking to the teachers and principal. I have attended community meetings and helped come up with ideas on how to raise money for the school."

Patsy stated the following about her experiences with decision-making:

I am aware that I have the right to make some decisions at the school. I have been involved in the PTA and while everyone was encouraged to participate, when it came right down to the decision-making, I felt that it was definitely not my decisions that were carried through. It seems like there were other, maybe stronger, opinions that were pushed and other ideas that were thrown out, and were never even considered to my knowledge.

Amanda stated:

I don't believe that we have ever been asked to be involved with any kind of decisions regarding our son's education. Once his speech teacher did ask my husband and his mother [biological mother] if they felt his speech time could be cut back. That is about the only decision that I can think of, that we have ever been involved in.

Amanda commented further on decision-making. "I am not sure why we have not been approached, most things may go through his mother if they are being brought to

someone's attention.”

Debbie assured the researcher of her right to be involved in decision-making at school, “Yes, I know it is my right to be involved in making decisions on the building and local levels. She went on to state:

I've been approached about my opinion on issues. PTO asked and talked about certain issues about the school and I've given them my input. Also, I've been involved on the parent board for making education better in schools. I'm usually at every PTO meeting and I think that if a parent doesn't feel involved in their child's school, then it is their own fault. All the parent has to do is come and ask questions.

Donelle explained her decision-making experiences, “I go to every PTO meeting and was very involved with their SACS accreditation thing. I also sat in on a committee meeting to choose a layout for the new school.”

Kimberly was minimally concerned when speaking of her decision-making involvement, “I know parent complaints can do a lot to change things, but, for the most part, I feel like the decisions made at the school and at the central office are for the benefit of the kids.”

Tracy was questioned regarding her parental rights and responsibilities in the educational decision-making process. She responded, “I have never been asked to make any decisions and they wouldn't listen even if I did make a suggestion. That's what teachers and principals get paid for. It's not my job to decide what goes on in schools.” When Tracy was asked if she would be interested in becoming more vocal in the decision-making process, she negatively shook her head and responded, “Nope.”

Patricia responded “no” when asked if she had ever been involved in the building level or local level decision-making process. She explained, “Nobody has ever asked me to participate, but I did fill out a survey, I believe, on the dress code or something one

time.” Patricia stated about her involvement, “I’m not really interested in becoming more vocal in the decision-making process, weekends are about the only time I could help anyhow.”

Stacy stated this about her decision-making opportunities:

I have never been asked to be involved in any decision-making at the school. I guess, maybe I would if I went to the parent meetings, someone might have asked, but I usually don’t go anyway because all they ever talk about is donations, and raising money. My friend told me this because she went once last year. I wish they would just understand that I am barely feeding and clothing my kids. I don’t have any extra money to give to the school, if I did [have extra money], I would.

Dara was informative and affirmative that she was involved in the decision-making at her child’s school. She stated, “Our opinion is invited and even encouraged at meetings and school committee meetings. We go to all the school meetings and the community club meetings. I am always looking for new ideas to suggest.”

Dara explained that she was “heavily involved in school fundraising, helping to spend the money raised at school, and I even help plan some after school activities for the kids who have to stay at school until their parents pick them up.”

Dolly spoke about her involvement in decision-making at the school and local level:

I talk to the school board member on a regular basis. He’s our neighbor. He keeps me informed on the important things I need to know about at the school and even in the county. I trust him completely and I go straight to him and give my opinions. I think it’s better to just save your time and go straight to the top.

When questioned further about voicing her concerns to the school board member, Dolly stated, “Well, I can’t think of anything right off hand that he’s done just for me, but his wife does call and let me know if the kids are going to be two hours late or school has been cancelled and I appreciate that, you know.”

## *Collaborating with the Community*

Epstein (2001) defined collaborating with the community as identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Dara stated that she had not received any “help or support from the school or from any community services.” She stated that she did, “volunteer from time to time at the food pantry, but it was too depressing to volunteer on a regular basis. I would rather volunteer somewhere more upbeat.”

Stacy stated, “I did not know the school could help find additional services.” She proceeded to say:

I would love to get some extra tutoring for my kids if it is free. I can’t afford to pay, but any little bit of help would help us out so much. Also, it would have to be at school or somewhere that the bus could drop them off because of my work schedule.

