RE-ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG

ADOLESCENTS: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF A PARENT

EDUCATION PROGRAM EMPHASIZING EARLY

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENTAL

CHARACTERISTICS

By

JOSEPH McCONNELL PIERCE

Bachelor of Arts
Olivet Nazarene University
Kankakee, Illinois
1983

Master of Education
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Oklahoma
1986

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
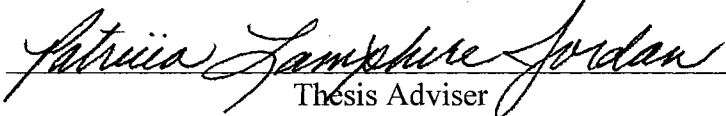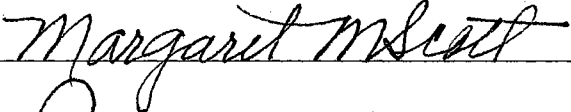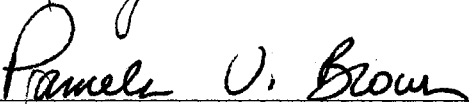the Degree of
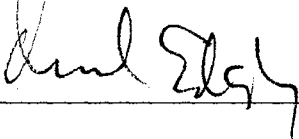DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
December, 2001

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Thesis Approved:

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Thesis Adviser

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_____
Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

As with any significant endeavor, there are times of excitement and frustration, advancement and retreat, perseverance and rest. I thank my Heavenly Father for His continued guidance and strength to see me through this project. His tender care and love have sustained me and have provided me with strength, clarity of mind, and the determination to pursue this dream.

To my beautiful wife, Joy—my best friend and confidant—I owe a lifelong debt of gratitude for all the many, many ways that you show me your love and support. You are truly a *Proverbs 31* woman! Without you I could not have completed this doctorate! You have always been there to pick up the slack while I commuted back and forth to Stillwater. You handled the multitude of mundane household tasks without much assistance. Thank you for your understanding when I could not be home for you and Harrison. This is it for me… after all, "No one else in this house gets another college degree-- unless it's Harrison!"   Love 'ya, mean it-- you're the best!

To my "best boy in the whole world," Harrison, I love you "all the numbers… and to the moon and back!" Since I started this journey two weeks before you were born (What *was* I thinking?), this lifestyle is all you have ever known. Remember though, just because I am becoming a "doctor," doesn't change my most important job in the whole

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THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Parents are the essential link in improving American education, and schools have

to do a better job reaching out to them. Parents also want to help their children succeed

in school and often need guidance on how to be most effective (United States Department

of Education [USDE], *Reaching All Families*, 1996). The American public has

identified seven important actions to improve education-- encouraging parent and family

involvement is one these identified actions (USDE, *America Goes Back to School*, 1996).

Studies have shown that as students move into the middle grades, involvement by family

members in school decreases. Young adolescents often want their parents or families

involved in school just as long as it is in *another* classroom! However, schools can

support family involvement by providing an environment that encourages participation in

a variety of ways (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Integrating current research with

considered and wise practice, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989)

found that the transformation of education for young adolescents involves eight essential

principles, the seventh of which formed the initial interest for this inquiry. The seventh

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principle states that families should be allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication.

Many benefits are found when families are involved in their children's' education. Family involvement in schools is associated with higher levels of student performance, improved behavior, and greater parent and community support for schools (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). These factors play an especially critical role in the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development of young adolescents. Furthermore, as parenting skills improve, children come to school with more positive attitudes about themselves, their abilities, and the school itself. When students come to school ready to take advantage of educational opportunities, school time and energy can be devoted to facilitating learning (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Nevertheless, young adolescents moving toward independence are still intimately tied to their families and still have much to learn and much growing to do. Whatever their ethnicity or economic circumstances, in survey after survey, students reveal a yearning for parental attention and guidance in making educational and career decisions, in forming a set of values, and in assuming adult roles (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions*, 1996).

Parents who want their children to do well in school must remain involved in the student's education throughout the middle and high school years. The Carnegie Council (1996) noted that although more schools are recognizing the importance of such involvement, the numbers that actively involve parents/families are still small. If more progress is to be made, there must be widespread change in the attitudes and practices of teachers and principals regarding family involvement. Parents who participate in the life of the school feel useful, develop confidence in their relations with school staff, and are

more likely to attend school activities, which signal to young adolescents the importance of education (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions*, 1996). Nevertheless, the most common forms of family involvement found in schools are as supporters, volunteers, and audiences for school productions and events. Although schools welcome help with fund-raisers and encourage attendance at special events, there are many other ways in which families can become engaged in their child's formal education (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Loucks and Waggoner (1998) further noted that schools are caught in the vortex of changing demands and cannot, by themselves, accomplish the reforms necessary to improve education. Schools, alone, cannot educate the children. Parent involvement in the school can neither be seen as a quick fix nor a luxury; it is fundamental to a healthy education. Since many parents sense that they have no meaningful role in their children's education or in school in general, schools must recognize that significant outreach efforts will be necessary to establish effective working relations between school and home (Carnegie Council, *Turning Points*, 1989). Additionally, the multiplicity of services that schools are expected to provide to meet the needs of students within their classrooms requires additional financial and human resources (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Schools may find it difficult to engage families of young adolescents. Nonetheless, parents are more willing to participate in learning when they feel a need to change the situation or improve their own skills (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). For example, communication between parent and child may become particularly strained during the early adolescent years and families continue to voice concerns about their perceived inability to communicate with their young adolescent children. Consequently,

specific guidance or training opportunities offered within the context of the school may produce more willingness for parents to become involved.

Research on effective schools demonstrates the importance of building partnerships among home, school, and community. The involvement of parents and family members in the education of their children, both at school and in the home, is supported in the research as one of the keys to achieving success in school (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). *America Goes Back to School* (USDE, 1996) states that thirty years of research clearly shows that family involvement is critical for children's success in school and in the rest of their life. Therefore, any effort to improve education should focus especially on increased family involvement. In 1996, William Riley, then United States Secretary of Education, stated, "...when family and community members are directly involved in education, children achieve better grades and higher test scores, have much higher reading comprehension, graduate at higher rates, are more likely to enroll in higher education, and are better behaved" (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Research strongly supports comprehensive family involvement as one way to improve student gains in personal and academic development (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Parent organizations can be particularly important in offering parents opportunities to decide what they need to know about early adolescence. In our country, much of parent-adolescent relations involve uncharted waters. By offering meetings in which information regarding preadolescent development and issues is exchanged, parent organizations can enable parents to find out from others like themselves what "normal" means for this age group. Strong parent groups can, if they wish, initiate workshops or

classes on parenting skills or teach parents how to tutor or monitor their children in specific subjects (Carnegie Council, *Turning Points*, 1989).

A social consensus holds that parental knowledge of infant and child development is critical to a child's future. Nevertheless, no such consensus yet exists in defining the knowledge that parents should have about the adolescent years or about their roles during the critical transition from childhood to adolescence. To the contrary, many parents are led to believe they should just get out of the way when their children reach adolescence and let the schools handle everything. Others feel perplexed and angry as they see their authority weakened and their values challenged. Yet concerned parents search in vain for counsel in how to best respond to the needs of their adolescent children (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions,* 1996). Although not all adolescents receive annual health exams, the guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services of the American Medical Association (AMA) recommend that parents or other caregivers of adolescents receive information and guidance on early, middle, and late adolescence as part of adolescents' annual health examinations. The Carnegie Council strongly supports this advice. During these visits, parents have the opportunity to learn about normal adolescent development in physical, sexual and social contexts (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions,* 1996).

Background of the Problem

In order to provide the reader an insight into the background of this problem, this section explores four areas of concern: educational trends related to the problem, unresolved issues, social concerns, and facts related to today's American young

adolescent culture. These four areas provide information relevant to this study's focus on family involvement issues and trends relevant to parents and early adolescents involved in American public schooling.

Educational Trends

Loucks and Waggoner (1998) emphasize that pre-adolescents have unique social, emotional, and physical needs that require special parenting skills. The uniqueness of these various needs during the middle grade years reflects many parents' belief that they should increasingly disengage from their young adolescents. In the belief that adolescents should be more independent, parents come to view involvement in their child's education as unnecessary. While young adolescents need greater autonomy, they neither need nor desire a complete break with parents and other family members (Carnegie Council, *Turning Points*, 1989).

Despite the clearly documented benefits of parental involvement for students' achievement and attitudes toward school, parental involvement of all types declines progressively during the elementary school years. By the time students enter middle school, the home-school connection has been significantly reduced and in some cases is nonexistent (Carnegie Council, 1989). Studies indicate that family involvement in their children's education steadily declines as their children move from elementary school through middle and high school (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Surprisingly, surveys show that most parents, regardless of their background, want guidance from schools regarding ways they can help their children learn and achieve more at higher levels. Thus, parents look to schools for help even if the parents

do not or cannot make the first contact themselves (USDE, *Reaching All Families,* 1996).

Particularly in low-income neighborhoods, schools can act as family resource centers

where parents can meet and learn about normal changes during adolescence (Carnegie

Council, *Great Transitions,* 1996). Efforts that have met with success include programs

that are user-friendly and appropriate for the populations they intend to serve. Some

commercially available programs include S.T.E.P. (Systematic Training for Effective

Parenting) and P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness Training). Some schools have found that by

offering adult literacy, GED classes, English as a Second Language sessions, and

computer literacy workshops, improved student attitudes toward learning often result

(Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). In essence, schools today need to reach out and offer

families more meaningful roles in their child's education and in the life of the school

(Carnegie Council, *Turning Points,* 1989).

Unresolved Issues

The current level of family involvement in middle level schools is low as

indicated by a longitudinal survey being conducted with eighth graders by the Office of

Educational Research and Improvement (USDE, 3-26-97). The Carnegie Council noted

in *Great Transitions* (1996) that, contrary to conventional wisdom, adolescents as a group

are not inherently difficult, contrary, ineducable, and prey to "raging hormones." For

many, the transition from childhood to adolescence goes smoothly, especially when

family relationships are based on an understanding of adolescents' developmental needs.

In *Reaching All Families* (United States Department of Education, 1996), summaries of

several research studies indicated that many parents prepare their children well for school

on their own and only contact the schools as needed. Working with these parents requires little effort on the part of the schools. But there are many other parents who want to help their children learn more who do not come to the school. Be that as it may, this fact should not be taken as evidence that they do not care about their children's education. In addition, by the year 2020, nearly half of all school-aged children will be non-white (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Loucks and Waggoner (1998) indicate that three research studies have reported that although all children benefit from their families' involvement in their education, children from low-income and minority families tend to show the greatest gain from comprehensive parent and family involvement.

Being the parent of an adolescent, no less than of a child, in today's America is a formidable responsibility. Yet families with young adolescents, in contrast to those with young children, have been neglected in professional services, community programs, and public policies. Little attention has been given to strengthening supportive networks of families in either middle-class or low-income communities. Although an industry of books, audio- and videotapes, and seminars has burgeoned for parents with young children, much less information is available to those with adolescents (Carnegie Council, 1996).

Social Concerns

According to Loucks and Waggoner (1998), early adolescence is a period when children begin to assert their independence and establish their own identity. Discipline problems within the family are greatly reduced when behaviors typical of young

adolescents are understood and families hold age-appropriate expectations of their children. Understanding the facts about America's adolescents assists families in gaining a fresh perspective about the challenges faced by today's youth. During these critical years, students are forming attitudes and values that will shape their adult lives leading to decisions that will affect the quality and quantity of their lives forever. The future of one in four adolescents, or approximately seven million young adults, is in serious jeopardy because of their vulnerability to the negative consequences of multiple high-risk behaviors such as school failure, substance abuse, and sexual involvement (Carnegie Council, *Turning Points,* 1989).

Millions of young adolescents are growing up under conditions that do not meet their enduring needs for optimal development. They are not receiving the careful, nurturing guidance they need—and say they want—from parents and other adults. They are yielding to social pressure to use drugs, to have sex, and to engage in antisocial activities at distressingly early ages. Too many young adolescents are alienated from school and moving toward dropping out. Further, countless examples exist of self-destructive, even violent, behavior in the ten-to-eighteen-year age group among children from both rich and poor communities (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions,* 1996).

The U.S. Department of Education's *Reaching All Families* publication (1996), states that jobs and family demands leave little free time for many parents. Other parents who stay away from school tend to represent racial and ethnic minorities and those who have less income and less ease with the English language. Their children are more often at risk of failing in school. While growing up, these parents may also have had negative school experiences. Involving these hard to reach families is a challenge. The poignant

answer of young people to the question about why they join gangs is that these groups

become the families that they never had. This is compelling testimony to young

adolescents' fundamental need for close, reliable relationships with a supportive,

protective group that confers respect and identity and recognizes competence. Many

gangs do just that, although at the price of strict conformity to norms that tend to be

antisocial and dangerous (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions*, 1996).

Teachers should acknowledge and show respect for the diversity of families

represented in their classrooms. Integrating ways that diverse families can be involved is

essential when assisting schools with the development of school and family partnerships.

Not all families are comfortable with or have schedules to accommodate their direct

involvement in the classroom. Single parent, blended, and stepfamilies will comprise

eighty-five percent of family structures by the year 2000. Those families need to be

included in equally important support roles outside the classroom (Loucks & Waggoner,

1998).

Facts About America's Young Adolescent Culture

Various local and national media sources have reported and investigated tragic

and violent events in American schools. The media and the public wonder what "went

wrong" with the children involved in such destructive behaviors? In order to add another

perspective into today's youth culture, Loucks and Waggoner (1998) noted and adapted

facts about America's young adolescents from Surgeon General Dr. Antonia Novella.

They note the following facts:

ALCOHOL:
- Is the most abused drug among 8th graders
- 1 in 8 eighth graders binge drink; figure doubles by tenth grade
- 4 million report drinking because of low self-esteem
- 70% of attempted youth suicides attributed to alcohol and drug use
- 1 in 3 have drunk excessively by age 15

ILLICIT DRUGS:
- 1 in 5 8th-10th graders have used inhalants at least once
- Marijuana use has increased by 2% (11-13% from 1991-1994)
- 3% of 8th graders use LSD and cocaine
- Fewer recognize drug use as a risk or disapprove of use that in previous years

SEX AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES:
- 1 in 4 adolescent females, 1 in 3 adolescent males have had sex
- Most adolescent sex occurs between 3-5 p.m.
- Heterosexual HIV positive incidences have surpassed homosexual
- Pregnancy rate in young adolescents has increased by 23% since 1987; 67% outside of marriage

SUICIDE:
- Suicide rate among 10-14 year olds has tripled since 1968
- Preferred method of suicide for boys is guns, for girls is drug (pills) overdose

TOBACCO:
- 3,000 adolescents start smoking every day
- Adolescence is the only segment of population where smoking is on the rise
- 11-14 is most frequent age for starting smoking
- 1 in 7 smoke on a daily basis (use marijuana/drinking closely associated with daily tobacco use)
- 80% of adolescents who smoke have less than a C average

VIOLENCE:
- 1 million-plus adolescents per year are victims of violent crime; 400,000 while at school
- 1 in 5 are victims of an act of violence in or around school; 6,000 incidents per day or 1 in 6 seconds
- 22% express concern about being hurt by someone else in or around the school
- 135,000 brings guns to school each day; 1 in 3 bring some weapon to school at least once per month
- Median age for acquiring a handgun is 12-15 years of age

In order to provide the reader an insight into the background of this problem,

these four sections have explored four specific areas of concern related to the problem

associated with this investigation: educational trends related to the problem, unresolved

issues, social concerns, and facts related to today's American young adolescent culture.

These four areas provided relevant background information to this study's focus on

family involvement issues and trends relevant to parents and early adolescents involved

in American public schooling.

Statement of the Problem Situation

The primary focus of this study is the need for families to become more involved

in their children's lives-- particularly with their children's education in an effort to help

their children succeed. Re-engaging families in the education of young adolescents is

one of the eight major recommendations cited in *Turning Points: Preparing American*

Youth for the 21st Century (1989). However, changes in family lifestyles have increased

barriers to family-child communications (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Schools have been

said to mirror our American culture. Therefore, there exists a need to develop ways to

keep families informed, involved in meaningful ways, and supportive of the education of

young adolescents beyond such traditional routines like homework hotlines, monthly

newsletters, and bake sales (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

What can schools and families do to help children succeed in their education? The

conclusions drawn from research indicate that young adolescents flourish when they have

a family life characterized by warmth and mutual respect and when they have parents

who show serious and sustained interest in their lives; who have parents who respond to their changing cognitive and social capacities; whose parents communicate high expectations for their achievement and ethical behavior; who learn democratic, constructive ways of dealing with conflict; and who have been provided with consistent discipline and close supervision. Such a family atmosphere can provide powerful protection against the risks of a young person's engaging in unhealthy or antisocial practices or becoming depressed and alienated (Carnegie Council, 1996).

Family training is an effective means of informing families of at-risk children about good parenting procedures. The benefits are tremendous. Loucks and Waggoner (1998) assert that families from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds can benefit from opportunities to improve their skills. Further research done by Swick (1992) asserts that parents of adolescents can clearly improve their empathic responses and develop decision-making skills when participating in learning opportunities designed for them. In addition, Swick found that low- and middle-income parents benefited equally from the training. Hence, schools can increase the probability that families will become involved in their young adolescent's education if options are made meaningful, address a known concern, or relate to a particular interest.

Families are typically involved within schools in one or more of the following primary roles. The first role is the "supporter" (raising funds and working at school events); the second is the "volunteer" (assisting in various ways in schools and on field trips), and the third is the "audience" (attending special events and performances). On the other hand, families may become additionally involved in their child's education by taking on roles outside the classroom and at home (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Also

important for young adolescents is for them to see their parents as effective people and as decision-makers who are concerned about them and work and act on their behalf. Additionally, noted is perhaps the only place where many young people, particularly in low-income communities, see their parents in important roles is in the school or the church. For that reason, parental involvement also has the potential to create trust and respect between parents and school staff; as students observe that trust, they begin to trust school staff as well (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Reversing the downward slide in parent involvement and closing the gulf between parents and school staff with mutual trust and respect are crucial for the successful education of adolescents. For example, offering non-threatening adult learning opportunities can reap benefits in increased family involvement. In addition, providing audio or video rental service for parents that offers short audiovisuals on a variety of topics related to adolescence can be particularly helpful to adults (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Schools can re-engage families by offering parents meaningful roles in school governance, keeping parents informed, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school (Carnegie Council, 1989). The Carnegie Council (1996) asserts that parents are turning increasingly to parent support groups which can reach a large number of families in an efficient way to share information and experiences about handling the transition from childhood to adolescence, aspects of normal adolescent development, how to improve their communication skills, ways to negotiate the parent-adolescent development, etc. Therefore, from the information noted above, the focus and purpose of this study was formulated.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to discover what effects participation in a series of parent education workshops focused on early adolescent developmental characteristics and related issues has upon a cadre of fifth grade parents' parental efficacy, their early adolescent children, and school personnel's perceptions of these parents and students using a combination of action research and case study methodologies. The central areas to be explored are parent efficacy, student perceptions, and teachers' perceptions of parents and students.

Research Questions to be Answered

Research Question #1

As participants in workshops on early adolescent development, how will *parents* view their own parental efficacy in the following areas?

A. Perceptions of the parent education program

B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

C. Parent-child relationships

D. Family-school relationships

Research Question #2

As parents of early adolescents participate in this parent education series, thus

exhibiting parent involvement at school, what are their *early adolescent students'*

perceptions of?

    A. The effects or impact of this parent education series

    B. Their parents' knowledge base and parenting skills

    C. The effect of their parents being involved at the school (e.g. academics/social-
emotional/behavior)

Research Question #3

As parents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent

involvement at school, what are the *teachers'* perceptions of?

    A. The effects of parental participation in this parent education series

    B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

    C. The effects of having parents involved with the school (e.g. academics/social-
emotional/behavior)

Importance of the Study

Most American adolescents navigate the critical transition from ages ten to

eighteen with relative success. For others, however, the obstacles in their path can impair

their physical and emotional health, destroy their motivation and ability to succeed, and

damage their personal relationships. At least one quarter of all adolescents are at high

risk for engaging in dangerous behaviors that threaten their health and long-term

prospects (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions*, 1996).

According to the National Parent Teacher Association (Parent Teacher

Association [PTA], 1997), parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the

most important support a child receives is from the home. When staff members recognize

parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what support they need to help their children

succeed, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message

to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality

program. PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (1997) lists quality

indicators of successful parent/family involvement programs. PTA's "Standard II:

Parenting" strand suggests the following six quality indicators ensure successful

programs when the programs:

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and
   their children.

2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide
   support services to families.

3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.

4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing
   the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's
   cultural and religious diversity.

5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to
   support parent and families with training, resources, and other services

6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Former United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, believes parents are the essential link in improving American education; however, parents often need guidance on ways to be most effective. The Carnegie Council's report, *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century* (1996) strongly recommends that schools provide guidance to parents on adolescent transitions. An entire industry of books, audio- and videotapes, and seminars has burgeoned for parents of young children. Yet, less information is available for parents with adolescents.

As one of the seminal recommendations from the Carnegie Council, family involvement is further validated as an integral part of reform for middle level education. The current level of family involvement in middle grades schools is extremely low as indicated by a longitudinal survey being done on eighth graders by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (USDE, 3-26-97). Family involvement in schooling, which encompasses a wide variety of definitions and holds broad meaning, can be categorized into six main components with family involved as:

- Decision makers and advocates;
- Communicators;
- Learners;
- Teachers and coaches;
- Supporters, volunteers, and audiences;
- Partners with the community. (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998, p. 4)

America Goes Back to School (USDE, 1996) stated that thirty years of research clearly shows that family involvement is critical for children's success in school and in the rest of their life. Therefore, any effort to improve education should focus especially

on increased family involvement. However, families in which both parents work and those that are headed by single parents often face a time crunch that can affect their ability to develop strong relationships with their children's teachers. Help needs to come from everyone within the local communities, schools, employers, community organizations, and religious groups to ensure that our society is family friendly for children's learning.

Mandates, Standards, and Recommendations

Various organizations, associations and governmental departments have all offered standards, recommendations, and/or mandates regarding parent/family involvement in today's American schools. Publications from the National Parent-Teacher Association's *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, the United States Department of Education's recommendations in *Strong Families, Strong Schools* and *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, and* two publications from the Carnegie Council on Early Adolescence: *Great Transitions* and *Turning Points* contributed to this study. These publications are readily available from the organizations or their web sites.

Conceptual Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the terminologies used in this dissertation are conceptually defined as follows:

Early Adolescence: The onset of adolescence is closely synchronized with the biological changes of puberty. Early adolescence, encompassing the sexual and psychological awakenings of puberty as well as new social challenges, extends roughly from ages ten through fourteen. Young people in this stage begin to adopt behavior patterns in education and health that can have lifelong consequences. The years from ten to fourteen are a crucial turning point in life's trajectory. This period, therefore, represents an optimal time for interventions to foster effective education, prevent destructive behavior, and promote enduring health practices (Carnegie Council, 1996). Donald Eichhorn (1966, p.3) coined the term *transescence* to succinctly describe, "the stage of development that begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence." Further, transescence takes is roots from *trans-* from transition and *-escence* from adolescence (Toepfer, 1993).

Acknowledging that puberty is a developmental process not occurring for all children precisely at the same chronological time, Eichhorn (1966) based his notion of transescence on the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that appear prior to puberty. This period is marked by tremendous changes. Variability is the most outstanding characteristic of this age group (George & Alexander, 1993, George et al., 1998, Walker & Lirgg, 1995).