Patricia was questioned about the advantages of the many community services offered in her area. She quickly and frankly responded:

“No, we don’t need anybody’s help. We’ll be just fine. My grandbabies may not always have the best clothes or the finest shoes, but there will always be food on our table and a warm place to sleep every night. I appreciate the thought, but no thanks.”

Tracy stated that she had never taken advantage of community services, but that she “would like to know more about what is offered.” She further explained that she would like to, “get emails or notes to tell me about free tutors. My kids could use any free tutoring services they could get.”

Kimberly stated that she had taken advantage of some of the community aid programs provided by the school. She explained:

My kids took part in the dental or teeth program, where a dentist came in, for free, and cleaned their teeth and then put sealants on all their teeth. This was so helpful, and has

really helped my kids to care for their teeth better. Also, the dentist comes back twice a year and gives the kids fluoride treatments for free. This helps to since we are on well water.

Donelle stated her thoughts on community-provided services and school aid, “We have not needed any help. God has blessed.”

Debbie stated that her family has taken advantage of some community support services. She explained:

Yes, I’m very thankful for these services. We use the schools website for homework help and the school nurse told me about a clinic to go to for people without health insurance. I have gone myself and taken my daughter, too,

Debbie added:

The school could aid in making these resources known better by sending home a letter to let parents know that these services are available if they need them and all they have to do is call the principal or the nurse to find out any more information.

Amanda stated, “We do not participate in any of the assistance programs. We are good with doctors and medicine and all, as far as I know.”

Patsy explained, “I am aware that there are things out there to help people who are in need, but fortunately we have not had to use any of these services. I do know they are there if ever we are in need though.”

The analysis of the data presented the 12 participants’ thoughts and feelings on parental participation. Their descriptions helped to identify their feelings based on Epstein’s six Typologies of Parental Involvement (2001). It is important to recognize that various factors have shaped the participants’ thoughts and opinions. The next chapter summarizes the findings and presents the researcher’ recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research on this topic.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this investigation was to examine specific parenting practices and parental involvement practices of families from rural communities in one school district in East Tennessee. The study followed Epstein's (1987) six important types of collaboration between families, school, and communities. The six typologies are:

Type 1 – Parenting, Type 2 – Communicating, Type 3 – Volunteering, Type 4 – Learning at Home, Type 5 – Decision-making, and Type 6 – Collaborating with the Community.

#### *Findings*

Examination of the 12 interviews conducted for this study revealed that 12 out of the 12 participants agreed that parent participation was pivotal in the educational process. These findings are consistent with prior research. Epstein (2001) stated that partnerships were instrumental in maintaining the success of the current educational system. The participants referred to the partnership of parenting and education as, “the key to the future,” and “education is a top priority in our home.” The participants unanimously agreed that positive parenting practices were a necessity for successful parental involvement. No common barriers to parenting were defined throughout this study

Examination of the 12 participants conducted for this study revealed that 12 out of the 12 participants had at least one type of communication, oral or written, with their children's school or teacher. The study showed that 10 out of the 12 participants had



visited their children's school at least once or had an oral conversation with their children's teachers. The study found that 12 out of the 12 participants had communicated through written correspondence such as notes or emails and 12 out of the 12 participants communicated using the telephone.

These findings are consistent with prior research, which stated that clear two-way channels for communication must be established from school-to-home and home-to-school. This dialogue keeps the school-to-home and home-to-school lines of communication open and flowing (Epstein, 2001).

Common communication barriers were identified in this study. Participants commented on additional communication resources such as weekly progress reports, a school web page with classroom links, and varying hours for parent-teacher communications due to work schedules, time constraints, and other family commitments.

Examination of the 12 interviews conducted for this study revealed that 6 of the 12 participants did some type of volunteer work at their children's school. Volunteer work ranged from "sending in supplies for the PTO dinner" and acting as "room mother" to "volunteering in the library and lunchroom when I am needed." One participant stated, "The types of things that I enjoy doing most are helping in the library or helping teachers with activities in their classrooms."

Multiple barriers for volunteer opportunities arose from this research study. The most prevalent volunteering barrier was found to be time. One participant remarked, "I don't have time to volunteer because I work all the time. I wish I had more time to help, but I just don't have time. Another participant explained, "It would be more possible for me to volunteer at school if they would pay my bills, so that I don't have to work."

The research surrounding volunteer work as linked to parental involvement supports the findings in this research project. Epstein (2001) states that increased workloads, demanding schedules, and overall busy lives have greatly cut down on parents' volunteer time.

If educators expect more children to be successful in the literacy experiences at school, they must strive to form lasting partnerships with parents (Fried, 2001). This research study found that 12 out of the 12 participants attempt to nurture learning at home and wish for the best educational outcomes for their children. Participants stated such attempts as, "reading to my children at very young age," and encourage outside reading and activities." Nine out of the 12 participants stated that they helped their children with homework on one occasion or another and 6 out of the 12 participants' stated that they checked over homework assignments on a nightly basis.

This study found consistencies with prior research surrounding learning at home. Many students and parents will respond positively when steps are taken to personalize the educational process. Often students gain insight on skills, abilities, and test scores from the added concern at home. Many homework assignments are completed correctly and a positive attitude toward school work is put in place. Finally students usually become more self-confident in their learning abilities and many times improve familial relationships through positive learning at home (Epstein, 2001).

Examination of the interviews conducted for this research study revealed that 7 out of the 12 participants experienced some level of decision-making input, either on the building level or the district level. Five of the 12 participants did not have any input on decisions made neither on the building level or the district level.

Reasons for not participating in the decision making process included “not really interested in becoming more vocal in the decision making process,” “I have never been asked to be involved in a decision making issue,” and “I feel that most decisions made on the building and local level are the benefit of the children.”

The reasons suggested for lower involvement ranged from lack of time and information (Gold, 2001) to feelings of powerlessness and a low sense of individual and collective efficacy (Lareau, 2001).

The findings in the research study are consistent with prior research findings and provide further suggestions for lack of participation in the decision making process.

Five of the 12 research participants took advantage of community services for lifestyle improvements. In collaborating with the community, parents or caretakers are provided links to multiple community resources and services through the school. Participants reported that they took advantage of dental services such as fluoride and teeth sealants, and healthcare related services such as medical clinics for families with no health insurance. One participant’s child took advantage of a church-based program that was offered at school.

Two participants voiced a need for free tutoring services for their children. None of the 12 participants revealed whether their children took advantage of the free or reduced breakfast and lunch program offered at school.

The findings from this research study are consistent with findings from prior studies. Communities provide opportunities for youth to learn how to act in the world around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence through such venues as

school-sponsored programs, national youth-serving organizations and religious and volunteer organizations (Newman et al., 1999).

### *Recommendations for Practice*

The six components of Joyce Epstein's Typologies of Parent Involvement were largely supported by this research study. Educators, parents, community members, and all involved stakeholders must be provided the necessary information to make the links between school and home and home and community more prevalent. Research suggests that these links are pivotal for a successful educational world. As a result, the following recommendations are made.

Schools should:

1. Communicate to parents that parental involvement is directly related to increased student achievement.
2. Communicate to parents the significance of parental participation and create ways to enhance parenting practices that include schools, parents, and communities.
3. Increase communication opportunities between home and school. Increase communication modes between home and school. Various opportunities and modalities are imperative for involving all parents and caregivers in their children's education.
4. Plan and communicate in a timely manner multiple opportunities for volunteering. Various opportunities, times, dates and locations must be considered in order to accommodate all interested parties.

5. Build on existing practices of learning at home. Provide information on successful assistance practices including homework assistance, school related activities, and methods of student encouragement.
6. Provide information surrounding decision making opportunities and solicit parent involvement in upcoming decisions.
7. Communicate and provide informational materials that relate community services and resources to parents and all members of the community. Communication efforts must be broad and frequent in order to reach all potential recipients.
8. Investigate specific barriers to parental involvement and execute programs to reduce these barriers.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Further investigations suggested by this study include:

1. An investigation of the perceptions of educators, including administrators and teachers, concerning the barriers to parental involvement and possible suggestions for effectively diminishing the barriers.
2. A longitudinal case study that investigates the parental involvement practices of the research participants studied in this research study.
3. A quantitative study to determine relationships between parental participation and student achievement.
4. A quantitative study to determine the relationships between parental educational level and student achievement.
5. A revision of this research study to include parents from all grade levels.