Developmental Stages: Spurred by published works by G.S. Hall, Arnold Gesell, and Lewis Terman, the idea of scientifically studying developmental stages of children eventually gave birth to the invention of adolescence (Cuban, 1992). With the invention of the concept of adolescence, the ages of 12 to 18 were set aside as ones that were worthy of differential treatment from both teachers and administrators (Cuban, 1992). Thus, a developmental perspective emerged as the focus of middle level education Knowledge of the developmental stages of early adolescence gives families guidelines for evaluating behavior. Sometimes families are concerned about a particular behavior only to discover that their child's action is typical for young adolescents. Further, families' expectations may be unrealistic for their child's developmental stage.

Middle Level Schools: Middle level schools are schools that group students between the ages of 10 and 14. In some parts of the country, children from fifth to ninth grades are grouped together; in other parts, seventh- and eighth-graders are in one school. One of the most common middle school arrangements groups children from sixth to eighth grades (USDE, Middleweb, 3-36-97).

Middle level schools were developed to ameliorate deficiencies in the junior high concept, meet the needs of young adolescents, and to bridge the gap between the elementary school and high school. By offering a unique implementation of the curriculum, usually characterized by developmentally appropriate instruction, interdisciplinary teaming, flexible scheduling, innovative programs, advisor-advisee programs, and cooperative learning, the gap between the elementary and secondary years was bridged. (George & Alexander, 1993).

Parent/Family Involvement: *Parent involvement* is used interchangeably with

family involvement (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). References to "parent" involvement

may be interpreted broadly to include parents/guardians/legal custodians-- the adults who

play a primary role in the responsibility for a child's education and well being (Norman

Public Schools, 2000). The emphasis is on two-way communication between parents and

the school, not merely the more passive, one-way communication tools such as

newsletters or homework hotlines. Comprehensive family involvement includes the

participation of families in all aspects of their children's education resulting in improved,

supportive relationships among students, families, and teachers and in significant

academic and social growth for students. In addition to participating in conferences with

teachers and attending school functions, there should be opportunities for families to

learn good parenting skills, to support their children's school learning with home learning

activities, and to develop leadership skills by serving on school committees and advisory

groups. (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998).

Parent Efficacy: is synonymous with parent effectiveness. It is the parents' own

perceived notion of whether or not they produce a decided, decisive, or desired effect

within their style of parenting, thus producing the desired outcome resulting in

effectiveness in their perceived parenting techniques or styles.

Parent Education: Parent education can be widely defined to include "family and

cultural transmission of child rearing values, skills, and techniques to more specific

parenting behaviors" (Manning, 1992, p.24). Parent education can also be synonymous

with the phrase, "parent as learners." Matz (1994) found that middle school educators

believing in the importance of parent involvement soon discover the need to educate

parents as well as students. Although parent education programs have been commonplace in early childhood programs, educators have developed few programs to teach parents about early adolescence and middle level education (Manning, 1992).

Parent education programs may include activities, workshops, and/or materials that give parents or family members skills and experiences to help them as parents and as individuals. This form of involvement includes parent participation in workshops that educate parents in child development and parenting skills that meets the needs and concerns of the parents as well as the school (Liontos, 1992). Thus, these aspects of parent education can apply to a variety of parent education situations and/or contexts.

Alternative meanings of parent education not included in the scope of this investigation may be categorized into several themes: parent training classes in basic learning skills for adults (e.g. adult basic literacy classes), training in childcare and child-rearing practices for unwed teenage mothers, coping strategies for parents as a result of the changes in family structure, training aimed at changing the behavior of parents of at risk students, and training for parents associated with school procedures or curriculum issues.

Student Perceptions: is the students own view of the setting of high but realistic expectations for school achievement and overall development as well as progress in school (i.e. grades, attendance, and conduct). This can also include setting developmentally appropriate goals and standards for education, careers, life skills, conduct, and personal worth (Loucks & Waggoner, 1996).

Organization of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters. Chapter I focuses on the research problem. Following the introduction, background information about the problem is discussed. The statement of the problem situation follows afterward. The purpose of the study is then stated and is followed by the research questions. Next, the importance of the study is presented and is followed by a discussion of various national mandates, standards and recommendations related to the problem. Conceptual definitions of terms are presented followed by a discussion of the organization of this study. Finally, a description of the study's delimitations and limitations, generalizability and reliability, limitations of replication, and the trustworthiness and the accuracy of the information are disclosed.

Chapter II is a review of the related literature. This chapter presents the three essential issues that are relevant to the problem and purpose of the study. The three areas explored relate to the school, the student, and the parent. The first section offers the reader, who may be unfamiliar with the education of young adolescents, a historical perspective of the development of the middle school movement. To gain further understanding of the early adolescent, the concept of early adolescence is reviewed as well. Developmental characteristics of early adolescents are noted and a discussion of the contemporary context of early adolescence is outlined. The third issue reviewed in Chapter II is parental involvement in education. The importance of parental involvement as well as the benefits and barriers of parental involvement is reviewed. A historical perspective and a review the traditional roles and rituals related to parental involvement commonly found in schools are explored. The phenomenon of the overall

decline of parental involvement at the secondary level is discussed followed by a review of parent education in schools. A distinction between parent *involvement* and parent *education* is found. A review of the literature found alternative meanings of parent education not associated with the context of this study. These are reviewed for clarity and focus within the scope of this investigation. A review of the concept of parents as learners, an area of parental involvement advocated by research, is reviewed and is followed by a review of the literature related to the impact of parental involvement upon disadvantaged students. Lastly, a review of Loucks and Waggoner's model of family involvement is outlined.

Chapter III is the methodology chapter for this study. Following the introduction, the research design is described. Next, a review of the paradigms that guide qualitative research, an explanation of the benefits of qualitative research, and the development of qualitative research questions are presented. Case study research and action research are discussed and are followed by an examination of how these two approaches can be combined and used effectively to lead to conclusions for this study. The selection of the school site and subjects is described followed by an outline of the interview questions used in this study. Field procedures are then discussed and are followed by a section on data collection and recording as well as data processing and analysis. Methodological assumptions and issues of trustworthiness of the information are shared followed by a summary.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of this study. The findings of the three research questions and archival data are shared in Chapter IV. A description of the selected elementary school site and the community is offered. Following the site

description is a description of the participants in the study. Next, findings from each of the three research questions are presented followed by the archival data and document analysis. A summary of the findings concludes Chapter IV.

Chapter V offers the reader interpretations, implications, conclusions, and recommendations from this study. Following the introduction, the researcher offers a discussion and interpretation of the findings of this investigation as related to the recommendations and findings in the review of the literature. Next, recommendations related to educational practice are disclosed. Lastly, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Delimitations & Limitations

A limitation to this single site action research/case study was that it was conducted at only one school in a suburban community in the southwestern United States with a small cadre of fifth grade parents who volunteered to participate in the study. The school district has a reputation and is perceived as one of the top school districts in the state and for being more affluent and less diverse than other surrounding metro area school districts. Therefore, there was less diversity or representation in the demographic characteristics of the study's population.

This investigation incorporates the action research approach since this study is situated within the context of the elementary school for which the researcher not only the building administrator, but was also the investigator who initiated, developed, lead, and participated in the workshops. This may impose a limitation since the researcher, the

primary instrument in this study, was a human instrument that brought his previous life and career experiences, as well as philosophical biases in to the study.

Time and place bound this study. It was a five-month investigation conducted at one neighborhood elementary school in an affluent suburban school district in the southwestern United States with ten volunteer parents. The length of this study was limited to five months. A longitudinal study of the effects of the parent education program conducted may reveal additional data. It was a single, within-site, program involving a small cadre of parents of fifth grade students, who at first glance may seem to have little diversity. However, as described in Chapter IV, the parents and students demographically represented a rather academically/intellectually, socio-economically, emotionally, gender and racially diverse group.

Generalizability and Reliability

Merriam (1988) points out that the intent of qualitative research is to not really generalize the findings, but to form a unique interpretation of the events. The generalizability and reliability of this study was strengthened since the review of literature (including previous research studies and recommendations from various nationally recognized organizations) was used as the basis for establishing the categories or themes from the data analysis.

Limitations of Replication

Creswell (1994) refers to the limitations of replication rather than the more positivist term "reliability." The uniqueness of this study within the specific context of its natural setting mitigates it against replicating it exactly in another context (Creswell, 1994). Nevertheless, the full disclosure of the researchers' role, the selection and demographic profile of the site and the selection and demographic profile of the informants enhance the study's possibility of replication. Since this was a single-site investigation and the demographics and life experiences of the participants were specific to this investigation, any replication of the study would need to be modified. The detailed protocols for data collection enhance the possibility of replication as well.

Trustworthiness and Accuracy of the Information

The trustworthiness and accuracy of the information in a qualitative investigation is what internal validity represents in a traditional quantitative investigation. All the same, qualitative research incorporates the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, in an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding (i.e. thick description) of the phenomenon at hand. The use of multiple methods was a strategy that "added rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4). Therefore, the central question in the mind of the researcher was whether or not the information gathered matched reality (Merriam 1988). To further verify the accuracy of the information, peer debriefing with fellow doctoral students was utilized through discussions about the data collected.

In order to build trustworthiness and accuracy of information, multiple sources of information (i.e. triangulation) were incorporated into the study. The various sources of information are represented in Figure 1. Creswell (1998) emphasized the "complex, holistic picture... the multiple dimensions of a [qualitative research] problem or issue" that utilizes multiple sources of information and narrative approaches (p. 15). Multiple sources of information included participant and non-participant interviews, document analysis, and archival data (e.g. attendance, discipline, academic records). Through the use of the Reflection Cards, informants were involved in the research study by being allowed to offer input, feedback, and anecdotal notes at each meeting during the course of the investigation. Three primary sources of information were utilized during this study— document analysis, interviews, and archival data. First, participant and non-participant interviews were conducted (student, parent and teacher). Second, document analysis consisted of the researcher's observational notes (observer-participant), the researcher's journal notes (participant-observer) and the participants' reflection cards. Third, archival data was retrieved from the attendance, discipline, and academic records of each student in the study.

Figure 1: Multiple Sources of Information

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature is presented in three sections. Each section focuses on an essential element of schooling—the school, the child, and the parent/family. These three areas are the primary components of every child's education; therefore, they are interwoven throughout the course of this investigation. Much like a three-legged table would be unstable without one of its legs, without one of these school "legs," a child's education would also be severely inhibited. During this investigation, each of these essential components is explored to some degree or another; therefore, they are included in this review. Consequently, this review of literature provides the reader with a basis of understanding the importance of each of the "legs" that make the education of young adolescents function effectively.

The first section, or "leg," of this review provides the reader with a historical perspective of the development of middle level education and schooling. This section provides the reader with a conceptual understanding of the distinctiveness of schooling early adolescents. Included in this review is an examination of the middle school concept, a description of the middle school learner, middle school curriculum, middle

school instructional strategies, the organization of the middle school, and middle school administration and leadership.

The second section of this review emphasizes the early adolescent child and the developmental concept of early adolescence. Developmental characteristics associated with the onset of puberty are described followed by a discussion of early adolescence within the contemporary context of American culture. The purpose of this segment is to provide the reader with the essential literature, background information, and necessary concepts that provided the foundation, focus, and content of the curriculum used in the parent education program that was created and implemented during the course of this investigation.

The final section reviews issues related to the third "leg" of the table-- parental involvement in education. The importance of parental involvement as well as the benefits and barriers of parental involvement is reviewed. A historical perspective and a review of frequent practices of the traditional roles and rituals related to parental involvement commonly found in schools are explored. The phenomenon of the overall decline of parental involvement at the secondary level is discussed followed by a review of parent education in schools. A distinction between parent involvement and parent education is found. Reviews of the alternative meanings of parent education found in the literature that are not associated with this study are reviewed for clarity and focus. A review of the concept of parents as learners, an area of parental involvement advocated by research, is reviewed and is followed by a review of the impact and importance of parental involvement upon disadvantaged students. Lastly, a review of Loucks and Waggoner's model of family involvement is presented.

Discussion

Historical Perspectives of the Middle School Movement

To provide the reader with a historical perspective of the development of middle

level education, this discussion includes a historical framework and conceptual outline

of the distinctiveness of early adolescent schooling. Included in this review is an

examination of the middle school concept, a description of the middle school learner, the

middle school curriculum and instruction, the organization of the middle school, and

middle school administration and leadership.

The creation of the middle school has been one of the most remarkable

phenomena in American education (Gatewood & Dilg, 1975). The middle school is a

relatively recent phenomenon having emerged primarily in the United States during the

1960s. Junior high schools, the middle school's predecessor, appeared as early as 1909

and originally promised fundamental changes in secondary level school organization,

curriculum, instruction, and student outcomes (Lirgg, 1995). In the early 1900s, a

growing opinion about fitting the school to the needs of children began to emerge.

Spurred by published works by G.S. Hall, Arnold Gesell, and Lewis Terman, the idea of

scientifically studying developmental stages of children eventually gave birth to the

invention of adolescence (Cuban, 1992). With the invention of the concept of

adolescence, the ages of 12 to 18 were set aside as ones that were "worthy of differential

treatment from both teachers and administrators" (Cuban, 1992, p.233). Thus, a

developmental perspective emerged as the focus of middle level education

(Cuban, 1992).

Persistent problems existed with the traditional, original junior high school

concept. Departmentalization, a subject-centered curriculum, inadequate teacher

preparation, high school-like instructional methods, tracking, and limited exploratory

class offerings were the focus of much criticism of the junior high school (Cuban, 1992).

From the 1930s through the 1960s, only incremental changes, as opposed to

fundamental shifts in the reformation of secondary schools, had occurred (Cuban, 1992).

Therefore, by the 1950s typical junior high schools were merely "parroting senior high

schools" and had become a miniature version of the senior high school (Cuban, 1992,

p.230; George, Lawrence, & Bushnell, 1998).

The Middle School Concept: Bridging the Gap

Dissatisfaction with the junior high school gave birth to the middle school

movement in the early 1960s (George, et al., 1998). Much of the case for the middle

school comes from a developmental perspective as well as the failure of previous

reforms attempting to meet adolescents' unique needs (George, et al., 1998). Therefore,

middle schools were developed to ameliorate deficiencies in the junior high concept,

meet the needs of young adolescents, and to bridge the gap between the elementary

school and high school. By offering a unique implementation of the curriculum, usually

characterized by developmentally appropriate instruction, interdisciplinary teaming,

flexible scheduling, innovative programs, advisor-advisee programs, and cooperative

learning, the gap between the elementary and secondary years was bridged.

(George & Alexander, 1993).

George, et al. (1998) noted three general rationales for the new middle school:

♦ programs that focus on the unique developmental needs of "in-between-agers,"

♦ programs that provide continuity in education on a K-12 basis so that the transition from one level to another proceeds smoothly, and

♦ the middle school can facilitate needed innovations in every area of schooling.

Essentially, the mission of middle schools is to meet two basic criteria. First, uniqueness— offering a structure and program that differs from the elementary school and the high school. Secondly, transition— designed to permit a smooth and successful move from the elementary school and on to the high school (George, et al., 1998).

Approximating the United States Post Office's zip codes that distinguish unique, specific geographical areas for more effective mail delivery, the "zip code" for delivering an effective, yet unique education for adolescents has basic components that are broadly recognized, understood, and accepted. Characteristics of the middle school educational philosophy include:

♦ Unique and transitional in nature—all the components should be different from either the elementary school or the high school, but not so substantially different that the transition between levels is made more difficult;
♦ Advisory programs where teachers serve as advisors to their students and build positive relationships with other adults in the school;
♦ Interdisciplinary team organization in which teachers share the same students, the same schedule, the same part of the building, and the responsibility for planning;
♦ Exploratory curriculum that builds on and extends the basic academic skills imparted in the elementary years and yet introduces the knowledge to be encountered at the high school;
♦ Diverse instruction with a balance between teacher and student initiative moving toward greater student independence;
♦ Supportive grouping in which classes are organized for heterogeneous grouping coupled with flexible groupings within classes;

- ◆ Building organization (e.g. school-within-a-school) that creates a smallness within bigness usually focusing on the interdisciplinary team teaching areas;
- ◆ Broad choices in extracurricular activities that are age appropriate and exploratory in nature;
- ◆ Shared governance (e.g. shared decision-making) involving all the stakeholders in the school;
- ◆ Preparation of teachers specifically trained for the middle school. (George, et al., 1998, pp. 224-228)

The Middle School Learner

The middle school years, commonly the ages 10-14, encompass a great time of intense change for students (Lirgg, 1995; Walker & Lirgg, 1995). Middle schoolers are so unique that George and Alexander (1993) state that various professionals find it difficult to agree on the proper terminology to describe the age group of the middle school student. Donald Eichhorn (1966, p.3) coined the term *transescence* to succinctly describe, "the stage of development that begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence." Further, transescence takes is roots from trans- from transition and -escence from adolescence (Toepfer, 1993).

"No matter what terminology may be used, human development research and scholarship has increasingly identified the importance of early adolescence as a unique phase of growing up" (George & Alexander, 1993, p.3). This period is marked by tremendous changes uniquely experienced by children who are neither adult nor child. Variability is the most outstanding characteristic of the entire population of this age group; however, certain commonalties of experience associated with all early adolescents include changes physically, intellectually, psychologically, socially and emotionally, and in personality (George & Alexander, 1993, George et al., 1998, Walker & Lirgg, 1995).

Acknowledging that puberty is a developmental process not occurring for all children precisely at the same chronological time, Eichhorn (1966) based his notion of transescence on the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that appear prior to puberty.

Middle School Curriculum

George and Alexander (1993, p.55) assert that "a critical characteristic of the exemplary middle school is its comprehensive curriculum; that is, the program of planned learning opportunities for its students." The traditional view of middle school curriculum is based upon standards for learning and achievement of identified expectations that are appropriate to the developmental needs of middle schoolers while recognizing the learning differences of students (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 1993). George, et al. promote a middle level curriculum that emphasizes integration, opportunities for enriched exploration, with effective, authentic assessments as a means "…for infusing the traditional middle school curriculum with more life, light, and likeability, without attempting revolutionary changes"(1998, p. 339). Schurr, Thomason, and Thompson (1995) paint a wider picture of the diversity in middle school curriculum; it may encompass a wide range of topics such as: interdisciplinary/ integrative thematic units, curriculum frameworks and mapping, higher-order thinking skills, reading/writing across subjects, whole language, outcome-based curricula, and elective-exploratory coursework.

Although middle schools originated in the 1960s, old rather than new curricular programs have dominated through the early 1990s. There has been some evidence of reform-- usually only evidenced in the organization of teachers and students; however, little has changed in the area of curriculum (Beane, 1993; George & Alexander, 1993). Little change can be attributed to the notion that much of the current middle school curriculum still centers on the separate subject, academic-centered approach to curriculum. James Beane, an outspoken critic of middle level curriculum, attributes much of the middle school movement's partial success to "…a focus on better ways of transmitting the usual subject matter without questioning that subject matter or the subject area curriculum organization that surrounds it." Even so, Beane moves the curriculum issue a step further and poses a fundamental question regarding the broad and underlying conception of the whole middle school curriculum, "What ought to be *the* curriculum of the middle school?" (Beane, 1993, p.1).

Beane also proposes a very different kind of new "core" or "general" middle school curriculum— a general education that is interpreted in the context of the developmental concerns of young adolescence and their personal and social issues that face them. Beane's middle school curriculum, the one he proposes to be the curriculum of the middle school, centers on thematic units "…whose organizing centers are drawn from the intersecting concerns of early adolescents and issues in the larger world" (1993, p.68). Within these thematic units, opportunities would be planned to incorporate the various skills usually emphasized in the middle school curricula (Beane, 1993). Other voices from middle school curriculum critics advocate a curriculum that is rich in meaning and is responsive to young adolescents (Arnold, 1993), has a focus on quality

over quantity of what is learned (Tickle, 1993), employs zero-based curriculum

development (Lounsbury, 1993), is engaging and authentic (Stevenson, 1993), and

advocates gender equity (Butler & Sperry, 1993).

Middle School Instruction: Learner-Centered Practices

Middle schools were developed to meet the needs of young adolescents and to

bridge the gap between the elementary school and high school (George & Alexander,

1993). Nevertheless, most educators agree that teaching young adolescents is often more

challenging than teaching other age groups in other settings; furthermore, considering the

sometimes challenging characteristics of adolescents, the task of teaching in a middle

school may be even more challenging than in previous years (George, et al., 1998).

Hence, fundamental to effective middle level instruction is its obligation to be

simultaneously different from elementary school instructional practices and the high

school level, yet bridge the gap between both of them (George & Alexander, 1993).

George and Alexander (1993) assert that the middle school's obligation is to weave

together a balance between teacher-directed instruction common to the elementary school

with student-directed instructional focus at the high school. Therefore, key middle school

instructional practices are a combination of structure, balance, and flexibility.

Effective middle school teachers are not bound to any certain instructional

methodology— diversity in instruction is at the heart of the middle school

(George, et al., 1998). Davies (1995) summarized and advocated numerous effective

teaching strategies that offer relevancy, variation, and challenge while incorporating age-

appropriate methods, personally meaningful activities and active involvement for middle

school students. Davies' recommendations for effective delivery of instruction include:
1) relevant lifelike experiences (e.g. interdisciplinary units, community service projects, immersion programs and exchange programs) that link the content to the students' lives and build connections; 2) opportunities for making choices that increase students' intrinsic motivation and sense of control over their learning (e.g. choices in assignments or projects, learning contracts, and curriculum input into the content to be studied); 3) variety in addressing interests, learning styles, and developmental characteristics of middle schoolers (e.g. variation in grouping structures and visual/auditory/kinesthetic strategies); and 4) exposure to intellectual challenges and higher-order thinking skills (e.g. exploration through curiosity, creation of connections between prior knowledge and new learning, and evaluation through critical reflection and metacognition).

In summary, instructional practices which emphasize diversity of instruction, age-appropriate methodology, active and engaging learning activities, interdisciplinary team teaching, and differentiation of instruction within an active and engaging classroom should also strike a balance between independence as well as collaboration. These characteristics are benchmarks of successful middle school instructional practices (Davies, 1995; George, et al., 1998; Schurr, et al., 1995,).

Organization of the Middle School: A Vehicle for a Successful Transition

The organization of the effective middle school is a multi-faceted structure integrating the key concepts of interdisciplinary teaming, grouping practices, flexible scheduling, and flexibility of time and space. George and Alexander (1993) assert that the interdisciplinary organization of teachers is the most distinguishing feature of middle

schools and is the keystone of its structure. In its presence, other middle school

organizational components operate more smoothly. The phenomenon of sharing— either

content subjects or groups of students— determines the ways that teachers are organized

to deliver instruction (George & Alexander, 1993). Teamwork is essential for

interdisciplinary team organization (also synonymous with team teaching,

intradisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or cross-curriculum) and exists in four different

ways: 1) organization of shared students and content subjects taught, 2) community-

building for group identity and personal knowledge of team members, 3) teamed

instruction through collaborative planning and effective communication, and

4) governance through shared decision making in the team and across the school

(George & Alexander, 1993; George, et al., 1995).

Another keystone in the organization of the middle school is the grouping of

students, primarily influenced by the unique characteristics of the learners. George and

Alexander (1993) maintain that the variability and dissimilarity among middle schoolers'

developmental features require schools to implement a transitional program that takes

into account a variety of alternative methods of student grouping. This unique

developmental nature of the transescent is recognized by most middle level educators

attempting to design appropriate groupings to accommodate the middle schoolers they

serve. George and Alexander (1993, p.304) state, "the most effective grouping strategy

for a particular population of students is dependent upon the specific characteristics and

needs of the students in that school." Grouping practices may vary depending upon the

balance needed between the "supportive interpersonal structure" of the self-contained

classroom typical in the elementary school and the "teacher subject specialization orientation" common in the traditional high school.

George and Alexander (1993, p. 305-330) summarize the potential range of instructional patterns ranging from those with a more elementary approach to those with a more secondary approach. These patterns, listed in descending order toward greater amounts of supportive interpersonal structure required, include:

- ◆ Traditional departmentalization found in typical junior high schools, grade wide interdisciplinary teams (e.g. "the 6th Grade Team," etc.);
- ◆ Conventional grade-level teams— which is the most popular grouping practice where teachers are organized according to the students they have;
- ◆ Long-term teams or multiage teams (i.e. "looping");
- ◆ School-within-a-school in which the school is divided into "houses" or "villages" that are representative of the larger school; and
- ◆ Developmental age groupings based upon selected characteristics of the learner (e.g. maturity, chronological age, etc.).

Middle School Administration and Leadership

The quality of a middle school strongly reflects the characteristics of the leadership of the school. Modern leadership theory tends to focus on leadership as behaviors that contribute to the mission of a school (George & Alexander, 1993). Nonetheless, there are appropriate skills specifically required for middle school administrators (Reed & Russell, 1995). George and Alexander (1993) identified three sets of global behaviors that comprise an effective middle school leader: 1) an understanding of young adolescent characteristics that translate into a vision of an effective middle school, 2) planning of a school program to create a unique and effective learning environment for early adolescents, and 3) engaging the stakeholders

in shared decision making (i.e. Program Improvement Councils, Site Improvement Teams, Parent Advisory Councils, Principal Advisory Teams, etc.) for long-term school improvement.

Recent trends have moved administrators away from being building managers to instructional leaders who incorporate site-based management strategies within the school. This rethinking of leadership roles raises some questions regarding the responsibilities faculty members assume (Schurr, et al., 1995). Leadership roles in middle schools may not be limited to the building principal. Leaders may not be defined by position or academic training alone. Leaders may be found among administrators, teachers, parents, and community members who exhibit a "...willingness to be informed by the educational research, best practices in the private sector, and their own intuition and experience, and the experiences of others" (Reed & Russell, 1995, p. 195).

Finally, effective leaders are not those who seek safety and sameness, but who encourage risk-taking if it promises learning for the school or for those in the organization (Reed & Russell, 1995). Generally, administrators and other building leaders are commonly viewed positively when they are communicators, collaborators, decision makers, resourceful managers, self-confident leaders, and champions of the cause (Schurr, et al., 1995). In summary, an effective middle school leader envisions the middle school of the future, manages the middle school work of organizing and planning, and then advances the middle school team through synergy while recognizing the value of that organization (Reed & Russell, 1995).

In summary, the first essential component, or "leg," of a child's educational experience is the school. The development of middle level education in the United

States dates back to the mid-twentieth century. American middle level education offers a distinctive type of schooling specifically designed to meet the unique needs of a specific group of students-- early adolescents. Unique to middle level education is the middle school concept that developed out of dissatisfaction with the traditional junior high school and an attempt to bridge the gap between the elementary school and the high school. The middle school learner enters the developmental process of puberty and early adolescence at various times commonly between the ages of ten and fourteen. However, all early adolescents experience certain changes physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Curriculum and instruction at the middle level is comprehensive; it emphasizes integration, exploration, thematic teaching methods that focus on developmentally appropriate learner-centered practices. The organization of the middle school is multi-faceted and integrates the concepts of interdisciplinary teaming, grouping practices, flexible scheduling, and flexibility of time and space. Quality middle school administration and leadership contribute to the mission of the school by exhibiting an understanding of early adolescent development, planning the school program to create a unique experience for students, and often incorporating shared decision making within the school governance.

Early Adolescence

A look at the student, the primary focus of schooling, comprises the second essential "leg" in the three-legged table analogy. This section reviews the distinctive characteristics found in the early adolescent child and the developmental concept of early adolescence. Developmental characteristics associated with the onset of puberty are

described followed by a discussion of early adolescence within the contemporary context of American culture. The purpose of this review is to provide the reader with essential literature and concepts that laid the foundation, focus, and design of the curriculum used in the parent education program.

Developmental Characteristics

The distinctive time period between childhood and adolescence, early adolescence, is the primary focus of this investigation. In order to provide a successful educational experience for early adolescents, educators and parents need to understand the unique needs of early adolescents. Schurr states that, "the more genuine knowledge we have about middle grade learners, the better the chances are that our decisions will result in success for both our students and ourselves (p. 1). Corwin (1998) further describes a child in this exclusive stage as a "tween"-- a combination of the words teen and in between. During this particular time period, tweens are children who are in a time period of exploration, growth, change, and turbulence. Schurr, et al. (1995) advocate that the ten to fourteen year olds who compromise the group of children referred to as early or young adolescents have their own unique set of developmental characteristics and needs that must be recognized and addressed.

Echoing the notion of a specific stage of development between childhood and adolescence, Rosemond (1997) further identified a parallel between the two developmental stages of toddlers and teenagers. A comparison between the developmental characteristics and stages of toddlers and teenagers can be drawn. The

most significant point of comparison is that the most precedent-setting transitions in the parent-child relationship occur during these two stages (Rosemond, 1997). Rosemond notes this parallelism between toddlers and teenagers. He stated that both stages are typified by loud emotional outbursts, a certain amount of self-centeredness, and stubborn unreasoning opposition to authority. Nevertheless, adolescence may be the last best chance of making a significant impact upon children. Unlike early childhood (i.e. toddlers), adolescence is the last phase of life in which society has "reasonably ready access to virtually the entire population, so the potential for influence is great" (Carnegie Council, 1996).

As addressed in the section on the historical perspective of the middle school movement, attention has been centered on the cognitive/intellectual, emotional, physical, and social aspects of middle grade students' development. Loucks and Waggoner (1998) succinctly outlined the social, emotional, and physical characteristics of young adolescent development. These children are described as normally exhibiting a number of contradictions and conflicts. Corwin (1998) indicates that children in this stage commonly try to establish an identity apart from that of their parents, are more dependent and childish than they will be in high school, experience rapid physical and emotional changes, and that communication and discipline present additional challenges for parents. While all young adolescents experience rapid physical and emotional changes, it is worthwhile to note that there are differences between the genders. Margaret Finder's (1996) work notes these various gender issues associated with the developmental characteristics of female early adolescents.

In summary, the fundamentals of the adolescent transition from childhood into adulthood incorporate the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of a "tween's" development. The United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (USDE, Middleweb, 3-26-97) succinctly summarizes this group of students between the ages of ten and fourteen. A number of additional common characteristics are illustrated:

1. Adolescents have high levels of physical and emotional energy, which may contrast with long periods of idleness, generally disapproved of by adults;
2. They take risks, are curious, and love danger and adventure yet their feelings can be hurt easily. They may feel immortal, but worry about what their friends think about them;
3. They want to be independent from their families, and simultaneously need to be pampered and protected;
4. They withdraw and want a private life, and simultaneously worry about being accepted by their peers.

Young adolescents have their own unique set of developmental characteristics and needs that must be recognized and addressed. These children are described as normally exhibiting a number of contradictions and conflicts; nevertheless, certain common characteristics are seen as normal and are the last phase in life in which the potential for constructive influence is great.

Contemporary Context

For the reader to fully understand the notion of early adolescent development-- beyond the commonly addressed issued of cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development— contemporary social issues facing early adolescents shall be addressed. Although the biological sequence of puberty remains relatively unchanged, the social

context in which it occurs has changed, indeed. Numerous social transformations affect early adolescents; therefore, this section of the review represents the second "leg" of the literature review. It addresses the recent trends associated with the contemporary social context of young adolescence.

The Carnegie Council (1996) asserted that the notion of adolescent development has essentially unchanged since ancient times and that the drastic difference today is the social context for the biological changes experienced during puberty. The Council's *Great Transitions* (1996) report further describes several post-modern sensibilities associated with this stage of development:

> Rapid industrialization, urbanization, technological advances, geographic mobility, and wrenching cultural shifts have profoundly altered the conditions for growing up and for family. The swiftness of these changes in historical terms challenges our understanding and capacity of our key socializing institutions to meet the basic requirements for healthy child and adolescent development. As a result, many families and their adolescents are not faring as well as they should. (p. 14)

The Carnegie Council's report (1996, p.14) further outlines several trends of recent decades that have had strong effects on adolescent development. Five significant contemporary trends are noted and summarized:

1. *The Changing Family*: Slightly more than half of all American children will spend at least part of their childhood or adolescence in a single-parent family. With one or more parents and other adults in the workplace and out of the home, more and more adolescents are spending less time in the company of caring adults. More time is spent with peers or in front of the television set.
2. *The Shifting Nature of Work*: With economic restructuring, the shift to a knowledge-based economy, and the globalization of the marketplace, many high school graduates are relegated to low-status, dead-end jobs. This growing disparity as well as the material deprivation and job instability can give young people a bleak sense of the future.

3. *The Gap between Early Reproductive Capacity and Adult Roles*: Young people are undergoing pubertal change on an average of two years earlier than they did a century ago. Our society has seen the widest separation ever between the timing of sexual maturation and the formal assumption of adult roles and responsibilities.

4. *Dominance of the Media*: By mid-adolescence, young people will have spent more time in front of the television set than with their teachers. Television and the media profoundly influences the fears and expectations of adolescents about their future, their values, and their relationships with others.

5. *Diversity in the Population*: The United States has become one of the leading multiethnic nations in the world. One-third of American adolescents today are of non-European descent. By the year 2050, close to 50 percent of the entire American population is projected to be African American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latino/Hispanic.

The second "leg" of this review of literature has brought the focus of the review upon the student. This section reviewed the nature of the early adolescent child and the unique developmental characteristics of early adolescence. Although the sequence of the biological changes of puberty and the transition from childhood to adulthood appear to be relatively unchanged, the social context for this series of events has changed. The various social transformations that have strong effects upon adolescent development are interrelated. The primary effects noted include changes in family dynamics, the nature of work, the earlier onset of sexual maturity, the strong influence of the media upon the student, and the changing diversity of the American population resulting in a more racial and ethnic diverse population in the United States.

Parent Involvement in Education

This third section of the literature review offers the reader the last "leg" in the

table analogy—the parents and family. Parents are an integral aspect of all children's

educational experiences. Former Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, stated in a

U.S. Department of Education booklet, *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly*

Schools (1996, p. iii), that "parents are the essential link in improving American

education, and schools simply have to so a better job of reaching out to them. Sending a

report card home is not enough. Parents want to help their children in school, and often

need guidance on how to be most effective." This section will review the importance of

parents and families as well as parental involvement in schooling, the benefits and

barriers associated with involvement, the traditional roles and rituals of parent

involvement in schools, and a discussion of the decline of involvement at the secondary

level— which typically includes the middle level schools. Additionally, parent education

is explored as an outgrowth of involvement with a review of alternative meanings of

parent education.

The Importance of Involvement

When parents get involved in their child's education, the children are more

successful in school and have a more positive educational experience. When parents are

actively involved in their children's education, results of recent research demonstrate that

the children do better in school (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00). The U.S. Department of

Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (USDE, 1994) summarily

indicated that three decades of research have shown that parental participation in schooling improves student learning not only in the beginning of a child's education, but throughout a child's entire academic experience (USDE, 1994, Parental Involvement Policy Guidance). Schine (1998) also concurs that, "the home's most important contribution to the child's success in school has not changed over time: When parents show interest in the school, are supportive of learning, provide time and place and, where desirable, supervision for homework, children are more likely to have a more positive attitude toward school and a positive school experience" (p. 22).

Research demonstrates that parents can increase children's academic success through involvement with schools. The most significant predictor of a student's achievement in school is not social status nor income, but the extent to which that student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning, express high expectations, and become involved in their child's education at school and in the community (Wherry, 1-29-00). "The academic level of parents, their socioeconomic level, and their ethnic or racial origin are not determining factors for academic success," states the United States Department of Education (USDE, 1-29-00). When parents are actively involved in their children's education, results of recent research demonstrates that the children do better in school (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00).

The Benefits of Involvement

A review of the literature indicated that there are numerous positive consequences for students, the school, and for the parents when parents and family members get actively involved in their child's school. The benefits are interrelated and all parties mutually benefit when parents and family members are actively involved in a child's education. The United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (USDE, 3-26-97) asserts that when parents become involved, both students and schools benefit. Specifically, such participation has many positive consequences: students' grades and test results are better, students' attitudes and behaviors are more positive, academic programs are more successful, and the school is more effective. Involvement benefits students' grades and test scores, attendance, completion of homework, fewer placements in special education, attitudes and behavior (Wherry, 1-29-00). By being involved, parents reduce children's risk of academic failure and notice their children's behavior and social adjustment improve when parent are proactive with schools (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 1-29-00). Wherry (1-29-00) summarized the benefits of parent involvement for students. Benefits of parent involvement include: more positive attitudes towards school, higher achievement in reading, high quality and more grade-appropriate work, completion of more homework and observing a closer relationship between family and school.

Involvement is mutually beneficial for parents and for educators. Parents and educators no longer feel isolated when dealing with difficult situations and the school gains powerful allies in parents when parents are involved in education (Stouffer, 1992).

Through involvement, research documents the specific benefits for parents. Benefits for the parents include more confidence in the school, teachers have higher opinions of the involved parents, parents generate greater confidence in themselves as parents and in their ability to help their children learn at home (Wherry, 1-29-00). Parents can also practice specific parenting skills that provide children with additional support at home. For example, Finn (1998) notes that particular parenting practices are related to student's academic achievement. These practices include providing structure, active involvement, and providing support when the child experiences difficulties. In addition, when parents are actively involved in their child's education, all parties benefit-- the family understands the school better, the teachers understand the students more easily, students receive support from adults in order to confront the problems or early adolescence, and the school can be an extension of the home, aiding in the preservation of families' cultures and values (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00).

Educators and schools reap the benefits of parental involvement as well. Wherry (1-29-00) cited several benefits for schools as parents are involved: improved teacher morale, higher ratings of the teachers by the parents, more support from families, higher student achievement, and better reputations in the community. Cotton and Wikelund (1-29-00) summarized the overwhelming quantity of research that demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement and that the more intensively parents are involved, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. Further, Cotton and Wikelund (1-29-00) note that the more active forms (e.g. working directly with children at home on assignments and projects, attending and actively supporting school related activities, and helping out in the classroom or escorting field

trips, etc.) of parent involvement produce greater effects than the more passive ones (receiving phone calls from teachers regarding various classroom concerns, reading and/or signing communications from the school, etc.).

The Barriers to Involvement

Although the positive consequences of parent involvement have been well documented, barriers still exist which often keep families from full participation and involvement in their child's education. Barriers to involvement exist both within the school and within the parents themselves. The Center for Public Policy Priorities (1-29-00) noted many obstacles within the school culture that parents encounter when attempting to participate in their child's education. Barriers identified within the school culture include: differing ideas among parents and teachers on what constitutes involvement, a negative welcoming atmosphere toward visitors in the school, negative or neutral communication from schools, insufficient training for teachers to reach out to families, lack of parental education and parenting skills, time pressures, job pressures, and language barriers (1-29-00, pp. 1-2.) Beyond any negative barriers found within the school, negative barriers exist within the parents and family members as well. For example, if parents themselves had negative experiences or failure in their own schooling, they may have already formed a negative view of schools, might view their child's school as an unfriendly or hostile environment, or if not comfortable speaking English, may have experienced discrimination and/or humiliation because of their language barrier (Jackson & Cooper, 1992; The Center for Public Policy Priorities, 1-29-00).

Barriers exist both within the school culture itself and within the parents. Cotton and Wikelund (1-29-00) identified the "lack of planning and lack of mutual understanding as the two greatest barriers to effective parent involvement" (p.8). What can be done to bridge the gap between these barriers? Brandt (1998) believes educators must reach out to parents and re-establish public support for public education that has been eroded by politicized reforms, trends, and innovations leaving a rift between parents and educators.

Traditional Roles and Rituals

For some parents, the view of the present day parent-school relationship is the same as the one that prevailed prior to the 1960's when families sent their children off to school then went home while the educators kept the children at school did their jobs (Schine, 1998). Historically, school and families have understood themselves as having separate and distinct roles in children's lives; the school taught the three R's (teaching) and the home was responsible for the children's well being and instilling values (nurturing). Schools had little reason to interact with families as long as the schools did their job and the parents did theirs (Fleming, 1993). In addition, teachers have traditionally tended to prefer parents who come to school and create a cycle of positive reinforcement that leads to achievement, shutting out those who are afraid or unable to become involved at school (Wherry, 1-29-00).

Schine states that, "The parent involvement model of the 60's has as little relevance for the 90's as the fashions or the popular music of that time. Families have changed" (1998, p.20). For years, parent involvement was synonymous with attendance at parent-teacher conferences, Open House, and other annual events based upon tradition rather than on meaningful planning that took into account what the school or the parents might actually need or want (Fleming, 1993). Parent volunteers traditionally have baked treats, created bulletin boards, made copies for teachers, served on parent councils, and chaperoned field trips (Cavarretta, 1998).

With society and family changing, the attitude that the relationship between the school and the family should be "separate but equal" can no longer be permitted; each needs the other in partnership in order to weather the numerous stresses imposed upon today's families and schools. Traditional roles and responsibilities rooted in four-decades-old practices can no longer prevail. The American family and society has changed; it no longer resembles the model fondly remembered from the 1960's. Keenan, et al. (1993, p. 204), drawing upon the well-known African proverb about a village being required to raise a child, brings this discussion to the 21st century. Keenan ascertains that, "In the increasingly diverse and complex 'villages' of America's cities, traditional ways of working together are no longer viable…we need collaboration between families and schools to educate our children for a changed and changing world."

Decline of Parent Involvement at Secondary Level

Evidence of the decline of parent involvement at the secondary level (i.e. middle school and high school) is vast. Many parents become less involved in schools as their children get older and listen to "...bogus messages out there in our culture, telling parents it's time to let go and stay away. And parents do." (NEA Today, Jan. 1998, p. 15). The Center for Public Policy Priorities (1-29-00) also reported studies that witnessed the same trend and indicated that parents tend to be less involved in the educational process as their children get older. The Center also cited previous studies that indicated that as children grow older, contact between families and school decline both in number and in the positive nature of the contacts made. In addition, volunteerism drops during these years from thirty-three percent of involved parents in first grade to eight percent of involved parents in seventh grade. (1-29-00, pp. 1-2). Cohen (1995) states that, "parents' involvement in their children's' education drops off sharply (73%) after elementary school (for children ages eight to eleven)."

Henderson and Wilcox (1998) believe that the decline in parent involvement as children enter adolescence could not occur at a worse time. Stouffer (1992), a middle level educator, noted that, "sometime between the fifth and eighth grades, we lose significant numbers of parents who had previously been at least somewhat involved in the academic and co-curricular lives of their children" (p. 5). Parents tend to declare middle and high school students as "grown" and are responsible enough for their own behavior. However, "in this complex age, young adolescents need parent and school support for their development as much as—perhaps more than—in elementary school"

(Schine, 1998, p. 20).   Parent involvement at the middle level and secondary level schools remains essential and is not the time for parents to withdraw their support for their children.

Causes and explanations cited for the decline in parent involvement are varied. Giannetti and Sagarese (1998) acknowledge that elementary educators regularly invite parents into the school, but at the middle level, parents have no such easy access thus, leaving parents feeling left out—some reacting with suspicion or worry. Other reasons for the decline are varied, not the least of which is the child's resistance to such involvement (Stouffer, 1992). Students also report that they often discourage their parents from coming to the school because, for the most part, they relate parent visits to the school with disciplinary situations or with poor grades (Loucks, 1992). Additional explanations offered for this decline include is the need for early adolescent students to be more autonomous and independent from their parents. Peer relationships, values, and standards dominate their lives and parents tend to exercise less and less influence (Jackson & Cooper, 1992). Nevertheless, in recent years more research has been conducted with middle level and secondary students and their families which indicate that parent involvement remains very beneficial in promoting positive achievement and affective outcomes. Be that as it may, parents generally become less involved as their children move through the upper elementary and secondary grades for many reasons: schools are larger and farther from home, the curriculum is more sophisticated, children have more teachers, parents may be more likely to be employed, and students are beginning to establish some sense of independence from their parents (Cotton & Wikelund, 1-29-00; Jackson & Cooper, 1992). Nevertheless, parent

involvement is an important factor from kindergarten through high school graduation (Schine, 1998, Epstein, et al., 1997).

Schools must now seek ways to provide opportunities and support for parents in their desire to have a closer relationship with their young adolescents (Carnegie Council, 1996). Still, parent involvement is just as important in a child's success at school as it is in earlier grades. If the school does not have a formal participation plan for parents, it is important that parents take the initiative to continue their involvement and collaboration in their children's school (Berla, 1989). Reversing the downward slide in parent involvement and closing the gulf between parents and school staff with mutual trust and respect are crucial for the successful education of adolescents. Middle grade schools can re-engage families by offering parents meaningful roles in school governance, keeping parents informed, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school (Carnegie Council, 1989).

Parent Education in Schools

The Carnegie Corporation's report, *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century* (1996) devoted its third chapter to the topic of "Re-engaging Families with Their Adolescent Children." The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1996) recommended several goals for middle schools. One of the Council's goals was to "provide prospective guidance to parents on adolescent transitions." The Council seconded the advice of the American Medical Association's Guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services that suggested that parents or other caregivers of adolescents receive prospective information and guidance on early, middle, and late adolescence.

Nevertheless, another critical issue emerges as parent involvement opportunities are offered to parents. Celine Matz (1994) found that middle school educators believing in the importance of parent involvement soon discover the need to educate parents as well as students. Drawing upon the parallels found between infant and early adolescent developmental stages, the initial interest for this research study came about after receiving a plethora of infant development literature immediately after the birth of my son and then upon reading the Carnegie Council's *Great Transitions* report.

Echoing Matz's findings, M. Lee Manning (1992) stated that parent education programs could play a vital role in teaching parents about early adolescent development and behavior and the transition to the middle level. However, during the initial review of the literature, few resource materials from the National Middle School Association [NMSA] were found. Several resources are currently available from the NMSA and its affiliates for parents to use for resources. Available are: *Grounded for Life?!* (Tracy, 1994) *Living With a Work in Progress: A Parent's Guide to Surviving Adolescence* (Goldberg-Freeman, 1996), *H.E.L.P.- How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent* (Baenen, 1991), *More H.E.L.P.- How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent* (Baenen, 1992), *Learning to Kiss a Frog* (Garvin, 1994), *Your Ten to Fourteen Year Old* (Ames, Ilg, & Baker, 1989), and *Teen Tips: A Practical Guide for Parents With Kids 11-19* (McMahon, 1996). Other limited resources about adolescent development are available. Dr. James Dobson wrote *Preparing for Adolescence* in 1978. Nancy Berla, et al., published *The Middle School Years: A Parents' Handbook* in 1989. *Educating Young Adolescents: Life in the Middle* was published in 1995 with Michael J. Wavering as editor.

With limited resources available to parents and educators, what can schools do to assist and provide guidance to parents about their child's transition to adolescence? By offering non-threatening adult learning opportunities schools can once again reap benefits in increase family involvement. Through school workshops focusing on developmental characteristics, parents can receive the information they need. Parents are turning increasingly to parent support groups, which can reach a large number of families in an efficient way, to share information and experiences about handling the transition from childhood to adolescence, aspects of normal adolescent development, how to improve their communication skills, and ways to negotiate the parent-adolescent development, etc. (Carnegie Council, Great Transitions, 1996).

Hyde (1992) describes similar effects of such parent workshops held at one secondary school. Hyde found that parents really cared and wanted their children to succeed academically; however, he found that, "they may not know how to help their child" (p.42). Classes offered at school can assist parents with parenting ideas/problems, homework/tutoring strategies, and improving communication skills are popular (Loucks, 1992). In addition, providing audio or video rental service for parents that offers short audiovisuals on a variety of topics can be particularly helpful to adults (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Kane reported (1992) that by establishing parent institutes and resource centers on early adolescence, schools could help the process of supporting and educating parents.