6. A revision of this research study to include schools with larger and more diversified populations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Director of Schools

May 1, 2008

Amy Hurst Case  
Sevierville, Tennessee 37876

Dear xx.xxxxxx,

I am an ELPA doctoral student at ETSU. I am presently working in the dissertation stage of my program of study. The name of my research project is *Parental Involvement Typologies in Rural Community Schools: A Qualitative Investigation*. I am conducting my research in an interview-like format with parents of third, fourth and fifth grade students for the 2007-2008 school year. My dissertation is centered on rural school communities, so I am asking your permission to conduct my research at xxx Elementary School, xxx Elementary School, and xxx Elementary School. I feel that these three elementary schools will be best suited from which to choose the research participants for my study. Please feel free to call if you have any questions or concerns regarding this request. (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Thanks for your prompt attention,

Amy Hurst Case

APPENDIX B

School System Permission Form

Principal Investigator: Amy Hurst Case  
Title of Research Project: Parental Involvement Typologies in Rural Community  
Schools: A Qualitative Study

Please place a check by one of the following statements and return this form in the envelope provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to allow Amy Hurst Case to contact potential interview participants for a dissertation study centering around parental involvement practices in rural community schools.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to allow Amy Hurst Case to contact potential interview participants for a dissertation study centering around parental involvement practices in rural school communities.

Signature of Director of Schools \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Letter to Principals

May 5, 2008

Amy Hurst Case  
1924 Chelsea Jo Lane  
Sevierville, Tennessee 37876

Dear Principal xxxxxx,

My name is Amy Hurst Case and I am a teacher at xxxxxxxx xxxxxx Elementary School. I am presently working on a research study to complete the requirements for Doctor of Education through East Tennessee State University. The title of my research study is *Parental Involvement Typologies in Rural Community Schools: A Qualitative Investigation*.

My intention for this research project is to add insightful information to the knowledge base surrounding parental participation practices in rural school communities, such as your own.

I would like to talk with you more in-depth about my intentions and procedures for the study. I will contact you at a later date and set up a convenient time to go over the participant selection.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at your convenience at 865-850-7493. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Louise MacKay, at 423-439-4300 for further questioning. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Amy Hurst Case



## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent Form

#### **EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is to enlighten students, parents, and school personnel of the positive effects of parental involvement. The study will look at both positive practices of parental involvement and barriers that lead to decreased involvement. The findings of this study will add to the wide base of information surrounding parental involvement practices. This study in no way involves an investigational and/or marketed drug advice.

#### DURATION

Each research participant will be interviewed using an informal, conversation-like manner that should last no more than 1-2 hours. There will be approximately 18-30 participants in this research study.

#### PROCEDURES

The procedures, which will involve you as a research subject, include participating in an informal interview with only a principal investigator present. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Raw data will be taken in written format by the investigator during the interview. At your request, the interview may be stopped at any time and for any reason. If at any time you are uncomfortable with a question, you may decline to answer the question. The interview information and written data will be completely confidential and in no way will you be identified.

#### ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

There are no alternative procedures for this research study.

### POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no known or expected risks/discomforts pertaining to this research study.

### POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The benefit of this research study includes the opportunity to add insightful information surrounding parental involvement in rural schools to the educational research base.

### FINANCIAL COSTS

There are no financial costs to you as a participant in this research study.

### COMPENSATION IN THE FORM OF PAYMENTS TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There is no compensation in the form of payments to you as a participant in this research study.

### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Amy Case. Her home telephone number is 865-429-1009. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

### CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or problems at any time, you may call Amy Hurst Case at 865-429-1009, or Dr. Louise MacKay at 423-439-4300. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored at the personal residence of Amy Case for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, ETSU IRB, ETSU ELPA Department personnel, and DHHS – Department of Health and Human Services will have access to the study records.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

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SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

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PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT DATE

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SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR DATE

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SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable) DATE

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide

"Hi! My name is Amy Hurst-Case and I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. I appreciate the time you are taking to talk with me about your personal experiences with teachers, principals, and your child's school experiences in general. The reason for this interview is to complete some research I am conducting about parental involvement. I will be taping our conversation so that I can pay close attention to what you have to say, rather than having to handwrite the entire interview. Please feel free to tell me anything that comes to mind about parental involvement and your experiences as parents. I am very interested in your personal stories and honest answers to my questions. As I stated before, our interview will be totally confidential. Also, as stated earlier, in the final research report all names will be changed to protect your identity."

1. "Let's start by you telling me all about yourself."