The results of these types of adult learning opportunities include increased parental support for young adolescents and for the school's programs. Schine (1998) states that, "the school that offers parents accurate information and reassurance about the

physical, emotional, and social changes their children are experiencing, and about what they expect as they move to a different level in the school system, could be perceived as the parents' ally" (p.21). Parents also accrue certain benefits as they become more involved in their children's learning. Schools as well benefit from the improved rapport often expressed in parents' increased willingness to support schools with their labor and resources. Finally, research also reveals that improved parent attitudes toward the school result when they become more involved in their child's schooling (Cotton & Wikelund, 1-29-00). Parents are much more than cheerleaders who cheer their children on to do well, work hard, and plan for the future—they are also their teachers, advocates, confidants, and promoters (Henderson & Wilcox, 1998).

Parents as Learners

Celine Matz (1994) found that middle school educators believing in the importance of parent involvement soon discover the need to educate parents as well as students. Although parent education programs have been commonplace in early childhood programs, educators have not developed programs to teach about early adolescence and the middle level school (Manning, 1992). Parent education can be widely defined to include "family and cultural transmission of child rearing values, skills, and techniques to more specific parenting behaviors" (Manning, 1992, p.24).

Parent education is typically synonymous with the phrase, "parent as learners." This form of involvement includes parent participation in workshops that educate parents in child development and parenting skills that meets the needs and concerns of the

parents as well as the school (Liontos, 1992). Thus, these definitions of parent education can apply to a variety of parent education situations and contexts.

Several of these alternative perspectives and meanings of parent education will be reviewed in this section. This study is limited to Manning's definition of parent education, which includes those programs that "teach parents about the developmental aspects or their 10 to 14-year olds and about their transition from the elementary to the middle level," (p. 24). Alternative parent education programs and perspectives are reviewed in order to further limit the scope of this investigation. Other meanings of parent education not included in the scope of this investigation may be categorized into several topics that include: parent training classes in basic learning skills for adults (e.g. adult basic literacy classes), training in childcare and child-rearing practices for unwed teenage mothers, coping strategies for parents as a result of the changes in family structure, training aimed at changing the behavior of parents of at risk students, and training for parents associated with school procedures or curriculum issues.

The following section reviews the variety of parent education training and instruction eliminated from the scope of this study. Fruchter, Galletta, and White (1993), reviewed programs that assisted parents of preschool children—some of which offered parenting education literacy training, and job preparation, and referrals to other resources or service providers. Other programs reviewed also stressed intergenerational literacy, provided adult education and career training, and monitored health needs of the preschoolers. The Center for Public Policy Priorities noted that helping low-literate adults improve their basic skills has a direct and measurable impact upon children's education and on the quality of their lives (1-29-00, p.2)

Abell's and Ludwig's (1997) work focusing upon adolescent parents (e.g. female teens who have become mothers) offers a variation on the frequent meaning of parent education. The other focus that Abell and Ludwig offer is the preparation of adolescent parents to raise caring, competent and healthy children. The emphasis of these parent education programs is on providing teenage mothers with educational opportunities intended to increase their effectiveness in providing childcare and child development information as well as the implications for the critical practices of parenting (p. 42). Britner and Reppucci (1997) conducted a related study to evaluate a parent education program for the prevention of child maltreatment that served urban teen, unmarried mothers at risk for child maltreatment. They echoed Abell's and Ludwig's findings.

Parenting education is offered to some parents to help them better balance the combined stresses of their work with family life. In Rockdale County Georgia, Gordon (1998) reported that the "Parent Project," sponsored by the Rockdale Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse, offered twelve weeks of parent education all provided during various company's employees' lunch hour. Each program was tailored to meet the identified needs of each group and differed from company to company. The series used group discussion, videos, lectures, and role-playing to meet the specific needs of each group. One particular company representative noted that the parent education classes led to increased job satisfaction, decreased absenteeism, and greater job productivity. Participants noted a specific benefit; a network of friends developed which provided someone to talk to when problems [associated with parenting issues] arose (Gordon, 1998).

A change in the school-family relationship has occurred—this is the move toward the view that parents need to be collaborators in the schooling process (Johnson, 1994). Specifically, there is a need for parent education programs that reach out to parents and work with them to provide training on a variety of topics so that their needs are met. Johnson (1994) reviewed the literature on this emerging phenomenon and found no research on the existence of "parent centers" in schools. The parent centers, Johnson states, are foremost a signal from the school to parents that they are welcome in the building to engage in "collaboration in the education of their children... [and] provide parent information. Nearly all centers conduct parent workshops or classes on a variety or topics in response to parental needs" (p. 42). Another example of parent education that meets the specific needs of parents is evidenced in "The Parent Project" which was offered in a network of Chicago schools. This project was designed so that parents were indoctrinated into the educational practices utilized within the schools. The project is a series of weekly workshops that "immersed parents in the same kind of constructivist, workshop-style inquiry that teachers are using in their classrooms" (Daniels, 1996).

Parent education can also take on the context of training parents to alter their parenting techniques. Kuykendall (1992) contends that parents can be educated (i.e. through training institutes) so that they can play significant roles in schools and obtain the insight and understanding needed to be advocates for school success (p.96-97). Buroker, Messner, and Leonard (1993) described a parent education program offered to parents of at-risk students enrolled in the Lima City (Ohio) School District alternative education program. The program focused on parenting education of at-risk students and consisted of six four-hour training sessions in neighborhood schools in the city. The

Active Parenting curriculum, which focused on parental behavior change, was used with a video-based discussion on a variety of topics each week. They found that the parental peer support developed and proved "to be a powerful motivator for parent behavior change" (p. 639).

Rutherford and Billig (1995) maintain that schools should design programs that respond to the unique needs of the families of early adolescents. In the context of this investigation and for the purpose of this study, parent education is typically synonymous with the phrase, "parent as learners." This form of involvement includes parent participation in workshops that educate parents in child development and parenting skills that meets the needs and concerns of the parents as well as the school (Liontos, 1992). For example, White and Matz (1992) reported that as a part of a rural Pennsylvania middle school's parent involvement program, parent education was one of five categories that comprised the newly created "Steps to Success" program at the school. Included in the new program was a parent education component in which several evening workshops were offered for parents. The workshops dealt with understanding and communicating with pre-adolescents. Parents reported, "no longer feeling alone and were happy to know that their child's 'abnormal' behavior means they were 'normal' (White & Matz, p. 18). Manning (1992) identified three factors associated with the importance of parent education in the middle grades: understanding the developmental period, responding appropriately to young adolescent behavior, and the transition to the middle school. The scope of this investigation includes a parent education series of classes (like those immediately above) designed to meet the needs of families as well as early adolescents.

<u>Impact upon Disadvantaged Students</u>

Notably, according to Cotton and Wikelund (1-29-00, p.5), much of the general

research on parent involvement has been conducted with low-income, often Black or

Hispanic families due, in part, to the mandated evaluations as part of government-funded

programs for disadvantaged children. Major findings of these studies indicate that

minority or low-income parents are underrepresented among the ranks of parents

involved in schools, parents of disadvantaged and minority children can and do make a

positive impact upon their children's school achievement if they receive adequate

training and encouragement, and more significant, it dispels a popular myth that parents

can make a difference regardless of their own levels of education (1-29-00, p.6).

Seemingly, disadvantaged students have the most to gain from parental involvement

programs and that there may be a "bleed-over" effect into other special populations such

as special education, gifted, and limited English proficient.

The primary reason that parent involvement is so critical for at-risk or

disadvantaged students is that their "home and school worlds are so different"

(Wherry, 1-29-00). Reglin (1993, p. 23) stresses that, "Many unmotivated,

underachieving low SES (socio-economic status) and African-American students are

from single parent families... a substantial number of these kids are failing." Reglin

(p.24) further suggests other stressful factors that compound the problems children bring

to the classroom with which educators must deal and are manifested in reduced school

involvement by parents. Factors mentioned include: increased diversity in family

structure, divorce/separations, and psychological problems associated with change and loss, and poverty.

In addition, Austin (1992, p. 49) expands the discussion of the changes in family structure by noting that forty-four percent of all children live in a nontraditional family due to the divorce rate. Austin further observed that schools have geared policies to the traditional family (both parents living at home) and are often unprepared or reluctant to respond to the nontraditional family, specifically, noncustodial parents. Specifically, Austin (1992) indicated that a majority of school districts either provide no information to noncustodial parents or placed conditions on its availability while others prohibited noncustodial parents from visiting their child's classroom. Kuykendall (1992) echoes the assertion that schools engage in practices that limit parent involvement in school decision-making available to diverse cultural groups—many only giving "lip service and tacit approval to parental involvement while imposing barriers that keep parents, especially Black and Hispanic parents, away (p. 96).

Nevertheless, as families become more involved, children's interest in school changes and academic achievement improves (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Families from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds can benefit from opportunities to improve their skills. Research done by Swick (1992) makes it clear that parents of adolescents can improve their empathic responses and develop decision-making skills when participating in learning opportunities designed for them. In addition, Swick's research (1992) found that low- and middle-income parents benefited equally from the training. Schools can increase the probability that families will become involved in their young adolescent's education if options are made meaningful, address and known

concern, or relate to a particular interest. Family training is an effective means of informing families of at-risk children about good parenting procedures. For example, at an urban, predominantly African-American middle school, Goodman et al., (1995) reported that a series of six Saturday workshops conducted at the school addressed parents' concerns (e.g. adolescent development, family communication, behavior management, etc.) and were valued by the participants. Amato (1994) designed a yearlong practicum at middle school to address the declining parental participation in school functions and activities. Amato's program also provided information to parents about adolescent development, their roles as parents, and school policies. As a result, PTO membership and attendance at meetings increased, participation in school committees rose, discipline problems declined while student grades and self-esteem improved (Amato, 1994).

According to The Center for Public Policy Priorities (1-29-00, p. 2), parents of economically disadvantaged families face certain barriers when attempting to become involved in their children's education. Examples of difficulties include the belief that some parents face the risk of losing their job if they take time off of their job to attend school functions and those parents who are not well educated themselves may find it difficult to assist with homework. Cotton and Wikelund (1-29-00) emphasized that irregardless of a parent's socio-economic status, education level, or employment status— often those seen as well educated and well-to-do, or have larger amounts of discretionary time to be involved at school—has not shown their involvement to be more beneficial than the involvement of less-advantaged parents. All involvement works and works well (p. 3).

In summary, most research on parent involvement has been conducted with disadvantaged children. Parent involvement is important for all children; however, those who are disadvantaged or are "at-risk" have the most to gain. Societal and cultural influences have levied additional stress upon families and have resulted in reduced school involvement by parents. Families face many barriers when they attempt to become involved; even customary school practices and procedures may limit parent involvement. Nevertheless, research still indicates that as families are more involved in meaningful activities at school, positive benefits are evidenced.

The Loucks & Waggoner's Model

Loucks and Waggoner's (1998) family involvement model focuses on strategies for engaging families in the education of young adolescents. Their book, *Keys to Reengaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents* (1998) advocates a family involvement model which seeks to include various family members in the overall development of early adolescents. Using the recommendations found in the Carnegie Council's report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), as an impetus for the development of the model, Loucks and Waggoner have identified six main areas with family involved:

1. Decision makers and advocates;
2. Communicators;
3. Learners;
4. Teachers and coaches;

5. Supporters, volunteers, and audiences;

6. Partners with the community.

Using the six identified types of involvement, Loucks and Waggoner developed a model of parent/family involvement. Their model includes a discussion of each area with topics and a series of related ideas to be used to disseminate information. The model offers many reproducible sections to be used as "handouts, communication enhancers for parent newsletters, supplements for parent-teacher conferences, outlines for PTA/PTO programs and general information for community organizations" (p. 5). Loucks and Waggoner's model, specifically area number three, "Family as Learners," was used as an impetus for the development of the curriculum for the parenting workshops conducted in this study.

Summary

This review of the literature was presented in three sections. Each focused on an essential ingredient of schooling—the school, the child, and the parent/family. These three areas were selected for review because they are the primary components of every child's education and are interwoven throughout the course of this investigation. Much like a three-legged table would be unstable without one of its legs, without one of these "legs," a child's education is also severely inhibited. During this investigation, each of these essential components were explored to some degree or another. Therefore each area was reviewed and was included in this chapter. Consequently, this review of literature provided the reader with a basis of understanding the importance of each of the "legs" that make the education of young adolescents function effectively.

The first section, or "leg," of this literature review provided the reader with a historical perspective of the development of middle level education and schooling. This section provided the reader with a historical framework and conceptual understanding of the distinctiveness of schooling early adolescents. Included in this review was an examination of the middle school concept, a description of the middle school learner, middle school curriculum and instruction, the organization of the middle school, and middle school administration and leadership.

The second section of this review emphasized the early adolescent child and the developmental concept of early adolescence. Developmental characteristics of early adolescents were described and contemporary issues associated with early adolescence were addressed. The purpose of the second segment was to provide the reader with the essential literature, background information, and necessary concepts that provided the foundation, focus, and content of the curriculum used in the parent education program created and implemented during the course of this investigation.

The final section reviewed issues related to the third "leg" of the table-- parental involvement in education. Topics included were: the importance of involvement, the benefits and barriers associated with parent involvement, traditional roles and rituals, the decline of parental involvement at the secondary level, parent education in schools as an outgrowth of traditional parent involvement and alternate meanings of parent education are addressed as well. Lastly, a review of Loucks and Waggoner's model of family involvement was presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of a series of parent education

workshops offered to parents of fifth grade students at an elementary school who were

nearing the transition to the feeder middle school. The classes emphasized parenting

skills-- with a focus on early adolescent developmental characteristics. This chapter

justifies the methodology and design used for this inquiry. Following this introduction,

the research design is described. In order to create a basis for this research approach, a

review of the paradigms that guide qualitative research, an explanation of the benefits of

qualitative research, and the development of qualitative research questions is presented.

Case study research and action research are discussed and are followed by an analysis of

how these two approaches can be combined and used effectively to lead to conclusions

for this study. The selection of the school site and subjects is described followed by an

outline of questions for all of the interviews. Field procedures are then discussed and are

followed by a section on data collection and recording as well as data processing and

analysis. Methodological assumptions and limitations are identified and then a summary

concludes this chapter.

Description of Research Design

This investigation was an action research study making use of qualitative case study methodology. In the action research paradigm, an educator becomes the initiator who develops and leads the study of important issues and problems important to them (Miller & Bench, 1996). The researcher's role in this study was one of an initiator-leader as well as a participant-observer. The relationship of the researcher with the informants was unique in that the researcher was also the building administrator at the selected site. Additionally, inquiry through participation is a living process of coming to know-- rather than a formal academic method (Reason, 1998, p.263). This investigation utilized the action research approach of inquiry through participation. Since this study was situated within the context of the elementary school for which the researcher was also the building administrator (who initiated, developed, lead, and participated in the workshops) it falls within the action research paradigm.

This study also utilized a within-site, single case study with an instrumental focus to study the problem. The focus of this case study was on a singular issue, or program in this study, with the case used to instrumentally illustrate the issue; therefore, it was also an "instrumental case study" as opposed to a collective case study that involves more than one case. Creswell (1998) further defines a case study as an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. Time and place bound this case study; specifically, it was a five-month investigation conducted at neighborhood elementary school in an affluent suburban school district in the southwestern United States

(see Chapter IV: Description of Selected Site and Community). In order to build trustworthiness and accuracy of information, multiple sources of information were incorporated into the study.

Creswell (1998) emphasized the "complex, holistic picture… the multiple dimensions of a [qualitative research] problem or issue" that utilizes multiple sources of information and narrative approaches (p. 15). Multiple sources of information included participant and non-participant interviews, document analysis, and archival data (e.g. attendance, discipline, academic records). Figure 1 offers the reader a visual model of the resources used in this investigation. Through the use of the Reflection Cards, informants were involved in the research study by being allowed to offer input, feedback, and anecdotal notes at each meeting during the course of the investigation. Three primary sources of information were utilized during this study—document analysis, interviews, and archival data. First, participant and non-participant interviews were conducted (student, parent and teacher). Second, document analysis consisted of the researcher's observational notes (observer-participant), the researcher's journal notes (participant-observer) and the participants' reflection cards. Third, archival data was retrieved from the attendance, discipline, and academic records of each student in the study.

Figure 2: Multiple Sources of Information

This investigation was a single, within-site program involving a small cadre of

parents of fifth grade students. This particular single program was a series of parent

education workshops and follow-up sessions offered to parents of fifth grade students at

an elementary school who were transitioning to middle school. The classes emphasized

the early adolescent developmental characteristics of preadolescents.

Creswell (1998) further indicates that the context of the case involves situating the

case within its natural setting, which for this study was the academic, physical, and social

setting of the selected elementary school. Multiple sources of information included

participant and non-participant interviews, document analysis, and archival data. The

primary investigator of this study initiated, developed, led, and participated in this

investigation. The program was bounded in time and place and involved a small cadre of

participants within the context of the elementary school site. Thus, situating this case

within its natural setting and using multiple sources of information resulted in a

combination of the methodologies associated with action research and case study.

Paradigms Guiding Qualitative Research

"Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines,

fields, and subject matter." (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 2). Creswell (1998) emphasizes

the "complex, holistic picture... the multiple dimensions of a [qualitative research]

problem or issue" that utilizes multiple sources of information and narrative approaches

(p. 15). Qualitative researchers are concerned with several basic characteristics of

qualitative research-- process over outcomes, meaning, the researcher as the primary

instrument, fieldwork, description, and inductive processes (Creswell, 1994).

Denzin and Lincoln offer a generic definition of the qualitative approach to

research. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) maintain that, "Qualitative research is multimethod

in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means

that qualitative researchers study happenings in their natural settings, attempting to make

sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (p. 3).

Fundamentally, the qualitative researcher is a "jack of all trades" who uses any and all

tools of his or her trade resulting in an emergent construction that changes and takes on

new forms as it is pieced together (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Finally, the key difference

between the two research styles is that quantitative research deals with few variables and

many cases, whereas qualitative research relies on few cases and many variables

(Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative research design generally "follows the traditional research approach of presenting a problem, asking a question, collecting data to answer the question, analyzing the data, and answering the question" (Creswell, 1998, p.18). Nonetheless, Creswell (1998) also recognizes that the qualitative research approach has several unique features of its own. First, a general plan is created for the study. Second, problematic issues such as the amount of literature to be reviewed and how much theory should guide the study must be addressed. Finally, the format of a qualitative research study is different from traditional studies in the variation of the organization and possible number of chapters in the study as well as flexibility in writing style.

Research Questions within the Qualitative Approach

Before conducting a qualitative study, a researcher must explore whether or not a strong rationale exists for conducting a qualitative research investigation. Creswell (1998) maintains that there are many compelling reasons to undertake a qualitative research study. Creswell's reasons for qualitative research include: exploring the nature of the research questions (usually "how" or "what" statements in contrast to "why" questions posed in quantitative research); the topic needs to be explored and the variables or theories cannot be readily identified, or theories are not available and need to be developed; the need to present a detailed view of the topic; to study individuals in their natural settings (going out into the field, gaining access, gathering material); an interest in writing and telling a story; the presence of sufficient time and resources to carry out the investigation; because audiences are receptive to qualitative research; and finally,

to emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner, not an "expert" who passes judgment on participants. Additionally, investigators use, explicitly or implicitly, philosophical assumptions and theoretical lenses to guide a study. The researcher's personal knowledge, the meanings the researcher brings to the study, and how the researcher understands the topic (including biases and values) is all tied in to the context of the study (Creswell, 1998). The value-laden nature of this study is disclosed, admitted, and reported in a later section (Creswell, 1994).

Creswell (1998) advocates that problems in qualitative research explore topics found in the social and human sciences, include issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups, are close to people, and are practical. The research questions are open-ended and the researcher avoids taking on the role of "expert" with the "best" questions. Qualitative studies generally pose questions, not hypotheses, which assume two forms: a grand tour question and sub-questions. The grand tour question is "a statement of the question being examined in the study in its most general form…consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative designs [it] is posed as a general issue so as not to limit the inquiry" (Creswell, 1994, p. 70). Furthermore, these types of nondirectional questions usually ask "what" or "how" in order to discover, explain, explore, or describe problems. Questions evolve and change throughout a qualitative study as it emerges and develops so that the questions reflect "an increased understanding of the problem." (Creswell,1994; Creswell, 1998, p.19). Conceivably, Creswell (1998) concludes, there may never truly be an end to a qualitative research study—just more questions.

Case Study Research

Definition of Case Study Research

Tellis (1997) broadly states that, "Case studies have been increasingly used in education" and that, "Education has embraced the case study method for instructional use" (p.4 & 5). Although case study is a familiar term to many people "There is little agreement on just what constitutes case study research...or how one actually goes about doing this type of research" (Merriam, 1988, p. 1, 5). "Broadly defined, research is systematic inquiry. Case study is one such research design that can be used to study a phenomenon systematically." (Merriam, 1988, p.6) A case study is an investigation into a specific phenomenon, such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. Stake (1998), on the other hand, asserts that it is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied... "and is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p.86). In most educational settings it is not feasible or possible to control the entire set of variables of interest; therefore, nonexperimental, or descriptive, research is utilized when there is a need for explanation, description, or when variables are too embedded in the phenomenon. Case studies are forms of descriptive, nonexperimental research and are typically inductive in nature with results presented using words and pictures rather than numbers (Merriam, 1988). Tellis (1997) adds that case studies can either be single or multiple-case designs (where multiple-case studies are replicatory, not sampled cases) that are exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive in nature.

Merriam (1988, p. 11-15) acknowledged several special properties of qualitative

case studies; it is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Further, case study

is more concrete, "resonates with our own experience," is contextual, is developed by

reader interpretation, and is based on reference populations determined by the reader.

A case can be simple or complex; it is a "functioning specific," however, "we may be

more interested in a phenomenon or a population of cases than in the individual case"

(Stake, 1998, p.87). "The nature of the research questions, the amount of control one has,

the desired end product, ...and whether a bounded system can be identified as the focus

of the investigation" are issues that must be addressed when deciding whether or not to

use the case study approach. (Merriam, 1988, p.9).

The essential characteristic of case studies is their endeavor toward a holistic

understanding of the case at hand (Tellis, 1997). However, Stake (1998) asserts that the

holistic case study "calls for the examination of these complexities:" the physical,

economic, ethical, and aesthetic, its subsections, groups, and occasions. Creswell (1998)

summarily defines a case study as "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case

(or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple

sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). Finally, multiple methods of gathering

data can be used in a case study since the primary focus of a qualitative case study is

insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.

Conditions Under Which Case Study is an Appropriate Research Paradigm

Merriam (1988) maintains that case studies are ideal for the educational arena. The appropriateness of case studies in educational settings is due to the basic design of case study research that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary and philosophical perspectives as well as incorporating quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative or naturalistic paradigms situated within case study research makes it best suited for "making contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education." (Merriam, 1988, p.3)

Depending on how a problem is defined, as well as the questions it raises, is a determining factor in using a qualitative case study research design. Merriam (1988) states that it is selected as the design of choice "because of the nature of the research problem and the questions being asked—it is the best plan for answering one's questions" (p. 32). A case study may also be appropriate when its strengths outweigh its limitations and when how true or accurate data may be, but of crucial importance is the participants' perspectives. Another condition for case study research is the uniqueness of the situation to be studied (Merriam, 1988).

Stake (1998) identified three types of case studies to keep in mind as one undertakes an inquiry. The first type of study is termed an "intrinsic case study" and is appropriately used to better understand a particular case in and of itself. Secondly, an "instrumental case study" is selected in order to examine and provide insight into an issue where the case is of secondary interest; it helps pursue the external interest and is expected to advance understanding of that other interest. Thirdly, studying a number of

cases jointly is identified as a "collective case study" (p. 88-89). This investigation can be most accurately described an action research study using a qualitative, instrumental case study methodology.

Action Research

Definition of Action Research

Allen and Calhoun (1998) note that action research has been a topic of interest dating back to the 1940s and 1950s drawing on the work of Kurt Lewin and his school improvement efforts. However, action research is now promoted as a process of reflection on practice undertaken by individuals, small groups, or large groups as a strategy to guide site-based school improvements or to move beyond current understandings and practices (Allen & Calhoun, 1998). Foshay (1994) asserts, "Action research is one of two broad strategies used to conduct inquiry in education. The other, the most widely used, may be called analytical research" (p.317). Educators make little use of analytical, or quantitative research, although it has had a profound effect on published educational materials. Consequently, in order to deal with the complexities of educational issues, qualitative research has gained popularity and is often presented in the form of case studies (Foshay, 1994). This investigation primarily uses Stringer's (1996) definition of action research for the basis of this study. Stringer articulates action research as a process that is "rigorously empirical and reflective; engages people who have been called 'subjects' as active participants in the research process; and result in some practical outcome related to the lives or work of the participants" (p. xvi).

Another meaning of action research was utilized as well during this study. "Action research is active in the same sense that those involved in classroom life... are active inquirers and meaning makers. Action research focuses on human relationships and therefore is in the realm of human science research rather than natural science research, which focuses on the study of objects" (Castle, 1995, p. 18). Placing action research within the context of postmodern philosophy with its emphasis on vernacular language, pluralistic strategies, local knowledge, open discourse, and restructured authority relations, Stringer (1996) maintains that action research is a search for meaning and an exercise of power. To all intents and purposes, "The value of action research is in its transformative nature" (Castle, 1995, p. 19).

Conditions under Which Action Research is an Appropriate Research Paradigm

For the most part, teachers have found educational research of little use or application in the classroom. For that reason, "It follows that action research has to come from the inside out, not from the top down or the outside in" (Foshay, 1994, p. 323). The scientific approach places the researcher outside and separate from the subject of research while searching for one separate truth; however, there is hope of an emerging worldview that is "more holistic, more pluralistic, and egalitarian, that is essentially participative...fueled by holistic and systemic thinking...in quite radical contrast to orthodox scientific method" (Reason, 1998, p. 262-263). In customary university research, educators are the subjects of someone else's research. With action research, educators become the initiators developing and leading the studies of important issues

and problems important to them (Miller & Bench, 1996). Inquiry through participation is a living process of coming to know rather than as formal academic method" (Reason, 1998, p.263).

Practice-as-inquiry (i.e. action research) has as many variants as there are investigators exploring its possibilities. "There is no one 'right way' of doing action research, of being a teacher-researcher, or engaging in critical reflection" (Newman, 1998). Differences of opinion exist regarding what constitutes action research. Viewpoints range from the belief that action research requires some distanced systematic investigation following the norms of quantitative research to the more naturalistic belief that action research is primarily to inform and change on-going practice in which the practitioner reflects both while engaged in action and subsequently on the action itself (Newman, 1998). This researcher views action research in the latter view— that action research is primarily to inform and change on-going practice in which the practitioner reflects both while engaged in action and subsequently on the action itself.

In conclusion, there are several purposes for conducting action research. Johnson (1995) found numerous conditions or purposes why educators need to conduct action research. These reasons are grouped into three main categories: (a) promoting personal and professional growth as practitioners gather knowledge about their own situation, (b) improving practice to enhance student learning by theorizing about practice, and (c) advancing the education profession. Essentially, action inquiry is a form of inquiry into practice concerned with the development of effective action that may contribute to the transformation or organizations and communities (Reason, 1998).

Combining Case Study and Action Research Paradigms

This investigation is first and foremost an action research study that additionally makes use of qualitative case study methodology as in instrument to examine the problem at hand. The action research approach, in conjunction with the case study methodology, is used effectively in conducting this investigation. Both research paradigms are ideal approaches within the education arena. Essentially, both approaches are qualitative and naturalistic in design and rely very little on the use of positivist methodologies. The combination of these two approaches address all the criteria needed for a study from the qualitative perspective. First, in both approaches the findings can be reported descriptively without the narrow focus of surveys or complex analytical data commonly found in quantitative studies. However, both approaches still allow for the inclusion of quantitative data, if necessary. Further, an emphasis on the postmodern awareness of using multiple, and possibly alternative, methods of discovery and storytelling to represent the voices of the participants can be utilized. In addition, this unique combination of styles is capable of capturing the individual participants' voices and points of view through "close" (e.g. interviews and observations) rather than "remote" (e.g. surveys) data gathering methods.

Action research and case study research share similar philosophical assumptions that, in combination, create an effective approach to investigate the particular research problem in this investigation. Both approaches place an importance on how the problem is selected as well as the role of the researcher. Qualitative case studies lend themselves to investigating a specifically selected program, event, or process. Additionally, in

qualitative studies there is an emphasis on the role of the researcher as an active learner, not the "expert" or "outsider" who brings his or her own philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and values to the project. Likewise, action research studies lend themselves to investigations in which the researcher is an actively engaged participant in the entire process—not an "outsider" separated or removed from the inquiry. Since action research is "practice-as-inquiry," the researcher may assume the role of the initiator, developer, and/or leader throughout an investigation and examine the problem from the inside out, rather than outside in. Second, both approaches can lend themselves to a systematic method of investigation exploring a specific phenomenon, program, event, or process. Third, within both research approaches there is an emphasis on the choice of the object of study. Stake (1998) advocates the case study approach as a "choice of object" which parallels the essence of action research wherein the practitioner-researcher selects the problem to be investigated and is actively involved in the research process. Fourth, both approaches are contextual in design and tend to stress how particular experiences resonate with the reader's experiences and are developed by reader interpretation. This mirrors the action research focus on informing and changing practice while the practitioner continuously practices self-reflection while he or she is engaged in the action itself. Finally, the focus of both approaches is naturalistic. They both seek discovery, insight, and interpretation of a problem in order to transform organizations, communities, or practice; thus, improving the practice of teaching and impacting student learning.

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (1998) notes that investigators use, either explicitly or implicitly,

philosophical assumptions and theoretical lenses to guide a study. The researcher's

personal knowledge, the meanings the researcher brings to the study, how the researcher

understands the topic (including biases and values) is all tied in to the context of the

study. Therefore, the value-laden nature of the study must be disclosed, admitted, and

reported (Creswell, 1994). Consequently, the researcher's dual roles in this study

(initiator-leader and participant-observer) clearly placed this study in the qualitative

action research framework.

After teaching in an award-winning middle school and being an assistant principal

at another middle level school in the same school district for a combined total of seven

years, before becoming the principal of the selected site, I observed that middle schools

typically offered their patrons some form of parent involvement program. Usually, these

programs focused on one or two general practices: orientations for families and students

transitioning from the feeder elementary school and/or the practice of including families

in the in parent associations—often for fundraising endeavors or for volunteerism

opportunities. However, another question began nagging me after the birth of my son.

After my son's birth and throughout his first two years of life, my wife and I

received a plethora of infant-oriented magazines, flyers, newsletters, and surveys all

designed to assist us in being the better parents. My wife and I attended child-birthing

classes, followed our family doctor's many words of advice as well as some of the

unsolicited advice numerous strangers would stop us and share with us. The notion that

intrigued me was that families with young adolescents—the very ones that I came in contact with on a daily basis-- in contrast to those parents with young children, were neglected in professional services, programs, and public policies. An entire industry of books, videos, and magazines exist for helping families with young children— but not for those with young adolescents (Carnegie Council, 1996).

Manning (1992) states that parent education programs can play a vital role in teaching parents about early adolescent development, behavior, and the transition to middle school. Through my experience as a teacher and an administrator in various middle schools, I observed that parents often looked to the school counselors, teachers, and administrators for assistance in understanding and handling the rapid changes occurring in their preadolescent. During my tenure as a middle school administrator, I personally had many opportunities to offer guidance to parents regarding early adolescent developmental issues through conferences, phone calls, parent orientation nights, newsletter articles, and booklets. After attending a regional National Middle School Association conference and attending sessions led by Judith Baenen, a nationally recognized speaker and author of *HELP: How to Enjoy Living with a Pre-Adolescent* (NMSA, 1991) and *More HELP: How to Enjoy Living with a Pre-Adolescent* (NMSA, 1992), I found the information and training she provided to be of great value in the advisory role I often found myself. Through my middle school experience, I also noted that schools often inform parents about the ways in which they can be supportive of the school's programs or ways in which they can assist their youngster at home with academic skills. However, being a new parent as well as an being a middle level educator, I realized that a social consensus existed that parental knowledge of infant and

child development is critical to a child's future; yet no such consensus existed in defining the knowledge that parents should have about he adolescent years or about their roles during the critical transition (Carnegie Council, 1996).

Being an experienced middle level educator prior to becoming the elementary principal at this research site, I was aware of the developmental characteristics and changes that occur to pre-adolescents. There seemed to be some sort of parallel that could be drawn between the developmental stages that my son would soon go through as an infant and the developmental stages of infancy and adolescence. I began wondering what parent or family involvement programs, which have parent education components within them, do schools offer in order to teach families about the unique developmental changes through which their youngster would soon encounter? How would such a program affect the participants and their early adolescents?

In summary, the researcher's role in this study was one of an initiator-leader as well as a participant-observer, which is consistent with action research methodologies in which the researcher becomes the initiator, developer, and leader of a study (Miller & Bench, 1996). Additionally, inquiry through participation is a living process of coming to know rather than as formal academic method (Reason, 1998). Notably, the relationship of the researcher with the informants was unique in that the researcher was also the building administrator at the selected site and that the researcher has been the principal of the selected site for the last five years. All of the participants have been acquainted with the researcher to some degree or another. Therefore, researcher's dual roles in this study clearly placed this study within qualitative action research.

Selection of School Site and Subjects

The school site, "Southern Hills Elementary School" (a pseudonym), was selected

for this investigation occurred after initially offering the same parent education classes at

the start of the school year at a new middle school within the same school district. The

school is located in an affluent suburban school district in the southwestern United States.

After promoting the classes with letters, flyers, a reminder in the school's newsletter,

email messages and phone contacts to those parents who expressed an interest in the

classes at the middle school's Information Day in August 2000, only one parent attended

the first session and only three attended the rescheduled second session. Therefore, the

researcher and the dissertation adviser felt that the sample population for the inquiry was

not sufficient and the parents' interest in attending the sessions was not adequate to

continue the study at the middle school.

The researcher has followed all the steps required to obtain the university's

Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval of this research study (see Appendix A).

The original application was approved in July 2000. After initially offering the same

parent education classes during August 2000 at a newly opening middle school within the

same school district, only one parent attended the first session and only three attended the

rescheduled second session. Therefore, the researcher and the dissertation adviser felt

that the sample population for the inquiry was not sufficient and the parents' interest in

attending the sessions was not adequate. Nonetheless, a revision was submitted in

December 2000 with a Continuation/Renewal IRB form submitted in July 2001

(see Appendix A). The revised IRB proposed conducting this study at the elementary

school for which the researcher is also the Principal. The timing of the investigation was better suited to the purposes of the study since it corresponded to the traditional timeframe for transitioning the fifth graders to the feeder middle school. The researcher assumed that the parents at the elementary school were familiar with him, thus more likely to attend the scheduled meetings and would feel more comfortable attending meetings at their own neighborhood elementary school where they customarily attend other school functions and events.

In order to continue with this action research study, Southern Hills Elementary School (located within the same school district as the new middle school) for which the researcher is the building principal was selected. As in customary university research, educators are the subjects of someone else's research. With action research, educators become the initiators developing and leading the studies of important issues and problems important to them (Miller & Bench, 1996). Therefore, although the selection of this school site could be viewed as a convenience sample, it became clear that the purpose for this study would not be compromised in any fashion and it was felt that this inquiry would more closely align itself with an action research paradigm and methodology if it was conducted at this elementary school with second semester fifth graders and their parents. It was deemed that if this exploration was conducted in an elementary school setting (prior to their child's transition to the feeder middle school), it would be more appropriate to the purpose of this study and would also provide additional opportunities for future research.

By conducting this study at the elementary school for which the researcher is also the Principal, the researcher assumed the parents to be familiar with the researcher and might be more likely to attend the scheduled meetings. The researcher also assumed that the parents would feel comfortable attending meetings at their own neighborhood elementary school where they customarily attend other school functions and events. The timing of the investigation also corresponded to the traditional timeframe for transitioning the fifth graders to their feeder middle school, "Walnut Creek Middle School" (a pseudonym) and made it more relevant to receive this training directly associated with their child's transition to the feeder middle school during the second semester.

Subjects were selected by first promoting a free parent education series entitled, *H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with your Preadolescent* to any and all interested parents/families of fifth grade students at "Southern Hills Elementary School." An informational letter was sent home to all of the fifth grade parents at the selected site via all of students weekly Take Home Folders (See Appendix H). Dates, times, and location for the meetings was provided as well as an offer to provide free childcare and refreshments (see Appendix I). Any parent/family wishing to participate in the parent education classes was invited to attend the meetings.

Originally, fifteen specific parents/families were to be identified through stratification as the "parent cadre" which would later constitute the sample population for the proposed study. Participants were to be selected by stratifying the population according to the demographic and personal information offered on the information card (e.g. ethnicity, gender, socio-economics, regular & special education, remedial/gifted

education, LEP/ESL, Indian Education, Counseling). However, since only ten students'

parents attended the first workshop, all of the participants were included in the

investigation. Based upon the change in procedures, the "parent cadre" therefore

represented the entire population of this study.

Instrumentation

The research interview questions were written to be open-ended and as a way for

the researcher to avoid taking on the role of "expert" with the "best" questions.

Qualitative studies generally pose questions, not hypotheses, which assume two forms: a

grand tour question and sub-questions. The grand tour question is "a statement of the

question being examined in the study in its most general form...consistent with the

emerging methodology of qualitative designs [it] is posed as a general issue so as not to

limit the inquiry." (Creswell, 1994, p. 70). Furthermore, these nondirectional questions

usually ask "what" or "how" in order to discover, explain, explore or describe problems.

In addition, the questions evolved throughout this study as it emerged and developed

(Creswell, 1994; Creswell, 1998, p.19). Participant and non-participant interviews were

conducted at the conclusion of the five-month parent education program. The interviews

for the parents, students, and teachers all followed the qualitative format

(See Appendix B). Furthermore, these nondirectional questions asked "what" or "how"

questions in order to discover, explain, explore or describe the problem. Further, the

voices of the participants were represented by emphasizing the postmodern awareness of

using multiple, and possibly alternative, methods of discovery. This unique combination

action research and case study methodologies was capable of capturing the individual participants' voices and points of view through "close" (e.g. interviews and observations) rather than "remote" (e.g. surveys) data gathering methods.

At the inception of each interview, the researcher ensured that the third-party release of information forms were signed, then confidentiality was disclosed and was consistently followed within the parameters outlined in the signed consent forms (See Appendix G). Parents were interviewed using a focus group interview approach. This approach was consistent with the format of the parent education workshops and follow-up meetings and provided a familiar setting and context for gathering the interview responses. The focus group interview was videotaped for later data analysis. Student interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher. To make the student informants more relaxed as their principal interviewed them, they were interviewed at a conference table in the office and were not audio- or videotaped. Interview notes were taken and transcribed later for data analysis. The teacher interviews were likewise one-on-one except that they were conducted over the telephone and interview notes were taken. The use of the telephone interviews was more time effective since the teacher interviews were conducted during the summer months and the teachers were not on contract, making it more difficult to find time to interview each one. Upon completion of all the interviews, peer debriefing with fellow doctoral students was utilized as a verification step. All interview questions were written based upon the original research questions. The interview outlines, which include the grand-tour questions and follow-up questions for each of the interviews, are located in the Appendix B.

Field Procedures

In order to gain entry to the setting, the researcher obtained the permission of his immediate supervisor, the Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education to conduct this inquiry. For the study to be conducted at the selected site, there would be no disruption of the educational process. The parenting classes were offered after school in the evenings. The format of the evening meetings were very similar to the other frequently scheduled Title I parent meetings regularly held in the school's cafeteria. In essence, to the staff and the parents, these meetings were viewed like any another parent involvement opportunity that this school site normally offered.

Free childcare was easily obtained by using the site's feeder high school as a resource. Various organizations at the high school (e.g. the Teacher Cadet class, the Service Learning class, or other honor societies) were very willing to provide responsible students for the free childcare, which was promoted as an enticement. At the site's regularly scheduled events (excluding this study), high school students were frequently called upon for childcare, so it was easily obtained just by calling the high school principal's secretary to coordinate the students.

This study was divided into two parent education workshop/classes and three follow-up meetings for a total of five meetings during the second semester of the 2000-2001 school year. The designation of the two workshop/classes and the three follow-up meetings held once a month thereafter, allowed the researcher-participant to first present the curriculum relevant to early adolescent developmental characteristics and then follow

up with guest speakers who were qualified to meaningfully address the emerging topics of concern. During the last three monthly meetings, the researcher was able to become more of an observer-participant and document any emergent topics, questions, or concerns that developed over the course of the next three months. Each workshop/class and follow-up meeting was conducted at the elementary school site with the whole parent cadre. Free childcare, food, and drinks were offered at each meeting. Each session lasted one hour. The outline of the content of the sessions may be found in the Appendix C.

Since the researcher had previous experience and training using *H.E.L.P. How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent*, by Judith Baenen, (NMSA, 1991) and *More H.E.L.P. How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent*, by Judith Baenen, (NMSA, 1992) these two publications served as the foundation of the parent education program's curriculum (i.e. scope and sequence). These two booklets, purchased and given to each participant, were used as the foundation for the content of the parent education series' curriculum. Additional information from *Re-engaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents* (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998) was used for the parent training classes as well.

Confidentiality of parent and student names, grades, discipline reports, identification numbers, attendance records, and third party information release details were kept in confidence and were only known to the researcher. Upon completion of collecting the data, all names were replaced with suitable pseudonyms reflecting the gender and race of the interviewees and to protect the participants' identities. Any data with identifiable information was then destroyed.

Workshop #1: Introduction and Part I

All attendees at the first parent education class in January 2001 were asked to complete a detailed information card in order to gather additional information in order to disaggregate the sample population for further studies. This information also assisted in sending out post card reminders, letters, and email messages to those in the sample population. After a brief introduction, all attendees completed the consent form and third-party releases. A free copy of the booklet *H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with your Preadolescent* (Baenen, 1991) was given to each participant. The booklet was used as a guideline for the topics discussed: developmental changes, forgetting, irritability, power plays, friendships, survival guidelines, chores, worries, and joys.

Workshop #2: Part II

A free copy of the second booklet, *More H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with your Preadolescent* (Baenen, 1992) as well as selected handouts from Louck's and Waggoner's (1998) Keys *to Re-engaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents* were given to each parent and was used as a guideline for the topics discussed: developmental differences, denying, privacy, accepting consequences, blossoming idealism, facts about young adolescents, discipline processes, dealing with aggression and communication. Workshop #2 was held in mid-January 2001.

Follow-Up Session: Meeting #3

At the onset of the February 2001 monthly follow-up session, participants were asked to complete an anonymous "Reflection Card" (see Appendix D). Afterward, the researcher collected the cards and analyzed them to plan topics, resource personnel as speakers, etc. to address the emerging topics and concerns prior to the next month's follow-up session. One of the vice-principals and one of the guidance counselors from "Walnut Creek Middle School" spoke to the participants for approximately forty-five minutes. Both speakers presented information and intermittently answered questions from the parents. Information regarding the feeder middle school (i.e. middle school philosophy, organization, structure, activities) was shared. Included was information about early adolescent development and physiological changes to be expected in middle schoolers.

Follow-Up Session: Meeting #4

Once again, at the onset of this monthly follow-up session, participants were asked to complete another anonymous "Reflection Card." Afterward, the researcher collected the cards and analyzed them to plan topics, resource personnel as speakers, etc. to address the emerging topics and concerns prior to the next month's follow-up session. The same guidance counselor from "Walnut Creek Middle School" that spoke at the previous meeting returned to specifically address the emergent concerns of the parents.

Specific topics addressed were issues of conflict resolution among family members and early adolescents, offered advice regarding making compromises, holding family meetings, using enforceable statements, privacy issues, and discussed the orientation process to the feeder middle school.

Follow-Up Session: Meeting #5

Once again, at the beginning of this monthly follow-up session, participants were asked to anonymously complete a "Reflection Card." The guest speaker for this follow-up session was the principal of the feeder middle school. He spoke to the participants about more concerns they had expressed about the transition to sixth grade. He shared information regarding procedures and expectations of incoming sixth graders.

Data Collection and Recording

Data collection involved acquiring information through multiple resources (See Figure 1). Observational notes, participant's reflection cards, parent, student, and staff interviews, researcher journal notes, as well as archival data were collected. The data provided a complete record of the firsthand experiences of all of the participants allowed for information to be recorded as it occurred, provided a record about which unusual aspects could be noted, enabled the researcher to obtain the language and words of the informants, and was convenient to the researcher. No attempt was made to purposefully select informants. Any parent who attended the classes was included in the study.

The researcher, congruent with the action research paradigm, was a participant throughout the investigation. During the data collection phase, the researcher made observational notes during each of the workshops in which he had designed the parent education curriculum and facilitated the sessions. During the first two workshops the researcher held more of a participant-observer role since the researcher was known as the school principal as well as the researcher. During the monthly follow-up sessions, the researcher held more of an observer-participant role since the invited guest speakers were the professional educators delivering the information and the researcher's role as a participant was secondary to the role of an observer.

During each of the monthly follow-up sessions, participants were asked to complete an anonymous "Reflection Card" (see Appendix D). The researcher collected the cards and then afterward interpreted them by searching for emerging categorical topics, thematic trends, and/or patterns. The researcher also kept a journal of thoughts, ideas, and anecdotal references during the research study. The reflection cards provided documentation that represented thoughtful data in the informants' own language and words as well as direction to the investigator for planning future topics of discussion or possible resource personnel to invite as guest speakers who would address the emerging topics and concerns prior to the next month's follow-up session.

The nature of some of the questions on the reflection cards requested information related to family atmosphere or incidents involving family members. The researcher recognized that some participants might see the responses to these questions as sensitive information, some information might be considered confidential, and some participants might not want it shared with others. In order to preserve confidentiality, participants

were anonymously asked to respond to the three reflection questions upon arrival at the

follow-up meetings. They were asked how they have applied the content of the materials

presented in the classes. Changes in the effectiveness of their perceived parenting skills

was also queried. Finally, their perceptions of their relationship with the school and its

staff were questioned. The reflection cards requested participants to respond to:

1. *Tell a story about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in theses sessions— or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why or why not?*
2. *How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.*
3. *How have these sessions affected your relationship with the school and its staff?*

At the conclusion of the study, a variety of participant and non-participant

interviews were held. The questions were based upon the research questions posed. An

interview outline with main questions and follow-up questions for each of the interviews

is provided in Appendix I. Participant and non-participant interviews were conducted at

the conclusion of the five-month parent education program. At the inception of each

interview, the researcher ensured that the third-party release of information forms were

signed, then confidentiality was disclosed and was consistently followed within the

parameters outlined in the signed consent forms.

Parents were interviewed using a focus group interview. This approach was

consistent with the format of the parent education workshops and follow-up meetings;

it also provided a familiar setting for gathering the interview responses. The focus group

interview was videotaped for later data analysis. Student interviews were conducted

face-to-face, one-on-one, with the researcher. To make the student informants more

relaxed as their principal interviewed them, they were interviewed at a conference table

in the office and were not audio- or videotaped. Interview notes were taken and transcribed later for data analysis. The teacher interviews were likewise one-on-one except that they were conducted over the telephone and interview notes were taken. The use of the telephone interviews was more time effective since the teacher interviews were conducted during the summer months when the teachers were not on contract, thus making it more difficult to find time to interview each one. The researcher's journal notes were written after each workshop and follow-up meeting and the journal notes were useful and could be accessed at a later time convenient to the researcher.