- \*Number of children
- \*Ages and grades of children
- \*Marital status
- \*Hobbies/Interests
- \*Age (20-30, 30-40, 40-50, etc.)
- \*Occupation
- \*Years at that occupation

2. "How would you describe "parent involvement" in school?"

- \*"Give me some examples of what an "involved" parent does."

3. "Now I want to ask you to share your views about several types of parent involvement. What are some of the things you do at home with your child?"

- \*Personal view of the importance of education
- \*Daily homework routines
- \*How do you encourage learning at home?
- \*Punishment/Rewards (Do you punish or reward for good grades, homework, etc.)
- \*Do you have any other support? (Spouse, family, friends)

4. "Communication plays a very important role in parent-school relations." Can you describe the major ways that communication with your child's school takes place?"

- \*How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
- \*How many times in the past school year did you contact your child's teacher?

- \*What means did you use to make the contact? (Parent-teacher conference, phone)
- \*Why did you need to make the contact?
- \*How many times did your child's teacher contact you?
- \*How was the contact made? What was the nature of the contact?
- \*Did you respond? Why or why not?
- \*How do you feel about the ways in which the teacher contacted you?
- \*How did the teacher reach out and try to involve parents in the classroom?
- \*Did this approach work for you? What do you believe the teacher have done differently?
- \*Do you feel like you communicated with the school enough regarding your child's education? Why or why not?
- \*Why is it difficult for you to communicate with the school?
- \*What would make it easier for you to communicate with teachers and principals?

5. "Next, I want to discuss volunteer work at your school." "Did you volunteer any at your child's school in the past school year?"

- \*If yes, how and doing what?
- \*Did you initiate the volunteer work or asked by someone else? (Whom)
- \*If no, were you asked to contribute? Doing what
- \*Why did you not volunteer?
- \*Were you asked more than once? In what ways were you asked? (Note, phone, personal conversation)
- \*Why problems did you face that did not allow you to volunteer more at school?
- \*How could the school accommodate these problems and make it possible for you to volunteer more at school?
- \*If it were more convenient, would you be willing to help out with school functions?
- \*What types of things would you most enjoy helping with?

6. "Encouraging learning at home is very important in the education of a child." Do you feel like your child is encouraged to do well at home?"

- \*If yes, what sources of encouragement do you use?
- \*If no, why is there a lack of encouragement?
- \*Are these encouragement methods effective and do your children respond positively to them?
- \*Do you help your child with his/her homework?
- \*If yes, how many times per week?
- \*If no, why not?
- \*How could the school make it easier for you to participate in nightly homework?
- \*Does your child involved in other school related activities? (Sports, clubs, band)
- \* How are you involved in these activities?
- \*What are the barriers to being more involved at home in your child's education?
- \*How could the school be more accommodating to these barriers?

7. “Many people are involved in making decision about education on the building level and local level.” Were you aware that it is your right as a parent to participate in some of these decisions?”

- \*Have you ever been involved in a building level decision regarding education?
- \*Have you ever been involved in a local level decision regarding education?
- \*Has anyone ever approached you or asked your opinion on an issue of concern?
- \*If yes, who, what about and why?
- \*If yes, how did you respond?
- \*If no, why do you think you have not been approached?
- \*Are you a member of the PTA or PTO?
- \*Are you interested in becoming more vocal in the decision-making process?
- \*How could the school make it easier for you to become involved?

8. “Schools can help families gain access to many other community support services such as tutoring, food pantries, housing, and other ministries.” Do you currently take advantage of any of these resources?”

- \*If yes, what kind of community help of support are you receiving?
- \*Did the school help lead you to the resources?
- \*If no, were you aware that the school could lead you to many different resources?
- \*If no, could you benefit from these extra resources? Which ones and how?
- \*How could the school aid in making these resources more known?

9. As a parent, what would you describe as the most positive experience you have had regarding your child’s education?

10. What would you describe as the most negative experience and how has this impacted your view on parental involvement?

11. Overall, what would you consider to be the biggest barriers to being more involved at your child’s school?

“Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today. You have been very informative and your insight will add a great deal to my research project.”

VITA

AMY HURST CASE

Personal Data:                   Date of Birth: January 25, 1975  
                                      Place of Birth: Knoxville, Tennessee  
                                      Marital Status: Married

Education:                        Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee;  
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                                      Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee;  
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