Additional primary materials were used for document analysis. The participants' children's attendance records, academic information, discipline referrals—or lack of them—were analyzed for trends, patterns, or commonalities. This school information and documentation was confidential; therefore a third-party release form was signed by the participants authorizing the school to release confidential records and information to the researcher. These third-party releases ensured the confidentiality of the information released under the conditions agreed to within the context of the consent form. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning a number to each student. The number corresponded to the number each teacher had assigned them in the teachers' grade books. Additional materials such as site parent/student handbooks, policies, district and/or state policies or procedures related to parent/family involvement were requested and analyzed.

Data Processing and Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to "organize the interviews to present a narrative that explains what happened or provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behavior" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 229). The data processing and analysis within this qualitative study was eclectic in nature and required the researcher to be comfortable with developing categories for the data so that it could be reduced to certain patterns, categories, or themes then interpreted using coding procedures (Creswell, 1994). This process of dividing the patterns, categories, or themes can be described as "an interactive process through which the investigator was concerned with producing believable and trustworthy findings (Merriam, 1988, p. 120)." This section describes the various processes used to analyze the reflection cards, interviews, researcher's journal, observation notes, and the archival data.

Observational notes written during all of the follow-up meetings were used for documentation and as evidence as the investigation emerged. The notes were useful to the researcher to record information as it occurred and for future reference as the study's findings were reported. Reflection cards were analyzed using a simple method for identifying thematic patterns within the responses. Each month, after each meeting, the researcher read through all of the reflection cards, getting a general sense of the whole, then key phrases or words that were common to several of the cards were written down in the margins. The researcher continued searching for emerging categorical topics, thematic trends, and/or patterns. No special coding methods were employed due to the limited number of reflection cards completed and the amount of feedback.

Anecdotal responses written on the reflection cards were utilized for examples of more detailed concerns or specific questions to be addressed at later parent meetings.

The researcher selected and invited various local educators, who were qualified to address the emerging topics, to be guest speakers at the following month's meeting. The examples of concerns and specific needs gleaned from the reflection cards were then shared with the guest speakers; this allowed the guest speakers to specifically target their presentations to best meet the emerging needs of the parent cadre. The guest speakers were professional educators (a guidance counselor, a vice-principal, and the principal) from the elementary school's feeder middle school, "Walnut Creek Middle School." Additionally, each of the guest speakers had a professional relationship with the researcher and each had previously been a co-worker with him during his tenure in the school district at other school sites. In addition, each school within the district is organized into vertical teams, and therefore, a cooperative collegial relationship had been created. The current collegial relationship between the selected elementary school and its feeder middle school is strongly encouraged by central office administration. Thus, securing the guest speakers was convenient for the researcher and was beneficial to the guest speakers who would receive these parents as new clientele during the next semester.

Incorporating Creswell's (1994) suggestions for qualitative data analysis, the interview transcripts were analyzed simultaneously with the data collection and interpretation using a coding method that represented recurring themes or patterns emerging from the interview responses as well as findings or themes noted in the literature review. Students' names were substituted with suitable pseudonyms and

parents in the group interview videotape were assigned an alphabet letter (first person on the left, letter A; second person, letter B, etc.) to maintain anonymity within the transcripts. Teacher names were also replaced with suitable pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

After transcribing the student and teacher interview notes and the videotape of the parent focus group interview, the researcher read through all of the transcriptions getting a sense of the whole. Any general ideas, concepts, or thoughts the researcher perceived to be germane to the interviews, were recorded in the margins of the transcripts as they came to mind. During the initial reading of each of the interview responses, the researcher began looking for general indicators within the responses. In the case of the student and staff interviews, the researcher first noted in the transcript's margin whether responses were generally positive or negative, or if the student perceived changes or no changes. Next, the researcher analyzed the additional comments by clustering them together into similar themes and then creating abbreviations for each. For the parent group interview, codes were created to correspond with research findings and predictions found in the review of the literature. The researcher then wrote the appropriate code next to the appropriate segments of the text. Simultaneously, the coding was reviewed seeing whether or not any new categories and codes emerged. Question by question, the categories were listed in the margins of the transcripts.

Researcher journal notes were written for documentation and were then analyzed for anecdotal references to events, patterns, trends, and group interactions relevant to the study. As written evidence, it saved the researcher the time and expense of transcribing and served as data. The notes were also convenient to the researcher in documenting the

exact timeline, events, and details necessary for recording any changes in the actual field procedures.

Additional document analysis was explored. Archival data was collected and reviewed searching for trends in attendance, academic achievement, discipline, and homework completion. Since the school information was confidential, third-party release forms were signed by each of the participants authorizing the school to release confidential records and information to the researcher. In order to further maintain confidentiality, student names were changed to numbers corresponding to the number that was assigned in the teacher's attendance records.

The participants' children's attendance records, academic records, discipline records were analyzed for patterns or changes using a document that summarized each student's quarterly attendance, disciplinary referrals, and quarterly academic averages. Each teacher's grade book, the official school record, was used as the source to document each student's quarterly attendance (including absences and tardies) and averages in reading, mathematics, spelling, science, social studies, spelling, and English were noted on a composite summary recording sheet. The number and frequency of discipline referrals to the office was also included on the summary sheet for each child. Since the study was conducted at the onset of the second semester, the researcher was particularly interested in noting any changes observed between the first and the second semester— pre-parent education program and post-program involvement.

After recording the data, the researcher reviewed each summary sheet looking at the "whole" to get a general sense of any patterns. Next, any noticeable changes over the course of the year, especially between the third and fourth quarters (the duration of this

investigation), were recorded in the margins, row by row, on each sheet. Following this, sheets were reviewed again, with the focus on the third and fourth quarters for each child. Additional notes were recorded if grades went up or down by one letter grade. Discipline referrals were tallied each quarter for quantity and frequency-- not for the cause of the misbehavior. The referrals were only tallied for quantity and frequency so that any changes in these two areas could be determined. If a child had any discipline referrals, notes were made in the margin of that child's summary sheet noting any patterns or changes. Finally, all of the student sheets were reviewed again and were combined on a composite summary sheet on which absences, referrals, and subject area averages were averaged. Researcher notes were then combined to look for patterns or trends and student names on the summary sheets were blacked out with a permanent marker in order to maintain confidentiality.

Methodological Assumptions

Inherent in qualitative research such as action research, in combination with a case study approach, the researcher was more concerned with the inductive process than the product. More attention was given to the researcher making meaning of the experience since he was the primary instrument who collected and analyzed data. The researcher compared this investigation's data with patterns predicted in the literature and then searched for plausible explanations or understandings in order to attempt to build an explanation about the effects of the parent education program. In addition, the researcher was the practitioner-inquirer involved with the fieldwork— physically

participating in and observing the program from the "inside" within its natural setting (see the discussion on action research in the preceding sections).

Action research and case study research share similar philosophical assumptions that, in combination for this investigation, created an effective approach to investigate a particular research problem. Both approaches placed an importance on how the problem was selected and upon the role of the researcher. This action research study lent itself to this investigation in which the researcher was an actively engaged participant in the entire process—not an "outsider" separated or removed from the inquiry. Both approaches were contextual in nature and tended to stress how particular experiences resonate with the reader's experiences and are developed by reader interpretation. These two methods both sought discovery, insight, and interpretation of a problem in order to transform organizations, communities, or practice; thus, improving the practice of teaching and impacting student learning.

As described in Chapter I, in order to build trustworthiness and accuracy of information, multiple sources of information (i.e. triangulation) were incorporated into the study. Creswell (1998) supported this process and emphasized the "complex, holistic picture... the multiple dimensions of a [qualitative research] problem or issue" that utilizes multiple sources of information and narrative approaches (p. 15). Multiple sources of information included participant and non-participant interviews, document analysis, and archival data (e.g. attendance, discipline, academic records). Through the use of the Reflection Cards, informants were involved in the research study by being allowed to offer input, feedback, and anecdotal notes at each meeting during the course of the investigation. Three primary sources of information were utilized during this study:

document analysis, interviews, and archival data. First, participant and non-participant

interviews were conducted (student, parent and teacher). Second, document analysis

consisted of the researcher's observational notes (observer-participant), the researcher's

journal notes (participant-observer) and the participants' reflection cards. Third, archival

data was retrieved from the attendance, discipline, and academic records of each student

in the study. Figure 1 offers a visual model of the triangulation used in this study.
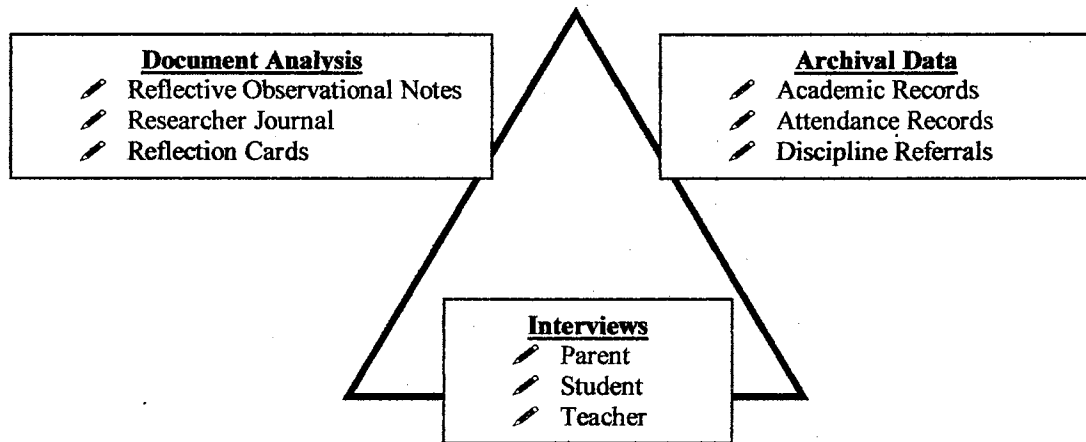
Figure 1: Multiple Sources of Information (triangulation)

Summary

This study was designed to explore the effects of a series of parent education workshops offered to parents of fifth grade students at "Southern Hills Elementary School" who were nearing transition to the feeder middle school, "Walnut Creek Middle School." The parent workshops emphasized parenting skills with a focus on early adolescent developmental characteristics. This chapter justified the methodology and design used for this inquiry. The research design was described as a combination of action research and case study methodologies. In order to create a basis for this research approach, a review of the paradigms that guide qualitative research and the development of qualitative research questions were presented. Case study research and action research were discussed and were followed by an analysis of how these two approaches were combined and used effectively to lead to conclusions for this study. The selection of the school site and subjects were described and followed by an outline of questions for all of the interviews. Field procedures were then discussed and were followed by a section on data collection and recording as well as data processing and analysis. Methodological assumptions were identified followed by a discussion of the procedures utilized to establish trustworthiness and accuracy of the information.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the effects that participation in a series of parent education workshops focused on early adolescent developmental characteristics and related issues had upon a cadre of fifth grade parents. Of particular interest were the parents' perceptions of their efficacy, their early adolescent children's perceptions of the effects of this program, and the school personnel's perceptions of these parents and students. This investigation used a combination of action research and case study methodologies to explore the problem situation. The central areas explored were parent efficacy, student perceptions, and the school personnel's perceptions of parents and students.

Multiple resources were used to triangulate the data, thus creating a trustworthy and authentic investigation (see Figure 1). Via semi-structured interviews, nine fifth-grade students (whose parents had all participated in the parent education program) and four classroom teachers (who were the fifth grade student-participants' homeroom teachers for the 2000-2001 school year) participated in the data collection phase of the study. A focus group interview was conducted with parent participants for the parent

interview portion of the data collection phase as well. Utilizing the school's academic, attendance, and discipline records, the archival data collection proceeded. The final component included in the data triangulation was document analysis of the researcher's journal notes, observational notes, and the parent reflection cards.

This chapter reports the qualitative data gathered as a result of the interviews conducted, archival data gathered, and documents collected. The previous chapters explained the background and purpose of this study, provided a review of the related literature, and presented methodological considerations that guided this investigation. The research questions that guided the collection of this data were:

1. As participants in workshops on early adolescent development, how will parents view their own parental efficacy in the following areas:

   A. Perceptions of the parent education program

   B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

   C. Parent-child relationships

   D. Family-school relationships

2. As parents of early adolescents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent involvement at school, what are their early adolescent students' perceptions of:

   A. The effects or impact of this parent education series

   B. Their parents' knowledge base and parenting skills

   C. The effect of their parents being involved at the school (e.g. academics/social-emotional/behavior)

3. As parents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent

involvement at school, what are the teachers' perceptions of:

A. The effects of parental participation in this parent education series

B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

C. The effects of having parents involved with the school

This chapter consists of a description of (a) the selected site, (b) a description of

the student participants, (c) the findings of the three research questions including quotes

from various interviews, (d) the findings of the archival data, (e) the document analysis

findings, (f) and a summary of the findings.

Description of the Selected Site and Community

"Southern Hills Elementary School" is a 39-year-old neighborhood school located

in an affluent suburban community adjacent to a large metropolitan area in the

southwestern United States. The school is a K-5 elementary school with forty-one

certified teachers, including one principal, one full-time assistant principal, one full-time

guidance counselor, and thirteen support personnel. On October 1, 2000, 552 students

were enrolled at Southern Hills. 28% of the students are from diverse cultural and ethnic

backgrounds. Approximately 38% of students participate in the federal free and/or

reduced breakfast and lunch program, thus are considered as low socio-economic or in

poverty. Southern Hills' State Report Card, which summarizes the community

demographics and state mandated testing information, is located in Appendix E.

Southern Hills qualifies for federal funds through the Title I program. The school is considered a "targeted assistance" school—as opposed to a "schoolwide assistance" school since the poverty level is thirty-eight percent. Two full-time reading specialists, who are trained Reading Recovery® teachers, are employed to serve the students who qualify for remedial reading support. First grade students may be eligible to receive one-on-one Reading Recovery® instruction as well as small group instruction through literacy groups.

The overall instructional program at Southern Hills is organized around the school's annual Site Improvement Plan that includes various goals, strategies, and initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning at the school. The annual Site Improvement Plan is developed through collaboration via the six structured site committees whose leaders serve on the Site Leadership Team. The Leadership Team is headed by the building principal and includes six representatives selected for voted upon from volunteers within the parent organization and the community. The site improvement committees were established to correlate with effective schools correlates and the District Strategic Action Plans.

Other key program features at Southern Hills include: each grade level and classroom teacher is required to create an integrated curriculum map that is generated from the skills listed in the district curriculum guides, state identified essential skills, and national standards. A networked computer lab with Internet accessibility is available to all students. Each classroom is equipped with a classroom computer workstation that is also networked with Internet accessibility. School assemblies are regularly held to create community, celebrate patriotism, birthdays, and citizenship. Students are also recognized

through the "Peace Keepers" program, which catches students doing peaceful things at recess, and through the Reading Renaissance school improvement model for reading achievement. Periodic school-wide assemblies showcasing middle school and high school performing arts groups or multicultural groups such as the Zambian Acapella Boys Choir or the high school's "Stomp Team" are held. Individual, small group, and classroom guidance is facilitated by a full-time certified School Counselor, Love & Logic parent education training classes have been taught by site staff members, and a hands-on science program has been hosted at the feeder elementary schools' high school called "Sciencing on Saturdays." A daily breakfast program is offered each morning and a weekly after-school bowling league is available for students after school. The school is staffed with full-time music and physical education instructors, offers weekly Spanish classes for students in grades 4 and 5, a peer mediation program and a service-learning cadre of students called "R.O.C.K. Stars." Special education programs at Southern Hills include a gifted and talented program for identified children in need of a differentiated curriculum, two full-time learning disability lab teachers, one full-time speech/language therapist, and a specialized self-contained program for students with emotional disturbance(s).

In order to foster greater parent and community involvement, many programs have been developed at Southern Hills. In addition to monthly "Love & Logic" parenting classes, the Title I staff hosts four parent meetings over the course of the school year in order to facilitate home reading, provide free literature and books in homes, and to involve more parents in the school. Parent and community involvement is also fostered through the parent organization's F.A.S.T. Friends program (Families Assisting Students and Teachers). Volunteers, whether they assist in classrooms, the media center, the

workroom, or at home document the hours they contribute and can then acquire special incentives and discounts donated by area businesses as volunteer hours are accumulated. A variety of high school students volunteer at Southern Hills Elementary School throughout the year as a Teacher Cadet or Science Teacher for a Day, or through the Service Learning classes. An after-school childcare program is provided on site. The local YMCA's "Prime Time" staff administers this. Special thematic units are planned along with snacks and play time. To further assist children and involve them community in the school, a mentoring program was developed in partnership the local city government offices. In addition, a nearby private religious university has partnered with Southern Hills to provide fifteen work-study university students who are trained to tutor identified students after school in the "America Reads" tutoring program.

The community in which Southern Hills is located is an affluent, relatively safe, education-oriented community adjacent to a large metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. According to the local economic development authority, the community's population in 2000 was 68,315 with a 30.6% growth rate. Two universities are located nearby with 45,000 colleges students located within forty-five minutes of the town. The school district enrolls 17, 079 students and 89.9% of them graduate from high school. Eighty-five percent of graduating students attend college and have an above average (22.7) ACT score (U.S. Average is 21.0). The school district ranks 22% above the national average for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, SAT scores are 13% above the national average, and ACT scores are 8% above the national average. The crime rate is only 62% of the national average and the average household income in 2000 was $74,484 as compared to the adjacent metropolitan area's average household income of $50,474.

The average price of a newly constructed single family home is $189,942 and the average sale price of an existing single family home is $150,654, which is 48% higher than the average price in the adjacent metropolitan area.

Description of the Participants

The participants included those families who had a fifth grade student enrolled in the selected site and whose parents volunteered to attend the parent education workshops. Ten families were represented in the study including seven male students and four female students (one parent participant had twin boys) were included in the investigation. The ages of the students at the inception of the parent program were all ten or eleven years old and were placed in the fifth grade at Southern Hills Elementary School. Four fifth grade teachers were also included as non-participants.

At the first parent meeting, parents were queried about demographic information relevant to this study. Two families in the cadre were parents who did not have children enrolled at Southern Hills, but were enrolled at two "open-enrollment" or "choice" elementary schools in the school district. They were invited as guests of parents whose children attended the school and had volunteered to participate in the investigation. Therefore, two student participants attended other elementary schools within the same school district. The racial composition of the student participants included one Black male and ten Caucasian males and females.

All of the children were the biological children of the parents with the exception of the one Black male who was a nephew of the one Black parent participant. Only one White male had qualified for the school's federally funded free and/or reduced meal program; therefore, would be considered in the low socio-economic status. All of the parent participants were currently married at the time of the study, thus none of the children would be categorized as coming from a single-parent family.

During the initial information-gathering phase, the parents were also queried about their child's participation, either current or previous, in various school programs (see Appendix F). In order to profile the families and children, parents were specifically asked to respond to whether or not their child had ever received any of the following services: Special Education (on an IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan), Remedial Education (before/after-school program, etc.), Gifted Program, Developmental First Grade (Transitional First), Retention (repeated a grade), Free/Reduced Meal Program, Title I Program, Reading Recovery® Program, At-Risk Program (e.g. mentoring program), Limited English or English as a Second Language Services, Indian Education Services, or Counseling (behavioral, etc.). The parents voluntarily offered this information and the researcher assumed it was correct and accurate.

Results of the profiling were as follows: one White female was categorized and was served under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the school's learning disabilities/special education program; one male had participated in the school's remedial reading program (after-school tutoring) and another male was identified as being gifted/talented. He was currently being served in the gifted program. One male had previously attended the district's Developmental First Grade (D-1)

program and three students had attended the Title I reading pullout program at some time. One male had been and was currently involved in the school's mentoring program for at-risk children. Nearly half (five) of the eleven children had none of the criteria checked at all and could be viewed as not exhibiting any "at-risk" indicators.

<div style="text-align:center">Research Question #1: Findings</div>

The first research question that guided this study was "As participants in workshops on early adolescent development, how will parents view their own parental efficacy in the following areas (a) their perceptions of the parent education program, (b) their parent knowledge base and parenting skills, (c) their parent-child relationships, and (d) their family-school relationships."

<u>Perceptions of the Parent Education Program</u>

The emergent and identifiable themes related to this research question were categorized into four topics: positive perceptions, understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics and what is "normal," proactive parenting styles, and sibling rivalry/power plays.

When asked to reflect upon participating in this program, specifically, "What was it like attending these classes?" the parents identified their perceptions of this parent education program as generally positive and helpful to them. The following responses were given:

Parent A:

I think it was helpful information to learn about middle school students, but I think it was also helpful to hear other parents say they were going through the same thing. So, it is kind of like a 'support group' for parents of adolescents.

Parent B continued the discussion by adding:

I didn't really have any expectations. I didn't know what it was going to be like until I got here and then-- just hearing other people talk and saying, "Oh, that is what I am going through with my kid," reinforces that, "Okay, things are normal." They are not as far fetched as I thought they were. We are not as "out there" as we thought. So, it made it a lot easier; I felt more comfortable after I come.

Parent D concluded:

I expected to be educated about how 'nutty' they were. It helped me in my perception of his emotional moods, so I was a little more understanding with him; but, still, it's like--when this is going to go away? But, I thought it was very educational. When I came, I came in a mindset to be educated about what the research pretty much says that this is how they act about this age. So, some of the things that I was seeing with several of my kids, it just kind of put a reinforcement on, yes, that's what I'm seeing and you need to be more understanding. But I also say that they need to be more cooperative, too.

As a follow-up question, the parents were asked if they could relate what specific benefits they gained from participating in the parent education program. The parents perceived that they were able to gain a greater understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics and what was "normal" for an early adolescent. In particular, they perceived that they had a better understanding of their children's emotional changes and 'ups and downs.' The following dialogue between Parent A and Parent B illustrates their understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics:

Parent B:

Dealing with the emotional ups and downs. Every day, one minute she is happy and laughing and two minutes later she is crying over something. Now I know, okay, I can deal with this now. I know what I am dealing with now.

Parent A:

It also made me think, "You know, I was eleven once." We tend to forget that. When you are thirty-something and you have lived your life you forget, "I was eleven once and went through this."

Parent B:

But I think it is different for them now, because I don't remember being this emotional and turmoil-like when I was eleven and twelve.

Parent A:

Oh, I was.

Parent B:

I do not remember that. She's a lot more sensitive and gets a lot more sensitive and gets upset a lot more easily than I used to. And I think there are just different pressures out there for them, so they have to react differently.

Parents also indicated that they perceived themselves as a more proactive parent as a result of the parent classes. Rather than reacting to certain difficult situations, they found that, as a benefit gained from attending the workshops, they now responded more thoughtfully to their child.

Parent A illustrated her perceptions of the changes that occurred in her parenting style:

I think going back to what she (Parent D) said; it made me not as hasty to do something. It made me stop and think, "OK, this is why. This is where he is coming from. These are the hormones and the things we talked about." So, it made me just take a moment and pause and say, "O.K., how am I going to deal with this?" rather than just dealing in the moment.

Following up with the theme of understanding the developmental characteristics of early adolescence and proactive parenting, parents were asked again which information given in the workshops was perceived to be most helpful to them.

Parent B offered her insights into what she perceived her husband gained from attending

the program:

> *Parent B* stated:
>
> I think it's helped my husband a lot more, because, well, being a learning disabilities teacher, you are taught, you have to be patient, you have to be considerate, you have to remember that they can't handle these things well. You have to put them in their perspective. But to him, it is just, "This kid's not doing what I tell him to do when I tell him to do it and I don't understand why!" So, I think it's helped him a lot because he doesn't have all of that training. He just came into it, "Oh, I am a dad." So, it's helped him to realize, "O.K. I need to stop. I need to think before I speak. I need to think before I act." So it's been a big help to him.

Incidentally, the researcher observed an unusual pattern in the family structure of

the participants. All of the parent participants not only had a fifth grade child at Southern

Hills, but all of them also had another younger child either in Kindergarten or in the first

grade at Southern Hills Elementary School. Thus, after reading the H.E.L.P. brochures

used in the first two parent nights, the issues of sibling rivalry and power "plays"

emerged and was explored as a theme throughout the investigation.

> *Parent A* reflected on sibling rivalry somewhat sarcastically:
>
> Another area was with the sibling rivalry. I never pinpointed, "Oh, he is just doing it because he is mean and nasty", you know? But, the section of the pamphlet that went with this test about their doing things for control. It is their power—it's the only place that they feel that they are making the decisions and their choices and "I can overpower a five or six year-old.

Noting the pattern of each parent in the cadre having a fifth grader in addition to a

Kindergartener or first grader at Southern Hills, when queried about whether or not they

observed any "power plays" or control issues among their children, after general

agreement, the following dialogue ensued:

Parent C shared her situation:

I had to, while I was working, let him have a little bit of that [authority over his younger brother] because they got off of the bus together at four o'clock and had an hour to an hour and a half of their own before I got home. So at that point, he was granted, or given, the power or permission to be the 'heavy,' but then he tries to carry it over to when I'm there, or we're there. It's hard for him to release that once he's had it! And it's hard for him to let go and go back to being eleven because he wants to keep going. That's been a real struggle. I say, "Quit! I can take care of this!"

Parent A added her perceptions:

I have to always tell Zachary, "I give you permission to be eleven. You don't have to be the parent. You didn't have this child. And I give you the permission to be a child yourself." I don't know if he feels that he just has to, or what?

Parent C responded:

Well, and then when he doesn't agree with what I've done, it's, "Mom, no."

Parent B noted her experience:

You often hear, "You did not do that with me!"

Parent C matter of factly stated:

Yes. It has been hard to say, "It does not matter. This is my decision."

The interviewer followed up this emerging theme by asking Parent C if she saw her son, Dylan, assume the role of parent with his sibling and whether or not it had been a source of conflict between the two of them.

Parent C reflected:

Yes, he wants to continue being the authority over Garrett when I am around and he [Garrett] doesn't need that as much. I give Garrett a little more freedom, a little more leeway than what Dylan does. Only God knows what they do in that hour! At least there is no bruises or broken arms or anything.

Parent B humorously asked:

No ambulance waiting for you when you get there? (Laughter)

Parent Knowledge Base and Parenting Skills

Parents were asked if they had any new insights into the knowledge base and the skills needed for parenting an early adolescent. Specifically, they were asked if they had any new insights into their effectiveness as a parent as a result of participating in the parent education classes. Several emergent and identifiable themes related to this research question surfaced: discipline issues, parenting styles, and the transition to middle school with an increased understanding of the workings of Walnut Creek Middle School.

The parents observed that discipline issues often surfaced with their preadolescent. They noted that as a result of the parent meetings, they now offered more choices to their fifth graders and utilized logical consequences in discipline matters. They perceived that they had a better understanding of the expectations appropriate for an early adolescent. Parent B quickly noted that not only did she see this issue between her and her daughter, Elizabeth, but it also carried over into Elizabeth's dealings with her younger sister at home.

Parent B:

Yeah. Because I know that her emotional ups and downs are normal and because I know that there are these control issues with her. I didn't think it would start this early. But, now that I know that they do, we try to be more lenient as to what we make her do and what we don't. If she decides she doesn't want to go out to eat with the family, because she just doesn't want to—"Fine, you can stay home." If you don't want to go to this particular place and do this thing. That's fine. You know. We try to give her more choices and let her make more decisions. And I think it's helped in the household a whole lot, with her sister as well as... because I see her do the same thing with her sister. You know, making her choose. "Well, I can play with you now, or I can get this done and then play with you later. But, if I play with you now, I can only play with you for a little bit of time." So, she is internalizing it and using it with her sister.

Parent D noticed that a new self-awareness of her parenting style had developed. She was reflective of the changes she observed in her parenting style.

Parent D explained:

You know, just thinking about the parenting. As far as that, it made me understand the type of parent I am. As far as the parenting techniques that I do. Authoritative, I'm authoritative. But, I'm starting to realize that my authoritativeness is because I want what I do the best for them. But, I'm learning that it only hinders them. It doesn't give them an opportunity to grow. So, in my perspective, as far as changing some of my goals is that I've gone into the part of the consequences. O.K., make a choice, these are the consequences. If they are not real brutal, example, a homework assignment... So, as far as me trying to tell him, I have decided that I have gone into the process of modifying. It's like, "Gosh, man, you decided to do that and guess where it landed you, okay? You've got two choices. You can either stay in your room for a time period, or you can read a book in your room, or..." And, while he's in that room, I've learned that you have to be real patient, because you go in that room and he just got as much endurance as I have. But, the choice, and I am starting to really use that word more so with him, that, "Your decision-- your choice. My decision-- my choice. All right. So, I guess I am more in the process of explaining, but with limited...you know, because when I can get into a talk with one of my kids, it's "Oh, here we go into a discussion." O.K. So, it's not as lengthy anymore. It has caused me to change into words a little bit more simple. So, communication is a real key. And, getting a child to realize that they are communicating is another thing that I am starting to bring out more so with my child. And I'm not trying to be psychological with him. I love him. I have learned that if I hug him more often, too, even when...I mean, even when like, "I don't feel like hugging you right now because I'm really upset with you." You know. But I will go over and I will hug him and I just see him just melt...just melt. And so, then it reminds me, is this really him, or is this just his, you know, his hormones or these changes that are going on. And, I like the part of just the hugs and just simmering him, and that's really good. And that's a therapy in itself.

An increased understanding of the transition to the middle school as well as an increased understanding of the workings and the communication possibilities at Walnut Creek Middle School surfaced. Parents noted that they felt that, as a result of personally meeting the guest speakers at the monthly follow-up meetings (the guest speakers were the counselor, the vice-principal, and the principal from Walnut Creek Middle School), they were less anxious about the transition, could have more active communication with

the middle school, and developed a better understanding of the internal "workings" of the school their child would soon attend.

Parent C elaborated on some of her fears about her child going to middle school:

Parent C:

I was glad that they came because it gave me a little bit better feel for what leaving here and leaving the security of being the 'big dog' and going to be the 'little dog,' you know, and what's going to happen there as we went through…I mean, we had already talked to so many of them before we went over for the parent night, that it was kind of a reinforcement of what we had already sat at the round table and talked about. And, didn't have quite as many questions or as many anxieties… But I think they'll be fine. But at least I know what to expect, and how the system works.

Parent C continued to share the anxiety of sending her first child on to middle school. She noted her newfound comfort level in approaching school officials for assistance.

Parent C:

I have a neighbor across the street that's just got two boys-- one that's leaving Walnut Creek Middle School and one that will be an eighth grader. So, I've seen some of the stuff she's dealt with. Of course her children are different than mine, but…because all of them are different. But, it's just a matter of…you have had a parent that's been there, and knows kind of where to go and what to say, or how to go from… You know and when we started here, I had no idea when Dylan started; I mean our first two years here were not very good years (and that was before you were here, you know). But, they were not very good years, and I had no idea at that point that I could go in to the principal and say, "We're not communicating with this teacher, can we do something?" I had no idea that you can go in. And so, at least now, I'm to the point where I can go, I know when I go to Walnut Creek Middle School, if we have a conflict with, not necessarily with a teacher, but in a classroom, I have the freedom, "HELLO!" You have a light bulb, you know, you can go in there and talk about this. And that's a lot of information that you just don't know until somebody comes in and says, "Yeah, we can move them out of this and put them over here. We can work that around." And that's good information.

Parent B observed that opening the lines of communication between the school and the home had benefits for her daughter and the transition to Walnut Creek Middle School.

Parent B noted:

I think this, what's been the biggest blessing here, at this school [Southern Hills], for Elizabeth is Ms. Pickle [the school counselor]. She's been a tremendous blessing to my daughter. And, I think after the parent's night over there [Walnut Creek Middle School] and Elizabeth's transition meeting with Ms. McCartt, her special education teacher, she's learned that the counselor over there is just as easy to get in and see and talk to. So, now she knows she has someone there on her side already, from day one. I think that's helped her adjust to the idea of going to middle school.

Parent-Child Relationships

The parent cadre was asked how being involved at this school-- in this parenting program, had affected their relationship with their child. The emergent and identifiable themes related to this research sub-question were: understanding their children as individuals, developing maturity and independence, and the children's desire to have involved parents.

Parents noted they had an increased understanding of their children as individuals with their own insights and perspectives.

Parent D:

Just knowing that they're kids. O.K., that my Marquise, which is my nephew, he is still mine. O.K. That with him, that he as an individual has his own thoughts, his own ideas, his own...I'm really learning, he really has kind of a different perspective of things in the fact that, he will think... the thing is, like, sometimes he'll ask a question and he already knows the answer. And it just drives the heck out of me. "Why are you going to ask me that question?" But he does ask me

that question. What I'm learning is he's asking that for reinforcement. O.K.? That's what I'm learning. And that...and I'm starting to kind of maybe realize that it probably has to do with that for three years he was with his mom and then he had his mom run away. And, even though he was young, when she was gone, KeJuan [Marquise's older brother—her other nephew] can really remember her a lot. Marquise just barely remembers her. And KeJuan talks about her. So I think that Marquise sometimes tries to conjure up and tries to think like KeJuan about his mom. And here I am his aunt who is not being his mom, but just having him to realize that I'm not his mom... I can never be her. But, I can be a person who is your aunt that can assist you in developing to be a young man. So, my perspective in learning his thought pattern has been really interesting. I have seen him. I have sat back and watched him-- and this is just learning about him and reading the books and stuff like that. You know just watching your kid. I have seen him just meet a stranger, and that person just go so comfortable with him that they were telling him personal things. And, I think that is interesting, that he has that ability. And, I never saw that in one form. I never viewed it in that sense.

To clarify the initial question, the researcher further explained the context of the question that was posed to the students. The researcher offered contextual information about the student interview question that corresponded to this one posed to the parents. They were told that their children were asked a similar question. Students were asked, "You know, your parents attended these classes and there are some people that would say, 'Oh, Elizabeth's parents, or Dylan's parents, are involved at school a lot,' because they know that they may have come to this. What do you think about that?" This seemed to further clarify the parents follow-up interview question, "Is there any effect in your relationship with your child by being involved at school? Several parents then quickly responded and unanimously agreed that their children enjoyed and wanted to have their parents involved at school. Parent A shared a story about her son, Zachary which illustrated the notion of pre-adolescents developing maturity and independence yet, exhibit a need for dependence upon their parents.

Parent A:

The day that we went to visit (this is just crazy!)... the day that we went to go visit Walnut Creek, we pulled up in the parking lot, and I told a friend of mine, it was like a total change in my child when we pulled into that parking lot. All of the sudden I was back teaching middle school and he was a middle schooler. I mean attitude! "Well, why are we just sitting here?" I said, "Well, because we are about twenty minutes early." "Well, this looks ridiculous. Everybody's looking at us." I mean, he was getting 'smart,' he was getting a mouth and an attitude and I was like, "Oh my gosh, who is this?" I mean, more than I had ever seen. And, then, about half way through the day, as we were walking through the building, he leans over and holds my hand all the way through the building. And I just think he felt, I don't know, I guess he was nervous or he felt like he had to put up a 'persona' because he was...because all of these middle school kids were out, and playing basketball-- and he was just going to put on this persona! And then, about half way through, he reaches over and holds my hand. I thought, "Wow, you're not so bad are you?" I think even though he would like to think that he is independent, I think he enjoys, you know, me being involved and being there, even in elementary, but I think even they have a thing in August where they invite the seventh graders, or sixth graders to come and they have a day and I went and told the counselor that I would be more than happy to help with anything they need for registration or anything. And he was fine, I mean, he was like, O.K.. So, I think even though, I've always said, that they're young enough that they still need you to make those decisions for them, but they're not old enough to know that they do. You know what I mean?

Parent D echoed a similar story:

I think Marquise really liked it. It's interesting. He wanted...there was like a field trip or something like that, and he said, "Are you going?" And I said, "Well, I don't think I can make it." But when I had all of the time (you know that extra time to go and to really participate) he was kind of limited. And, now I've gotten kind of busy, and then now, he's like, you know, I want you there. And, you know, he said, "I'd like for you to be there." And I'm like, "I'm sorry, but I've got to go pick Josiah up at this time, I've got this schedule..." So, there were times that I could tell that he wanted me to be somewhere, and I couldn't and I just had to explain to him, I said, "I've got to do this, I've got to do that, I've got to do that.

Parent B also shared a story about her daughter's pleasure when they get involved at

school-- even though she was leery about this parent program. She was worried about the

possibility that her parents might share personal information about her with the principal.

Parent B:

Well, Elizabeth has always loved us being here, you know, when there is a field trip or something going on at school. But I think, with these workshops, it is that we personally are talking to the principal. See, that bothered her! Class is one thing; principal is another. You know. He has the ultimate power. So, I think that's what bothered her at first. Oh, Elizabeth knows principal means "ultimate." You know you're in trouble!

Interviewer:

It was interesting calling them into the office. They would kind of come in and kind of look at you like (showed a scared face) and the first thing I'd say is, "You're not in trouble." (Demonstrated a sigh) You know, but they were all pretty nervous!

Family-School Relationships

The final question asked to the parent cadre focused upon family-school connections. Parents were asked how attending these parenting classes and participation in this investigation affected their relationship with the school. The emergent and identifiable themes related to this research sub-question were: improved staff relations, enhanced communication, teachers in the parenting role, staff morale and cohesiveness, the principal as leader, favorable perceptions of the school and the staff, and caring.

The parents reported that participating and being involved at their children's school has enabled them to get to know the teachers better, thus improving the relationship between them and the staff.

Parent C explained:

This is probably the best year that I've been involved, or...and I'm not quite sure why...but, I feel like I know all of the fifth grade teachers. Before, you just knew your child's teacher. I don't know what happened with the fifth grade, but it seemed like I had a better meeting, or when I volunteered, or came in for the testing time. I spent time with Ms. Goodwin, and I spent time with Ms. Evans. And we've talked to Ms. Decker about stuff. But that's fifth grade. I was all

worried about Dylan starting fifth grade at the beginning of the year, because I didn't know any of them. Here, we're leaving and we're sitting at the picnic over there [at a neighborhood park for the end-of-year picnic], and I'm looking at all five of them and they're all, you know, and it's like, "Wow, this has really been a good year!"

Parent B agreed with *Parent C* and continued the dialogue:

Well, I think the fifth grade teachers have done so much together as a unit, too. I think, has made the difference. Because Elizabeth knows all of the fifth grade teachers. She can tell you who's in their class, what they do in their class and everything. So, I think together, as a unit, they get together and try and assimilate the kids together as much as possible to get them ready to go to middle school.

Parent B noted the relationship between home and school was enhanced by increased communication when she got involved. She gave an example of her experience:

Parent B:

If anything, it has just made it stronger and easier to be here. Because I know when I go to talk to her teacher, "Do you see this? Do you see her doing this? Is this the kind of behavior you're getting from her?" And then, we can get on the same wavelength. You know, because I understand Elizabeth a little more. She's taught fifth graders for who knows how long, so maybe she sees it too every year. So, it puts us on the 'same page,' so we know what we are talking about.

Parent D shared a story in which she had a positive working relationship with the school. However, additional dialogue continued which provided information about how the parents allowed the fifth grade teachers to act in the role of "parent" for their children:

Parent D:

Ms. Goodwin is wonderful! If she can handle and deal with "Mr. Marquise," she's good!

Parent B:

Oh, I hear he's not so bad. Elizabeth talks about him all the time.

Parent D:

Well, "Mr. Marquise"...I guess he is just so outspoken, he just told Ms. Goodwin that her job was "to run her mouth!" You understand? (Laughter and comments that could not be identified)

Parent A:

I wonder what her comment was, because she's pretty quick on her feet!

Parent D:

And I thought that she handled it just right, you know, because I still use that to this day. You know, I guess, you know, "What is my job, to run my mouth, too?" I really commend her because I thought she was there for Marquise. She has been very understanding, from my perspective, and I just kind of backed off and let her have him for a little bit, which gave... I'm serious-- there were times when I would want to come in and do something! But I'm like, 'No, Ms. Goodwin has got it under control, and if something really comes up, she'll give me a call.' And when something really did, she gave me a call, and I was right here, and so we addressed that issue right then and there. I could see with both of us addressing that issue, pointing out and trying to get him...not trying to get him, but just kind of...how would you say...bouncing back to him what he's presented to her. You understand? He saw that.

Parent D expressed her trust in the teachers to act in the role of parent to her son:

Parent D:

Yes. I trusted her in dealing with him. Because, you know, I guess I'm real kind of protective, in a sense, of my kids. I feel like, I know that she's the teacher...her job is to teach and all of that, but her job is also a little parenting, too, okay? I felt comfortable enough to let her parent mine. You understand? And...which is a little difficult for me to do. Because, I'm the type of person that...my mother raised me to assume my own responsibility. And it's not that she taught me that or said that, that's what I saw her do. But I saw her [Ms. Goodwin] real laid back, though. She wasn't authoritative, or anything like that. She was just kind of laid back. She was there. She was supportive. and she was just kind of...cool. And I think I'm a little uptight. So, I know I did not see that portion with her, but I notice I am a little bit like that. And I don't know if I got like that because I went from having one child to three in a very short time period, and then I ended up having another one...four. And in the end, my husband is just kind of in the background just kind of laid back. He just kind of lets, "It's okay, you know that's wrong, you'd better not do that." And they go do it again. He says, "No, that's wrong, you'd better not do that." And they go do it again. He says, "That's wrong, you'd better not do that." And they go do it, and I'm

like, "Ya'll better stop doing that!" (Yelling) You know, I'm…this class has really taught me to kind of lay back a little bit in a sense. Because, I've been kind of, you know, not an uptight person, but… Ms. Goodwin, I saw Ms. Goodwin like, man, she wanted to scream, too! Which was really good. He does it to her too. But, ultimately, he's O.K. He's a good kid.

Parents were then questioned about the school's culture. They were asked if they had an increased understanding of the Southern Hills school culture. Parents reported observing high staff morale and a sense of cohesiveness as an effect of being involved at school. They also expressed strong opinions about the previous principal and the new leadership and support that the current principal (who is also the researcher) had provided during his four year tenure at Southern Hills. Parent D described her observation of the staff's morale and cohesiveness:

Parent D:

Yes, I think the teachers probably for example, all the teachers-- all the teachers seem like they work together. That they, how would you say it? That they talk among themselves about the kids. And I really saw like, an example, there was a situation with him [Marquise] just "touching." He's at the line at the bus stop and he just can't seem to keep his hands to himself! He just can't seem to shut his mouth! He can't seem to realize, if another kid says something, if he'll just be quiet he won't be accused of doing things. But, between the assistant principal and the teacher, Ms. Goodwin, letting me know some things, you know-- how, well he went from one cycle to another cycle. So, I thought they worked pretty well as a team.

Parent B noted the same notion of staff cohesiveness over the course of her daughter's five-years at Southern Hills.

Parent B:

They seem to get along a lot better, and stuff. And, I know from personal experience that the teachers seem to pass along warnings to each other of the kids that are coming up. And it's not always a bad thing. Because my daughter spends the first two weeks of school every year panicked about whether the teacher is going to like her, is she going to be able to do the work, is she going to be able to be okay? And the teacher seems to forewarn each other. I was talking

to Ms. Goodwin the Thursday before school got out and we had gotten her a gift. I told her, "Elizabeth's a little but upset. She didn't want to come in and talk to you. She's upset about something." Ms. Goodwin automatically panicked and said, "Well, I was a little upset with the kids today and I hope she doesn't think I was aiming it at her. It was just the whole class in general." I said, "Well, we'll worry about that later." Ms. Kilpatrick happened to be standing there--she had Elizabeth in first grade. She leaned over and said, "I had Elizabeth. I know what you're talking about. It's okay. You know, she'll be alright." So, they all know. And they pass along the things they should know about the kids that are coming up.

Parent A echoed the same sentiments:

Parent A:

Well, and that…being a teacher here…there was a funny comment yesterday and it was actually geared at pre-school, saying, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." That's just the feeling, after for three years being here, is that we all feel responsible for each and every child regardless of if they're quote ours or not.

Following up on the sub-question about the school-home relationships, the

parents voluntarily turned the interview in another direction. The parents in the cadre,

who had been involved at Southern Hills for the last six years since their child was in

Kindergarten, noted Principal assumed a different leadership style than the previous

principal. Parent C was especially vocal. Parent C attempted to reference the time that

the current principal had been at Southern Hills. She groped, "Because, I think…I mean,

in the last four years…have you been…" The interviewer confirmed, "I just finished four

years." Then further dialogue with other parents continued. Parent C speaking about

student discipline, observed:

Parent C:

The fourth year? I mean, boom! I nailed it. I know. You can just see the camaraderie in the teachers and the 'flow' and the fact that you don't put up with it. "Here's the line. You cross the line. I'm sorry, you crossed the line, and you're out of here." Or whatever the consequence is. They know what the

consequence is. Therefore, the teachers have a lot more freedom to be able to teach and to do the things that they need to be doing, because they know that you're there to support them for that next step. I can see a whole lot of difference than the first two years that we were here, and for that I'm very thankful. Things are going to be great for Garrett for the next three years, because, I hope that they don't say, "(Mumbling something about job security)" Because I want to be in here and I want to be a part of it, but I don't want to be a pest, either.

Parent B further addressed her observations about the school culture and

difference between the previous and the current principal's leadership styles.

Parent B:

Yeah. Because I noticed that the last principal that was here just didn't seem to care about the school. The leaks were still here, potholes in the parking lot-- I mean nothing got taken care of! And it seemed like the teachers all sensed that. There was a 'tightness' about them. But, you've come in and got things done, so now the teachers are a little more relaxed. They seem to get along a lot better and stuff.

Parent C chimed in and furthered the parents' observations. However, Parent C

brought out another theme—the notion of caring at Southern Hills Elementary School.

Parent C:

Well, and you and your staff, and your office staff, do an excellent job of taking the teacher's recommendation and saying, "Well, this child and this child...they were in this class together and they kind of rubbed sand paper," so next year, don't put those two children in the same class. So, I know...I mean that's an 'art,' that's a definite 'art.' That's you caring about the child and you caring about how the teacher is going to be able to effectively teach that child. So, you're right. This little community here is running quite well and I think a lot of it is because you guys care. And Ms. Pickle [guidance counselor] gets in here and you get in here-- and Mrs. Christopher [vice-principal]. But you know, you guys get in here and you really care about where the kids go and what to do and you know the children. And what blows me away, too, is that you know who my child is and then put me and my child together. In the beginning of the year, I had not spent that much time, but they knew, you know, who I was and what child I had in this school

Parent B:

Right. They get to know you when you come in. It's like, "I know who you are." And that's not a bad thing.

Parent C:

And that's good.

Parent B:

Right.

Parent C:

And that's good. But that's because you guys care. And you care and that trickles all the way down! Everything starts from right there (pointed to principal). I mean, I just came out of a business that the 'top' man didn't care. His attitude was, "Whose fault is it?" It was never, "What can we do?" It's always, "Whose fault is it?" So, everything that happened in that whole organization, the first question was, "Whose fault is it?" But, you know…so, if you start with the top guy, and you say, "Well, how can we fix this? How can we change it?" Then, everything's going to filter down all the way through to your assistants and to your teacher's aides, "This is okay. How can we fix this?" Because, the foundation's there.

Parent B:

Well, the first two years, when Elizabeth was in Kindergarten and first grade, we weren't asked what type of teacher we wanted for her. We weren't asked at the first year (like you've been doing every year), "What do you want this school to do this year? What do you want our mission to be?" And then at the end of the year, "How do you think we accomplished it?" That was never asked those first two years we were here. It was a totally different situation here. It really was.

Parent C:

I'm glad I'm not the only one who saw that.

Parent B:

No, it was obvious. The principal just didn't want to be here. That was obvious.

Interviewer:

That's real interesting to me because I was the (new) person that came in. I had no clue what it was like before, so...

Parent C:

Well, and I know that you took a couple of years before you could do a lot. I mean, you know, of just testing the water, and getting stuff and ...

Parent B:

And I like the way you tried to get the parents involved. Especially when it came time for the bond issue for the gym. "Write the school board," and you gave us their addresses and stuff. We sat down, my husband and I; we both sat down and wrote individual letters to them because the other principal just didn't care. "What got done got done. What didn't-- didn't. Fine. We don't care." And, I got tired of walking in and seeing leaks and pans and stuff being in the hall from the leaks and stuff. It was awful. You know, things get done, so people are happier.

Parent C:

But it all starts at the top and you've done a great job. And I know that it's taken you...I mean, your first two years, you were kind of...you couldn't do a whole lot. But, every year, you have a little bit more. You have more of the teachers that you've, hired, that know you.

Parent B:

Well, the rapport you have with the kids, too, because I know Elizabeth says, "He knows my name, Mom. He sees me in the hall and he says, 'Hi, Elizabeth.' Why does he know my name?" Well, maybe he's just good at remembering names. But, you know, it just thrills her to death that you know her name. She just can't get over that.

Parent B:

So, now Emma [her younger daughter] is looking forward to that. "Will he know my name, too?" Well, let's hope it's for positive reasons!

In summary, the parents held positive perceptions of this program, had a better

understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics and what is "normal" for

preadolescents. They developed more proactive parenting styles and more clearly

understood sibling rivalry and power plays. Parents noted changes in how they handled

discipline issues as well as changes in their parenting styles. They developed a better

understanding of the transition to middle school with an increased understanding of the

workings of Walnut Creek Middle School, the feeder middle school. The parents

observed that as discipline issues surfaced with their pre-adolescent, they now offered

more choices to their fifth grader and utilized logical consequences in discipline matters.

They also perceived that they had a better understanding of the expectations appropriate

for an early adolescent. The parents perceived that this parenting program had affected

their relationship with their child. They understood their children as individuals who

were developing maturity and independence and yet still had a strong desire to have

involved parents.

<p style="text-align: center;">Research Question #2: Findings</p>

The second research question that guided this investigation was, "As parents of early

adolescents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent involvement

at school, what are their early adolescent students' perceptions of (a) the effects or impact

of this parent education series, (b) their parents' efficacy with an emphasis on the

parents' knowledge base and parenting skills, and (c) the effect of their parents being

involved at the school. In order alleviate the student's possible anxiety of having to come

to the Principal's office for the interviews, the researcher attempted to make the students

more comfortable and relaxed by sitting casually at the conference table, by offering

them a piece of candy, and by starting the interview with some friendly small-talk. The

researcher recognized that he held a position of power and authority in the school and sought ways to minimize this so that the students did not merely try to please the researcher and offer answers they perceived to be "correct."

Perceived Effects of this Parent Education Series on the Children

The student responses to the question, "What do you think about your parents attending this program?" were overwhelmingly positive. Eight students responded positively and one was neutral. Students viewed the increased involvement of their parents at school as a positive "good thing." The fifth graders noted that as their parents learned new parenting skills related to adolescent development, they also changed communication styles, assisted more with homework, and increased their knowledge of middle school expectations

Several quotes from students indicated that they saw the benefits of parental involvement and that they felt good about their parents' involvement at school. Elizabeth said, "It might help. It's great. It makes me feel that they're more involved at school." Marquise said, "It's been fun and good. She gets to spend some time alone—and needs it! She can go somewhere to calm down and talk about it." Michael viewed this question from another perspective. He said, "It's good for her. She can learn more about us and how we act. Scottie agreed, stating, "It has helped her learn more about me and the middle school—like what I need to grow strong and healthy and how to do better on grades." Dylan agreed with Scottie, "It's cool because they'll know about what to expect of me in middle school."

Additionally, students were asked if they thought their parents' involvement at school had made a difference or impact in any area of their lives. Two said there was "no change;" yet, seven said they perceived a change in their parents as a result of becoming involved in this study. The students' responses to the impact that this program has had upon them can be categorized into two areas (a) communication in conflict resolution with siblings and (b) homework assistance.

Elizabeth observed her father's communication skills by adding, "My dad asks us more questions now when I fight with my sister....like, why we were mad. He hears both sides." She also said, "It helps me because I feel more like he's not just blaming me all the time. That's how I sometimes feel." Michael made a similar response. He said, "She listens to us more now. She talks to each of us and hears both sides and differences." Michael summarized his feelings about communication by saying, "It's helped me in a good way. I can tell my side (of the conflict) now-- even if I lie!"

Several students observed that their parents had changed the manner or quantity of homework assistance they offered their children. Marquise said, "She helps us more with more things and is more active with schoolwork." Charlie said, "Yes, she's helped out with homework a lot—like my research paper." Kylee stated, "They used to help by giving me answers, now they help more and don't just give me the answers."

Parent Efficacy

The second area explored in research Question #2 was the student's perception of their parents' efficacy-- with an emphasis on the parents' knowledge base and parenting skills. The students were first asked a grand-tour question. They were asked, "Do you

think your parents understand you better?" Several probing questions were used as

follow-up questions. The follow-up questions were, "Have your parents tried anything

new or different?' and "How has that affected you?"

Once again, the student responses were overwhelmingly positive. All responded

favorably to the question, "Do you think they understand you better?" Understanding

and communication were the two themes that emerged from the responses. Zachary

observed that his parents had a better understanding of him. He said, "They know I have

middle school coming up and will make lots of friends. Elizabeth responded positively

and said, "Yes, they understand me better." Jonathan declared his mother's increased

understanding of him. He said, "Yes, she knows the problems I've had—the good points

and the bad points."

Improvements in communication between the parents and the children were also

perceived. Marquise said, "If I get mad, we talk about it and she explains things to me."

Charlie made a similar statement. Charlie said, "She has tried telling Kory [his little

brother] another way of saying some things. They understand me." Dylan expressed the

same sentiments by saying, "Yes, they understand that right now I don't want my little

brother to be with me and my friends. They call him away so I can be with my friends."

To follow up the line of questioning on efficacy, the students were asked, "Have

your parents tried anything new or different?' and "How has that affected you?" All

students pointed out their parents had tried something new or different. The children

reported that their parents had created additional responsibilities or privileges for them,

had changed some routines, and they utilized conflict resolution skills to resolve sibling

conflicts.

Elizabeth reported that her parents have created additional responsibilities for her. She said, "They have tried having me and my little sister help out more with the dishes and the laundry!" Charlie agreed, "Now they're starting to give me more privileges. Now I get one chance before I am grounded but I can also earn them back now." Charlie also saw the positive side to this change; he said, "I get mad if I get grounded, but it's good that I can earn them (privileges) back now." Michael reported that he felt the additional chores were beneficial to him. He said, "She lets us do more stuff at home, like chores, as we get older." Michael further stated that, "I have learned more stuff so I will not be relying on someone else as I'm older."

Zachary stated that some of his regular routines at home had changed. Zachary said, "They changed my bedtime earlier. As for my homework, they usually give me free time and then I do it. Now, I have to do it right then and there." Zachary did acknowledge, "Well, if I have a lot of homework, I can't go play. That upsets me!" Marquise observed the same and said, "We have new schedules and routines-- getting ready for next year." He further admitted that, "It helps me somewhat. Like, if I go to bed late, I have to get up early the next day. I get less naps and am not staying up so late now."

Several students reported that their parents had incorporated conflict resolution skills to deal with sibling conflicts. Kylee said, "I fight with my little brother. They kind of discipline us more and they work it out more. We talk about it more, kind of like peer mediation at school. We tell our feelings." Dylan reported the same perception. He said, "Normally my brother and I get into fights. They would take whatever it was away and give it to the other person... just take it away! Now we started doing turns, like who gets

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to ride in the front seat of the car." Kylee, nevertheless, indicated that this change was useful to her. She said, "It feels better than being angry with him (little brother) all the time." Dylan also noted the benefits of his parents using conflict resolution techniques. Dylan said, "I haven't always gotten my way. Mostly, they understand and they let me get my way—like they give Garrett other options... my little brother wants to keep up with me."

The Effect of their Parents Being Involved at the School

The student responses to the question, "What do you think about having your parents involved at school?" were unanimously positive. All of the students responded favorably to the notion of parent involvement at Southern Hills. The fifth graders noted that their parents were (a) more aware of what was going on at school (e.g. events), (b) had a good relationship with their teachers, and (c) were pleased to have their parents involved in their school.

Several quotes from students indicated that the children reaped the benefits of parent involvement. Zachary said, "I kind of like it. I know they're here and participating. They know what's going on." Elizabeth said, "It's great! My Dad can be involved because his schedule can allow it. Mom can't because she teaches." Marquise echoed that same notion, "It's good because it helps me figure out things about the schools and understand what's going on." Kylee also said, "It's good because they learned about things going on at school." Marquise additionally observed another benefit. He said, "We get to meet more teachers and get used to them." Finally, the students reported that

they were pleased to have their parents involved at their school. Michael said, "She cares about her job and cares about what is going on here." Elizabeth said, "It's great. It makes me feel that they're more involved at school." Dylan mentioned that, "It's great they're involved and willing to help." Scottie offered the only alternative view. He stated his approval with a disclaimer, "It's kind of neat. She has sometimes had to miss maybe a soccer game. I didn't like that. She has had to miss some things like soccer and Bunko."

To follow-up the line of questioning on the effects of parent involvement, students were queried about any perceived changes in their own academic achievement (grades, attendance, and homework completion), their attitudes toward themselves and toward the school, and their perceptions regarding the transition to middle school. First, students perceived that their grades had improved and that they had received more homework assistance, thus an increased homework completion rate and better grades. Zachary reported that, "My grades have gone up a little. They help me with homework to get it done... about the same amount of time." Marquise noted that, "My reading was low...a "D." But now it went up to a "B" and my other grades went up." Scottie saw a change as well, "I've seen a change. She's helped with unfinished homework and gives me help on spelling." Charlie said, "I have to always do my homework right when I get home. Then I can play, so I get better grades."

Six of the nine students perceived a change in their attitude about themselves and towards school. Marquise reported that he "used to not like school. Now I like it because my grades are better." Michael indicated that his mother "knows what we feel like and if friends are taken away, she understands how bad I feel when it's taken away."

Scottie stated, "Yeah, I like school better now. It was frustrating. Now it's better."

Kylee said, " I like school better because they are involved more and they help with

homework more."

All of the students who were interviewed were optimistic about the expected

transition to middle school. Parents had offered encouragement to them. The students

also reported that their parents now had an increased understanding of the homework

expectations at the middle school. Marquise stated that, "It will help me especially with

homework— she can help give me examples." Dylan noted that, "They'll know what to

expect-- like times and homework expectations." Michael also perceived the same, "She

understands it will be hard and that we can adapt even though it will be hard."

Several students reported that their parents had offered words of encouragement

to them and were had a positive outlook about transitioning to Walnut Creek Middle

School. Zachary said, "I'm looking forward to it (going to middle school). They've

helped me with it and they're cheering me on to do well." Elizabeth was positive as well,

"I have the same opinion of going to middle school; it's going to be pretty cool!"

Scottie said, "I was scared... if I messed up or got in with the wrong gang. She's told me

what was right from wrong and how to settle conflicts at school." Charlie stated, "I think

it's going to go fine. We had a little talk at home... it was a good thing." Kylee offered a

slightly more skeptical outlook than the others. She reported, "They are more excited

about it (going to middle school) than me. They tell me I will have lots of fun and it will

be easier."

In summary, the researcher acknowledges that his dual roles and relationships (researcher-student and principal-student) with the students in this investigation may have impacted the responses that were collected. The students generally viewed the increased involvement of their parents at school as positive. The fifth graders noted that as their parents learned some new parenting skills related to adolescent development, they also improved their communication styles, assisted more with homework, and were more knowledgeable of middle school expectations. All of the students indicated their parents had tried something new or different as a result of this study. The children reported that their parents had created additional responsibilities or privileges for them, had changed some routines, and they have utilized conflict resolution skills to resolve sibling conflicts. All of the students responded favorably to the notion of parent involvement at Southern Hills. The fifth graders noted that their parents were more aware of what was going on at school, had a good relationship with their teachers, and were generally pleased to have their parents involved in their school. The students also perceived positive changes in their own academic achievement (better grades, improved attendance, and higher rates of homework completion), their attitudes toward themselves and toward the school, and in their perceptions regarding the transition to middle school.

Research Question #3: Findings

The third research question that guided this investigation was, "As parents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent involvement at school, what are the teachers' perceptions of (a) the effects of parental participation in this parent education series, (b) parent knowledge base and parenting skills, and (c) the effects of having

parents involved with the school (e.g. academics/social-emotional/behavior)?" The responses that were collected were little more than hearsay. The teachers' responses were based upon their perceptions that were shaded by their own experiences as teachers of early adolescents. Based upon their observations of the fifth graders in their classrooms, they based their perceptions and suppositions regarding the effectiveness of the parents, the parents' knowledge base, and parenting skills.

Telephone interviews were conducted with four of the five teachers on the fifth grade staff. The one teacher not interviewed was excluded because she had no parents from her room participate in the program. The teachers were invited to attend the parent program; however, none attended. It was not a required school event. Since they did not attend the meetings, they had little to no information, about the content of the program's curriculum or its activities. This was done intentionally so that when they would be interviewed at the conclusion of the program, they would have no prejudiced views about it or the parents involved.

The Effects of Parental Participation in this Parent Education Series

The first grand-tour question posed to the teachers was, "Have you heard anything about this program?" Only two out of the four teachers interviewed had heard any responses from parents. Therefore, limited data was available. Quotes taken from the two teachers who had heard about the program indicated that they had heard, or had been told, that it was a positive experience for the parents. Mrs. Evans said, "I heard about it from Kylee's mom. She said it was very informative and worthwhile to attend. She

didn't go into any depth. Mrs. Preston reported, "Yes, I heard a lot-- especially from Parent C. She was very impressed and enthusiastic about it. She didn't understand why all of the fifth grade parents didn't participate!"

Four themes emerged from the teacher follow-up questions: (a) involved and supportive parents, (b) they were "good" parents already, (c) conflict resolution at school, and (d) fewer discipline problems. The first follow-up question posed to the teachers was, "What, if any, difference has this program made with parents?" Teachers reported that the parents who had attended the parent classes were already involved and supportive parents. They were perceived by the teachers as "good" parents. Mrs. Evans observed that she hadn't really heard anything about it, but that, "They were good parents already and want to raise them the right way and would be open to any information that would help to further their children's education and development at this stage. I am sure it helped them out." Mrs. Goodwin also noted, "No, I have not noticed anything—if I had known (who was attending) I would have been more observant. Really, these parents were already very supportive to begin with!" Mrs. Preston confessed, "I honestly don't know. Because I didn't participate in the program, I can't really say. These parents were already really involved and interested in their kid's school performance and behavior." The second follow-up question asked the teachers to respond to, "How has this program affected the students?" Mrs. Evans reported:

> That I didn't really notice anything with Elizabeth…but with Jonathan—(pause) well, later in the year he was able to, instead of fighting, use more reasoning and had fewer emotional 'blasts' at the end of the year. He was in the office less, I'm sure you saw that. I saw a lot of emotional growth in him. I may have just been maturity… who knows?

Mrs. Goodwin perceived a change in one of her students. She said, "If I can look back, if there were any changes in anyone, it would be Marquise. He kind of went through a 'rough' beginning, then leveled out with some decent behavior-- then went back down again—like big lying on trivial stuff."

Parent Knowledge Base and Parenting Skills

To gain insights into the teachers' perceptions of the parents' knowledge base and parenting skills, the teachers were asked, "Do you think these parents are more effective as parents now?" As noted previously, several of the teachers had very limited information and feedback about the program. Once again, the teachers' responses were little more than hearsay. The responses were based upon the teachers' perceptions and were shaded by their own experiences as teachers of early adolescents. Based upon their observations of the fifth graders in their classrooms, they formed their perceptions and suppositions regarding the parents' knowledge base and parenting skills.

However, the teachers had perceived that the program offered parents good information about what would be "normal" adolescent behaviors or characteristics. Mrs. Evans shared, "I'm sure they were more effective. You gave them good tips and helped them out." Mrs. Decker specifically reported on one family. She said:

> Yes, they benefited greatly! (Did I say that with enough 'political correctness'?) This one family *really* needs the help. You know, Zachary is such a smart kid. Like, he's one we will read about someday doing something really great. I mean, in class he is all over the place, can't really focus...he has so much potential though.

Mrs. Preston adamantly responded, "YES! Based on their comments to me, it gave them insights into their child's behavior—gave them new insights into what behavior is normal or not—especially if they don't have an older child who has already gone through it (puberty or middle school)."

The next follow-up question focused on the changes the teachers' perceived in the parents' parenting styles. Teachers were asked, "Have you heard anything about them applying the training?" All of the teachers responded that they had no input or feedback. The final follow-up question asked, "How has that impacted students?" All of the teachers responded that they had no input or feedback.

The Effects of Having Parents Involved with the School

To gather information about the teachers' perceptions of the effects of having parents involved in the school, they were each asked, "What do you think about having parents involved at school in this way?" Very positive responses were offered from all the teachers. From the teachers' responses, the themes of (a) transitioning to middle school, (b) understanding early adolescent development, (c) academics, (d) attitudes toward school and self, and (e) the family-school connection emerged.

Mrs. Evans perceived that the program, "hits at the right time just as they are taking the jump to middle school. If parents would take advantage of it, it hits at the right time of the school year." Mrs. Goodwin reflected:

It's really good having them involved. Any type of parent program is great. When I taught the Jim Fay Love & Logic classes, there was little turnout. They (parents) already think they're the best—won't admit their faults. There's just not enough (training) in this area. They need to be open and willing; they almost need to be at a "low point" then they will attend, but may be too late.

Mrs. Decker added, "It's good. Most parents could use the assistance at this age. It's a big transition time for them—from elementary to middle school. They need to know what to expect, what is 'normal.'" Mrs. Preston further perceived that, "I can only see the benefits. Like, if they are more 'enlightened' in development and behavior of adolescents that leads to less stress at home then less stress at school. I mean like, giving them choices in clothing—what shoes to wear today, etc."

Academics (e.g. grades and homework completion) were the emphasis of the next follow-up question. All the teachers perceived that parent involvement benefited students academically. Mrs. Evans asserted, "Oh, definitely. When parents are involved their kids are more involved (in their schoolwork). Their homework is done and finished. They know what to do and do just all around better!" Mrs. Goodwin reported on her students, "Michael and Elizabeth both maintained very good grades. Marquise, though—even though he's very smart when he applies himself-- he just had to decide. He had to make the choice then he would do very good." Mrs. Decker also commented on a certain child in her classroom, Zachary. She said, "I am not sure if it's a result or not, but I had a problem with him turning in his work. He got lots of zeroes, so his grade dropped. So, I started having him put his completed work in a folder on my desk—then there was improvement! Like magic, huh?"

Perception of the teachers' views about the participant students' social-emotional

characteristics (attitude toward self and the school) was also explored.

Mrs. Evans stated:

> When parents are involved, it tells the kids, "We care about you!" They (kids) have more self-confidence and backing from home. We get less "attitude" and more of a positive attitude. They enjoy school more. The teachers get to know the family more and have better connections with them...almost like "family." You get to know them personally and the school has better effectiveness.

Although her comments are too specific to generalize to the theme, Mrs. Goodwin

perceived that Michael and Elizabeth were already "very confident" and that Elizabeth,

though very shy, she had "some confidence." Marquise, she noted was "like a roller

coaster!" She asserted, "I don't know what else to call it. He would be a 'model' student,

then I would praise him for doing a great job, but then he would go back down. I had to

learn not to go too overboard!" Mrs. Preston echoed some of Ms. Goodwin's

perceptions. She declared that, "All of them had, with the exception of Charlie, a

positive outlook about school. Charlie has his own little outlook about most of

everything anyway! Charlie's mom—she really made tremendous efforts with her three

boys over the course of the school year, though."

When the teachers were asked to respond to how the student participant behavior

had changed and their outlook about transitioning to middle school, only one teacher had

any response. Mrs. Preston summarized the grade level team's perception of the fifth

graders, "Oh they were ALL very excited about going to the new situation-- Walnut

Creek-- this year. Like, all of the new classes and new teachers... they were really

excited. Usually we get lots of questions about lockers, classes, etc. But not this year—

go figure! They just weren't apprehensive about it at all."

In summary, the teachers viewed the parent participants as involved and supportive parents—particularly, "They were 'good' parents already." Several of the teachers had very limited information and feedback about the program, thus their responses were little more than hearsay and were shaded by their own experiences as teachers of early adolescents they based their perceptions and suppositions regarding the effectiveness of the parents, the parents' knowledge base, and parenting skills upon their observations of the fifth graders in their classrooms. They did, nonetheless, observe that some of the student participants demonstrated more positive conflict resolution skills at school as their parents became more involved. They also perceived that as a result of this study, there were fewer classroom discipline problems. However, the teachers who had received feedback from parents perceived that the program offered parents good information about what would be "normal" adolescent behaviors or characteristics.

Very positive responses were offered from all the teachers regarding the students' comments about their upcoming transition to middle school. All of the teachers believed that having the parents, like the cadre, involved at school benefited students academically. They noted an improvement in the students' academics (i.e. grades and homework completion) and an improvement in the students' attitude toward school and self.

Archival Data

Utilizing the school's academic, attendance, and discipline records, archival data

was collected. The average number of student absences slight declined during the

parent education program. The following figure summarizes the average number of

absences each quarter of the school year for only the student participants:

TABLE 1

ATTENDANCE-- AVERAGE ABSENCES PER QUARTER

Quarter	Days Absent
First	1.30
Second	1.20
Third	2.00
Fourth	1.25

Health issues may have made these averages inflated. For example, Elizabeth had twenty total absences during the school year due to, primarily, migraine headaches. The range of student absences was from 0 to 20 absences. It must also be disclosed that five of the eleven students had only one to two absences all year long. The averages in the figure above represent them as well.

TABLE 2

DISCIPLINE REFERRALS-- AVERAGE OF REPORTED REFERRALS

Quarter	Days Absent
First	2
Second	5
Third	4
Fourth	3

All of these referrals were generated by only four (4) of the 11 children involved in the study. Seven of the children had no office referrals. No attempt was made to analyze the behavior that resulted in the office referrals.

The students' core curriculum achievement (grades) were collected for each quarter and analyzed for trends and patterns. Percentages were collected for the content areas of: math, reading, spelling, English, social studies, and science. Pervasively, students were high achievers—earning a majority of A's and a few B's. One child earned average grades of B's and C's. Each quarter, students most often scored 90% or better. The following summarizes the patterns and trends observed after reviewing the students' academic records:

- Mathematics scores improves across the board

- Reading improved; a few dropped, but then returned or exceeded previous percentages

- Spelling improved slightly

- English improved slightly

- Social Studies improved

- Science overall, usually saw an improvement... some dropped slightly.

In summary, student attendance improved slightly during the course of this study. However, it must be noted that individual health issues must be considered and that some children had no absences, thus skewing the averages. Most of the children in the study were well-behaved students. Only four students of the eleven in the study received any discipline referrals all year long. The students' academic achievement improved in most areas during this study.

Document Analyses

Document analysis was collected from three sources: researchers' journal notes,

observational notes and reflection cards.

Researcher's Journal Notes

From the researcher's journal notes, it was observed that as the parent cadre began

to get acquainted and more comfortable with each other, they brought others with them to

the meetings and began openly sharing more concerns common to all of them. They all

seemed comfortable in this setting—their neighborhood school.

> *Entry:* Not many ate pizza the first night. One parent brought a "guest"—she
> was a parent at another school—a "choice"(i.e. open-enrollment school) school
> here in the district. Many parents did not know each other-- little talk or chit-chat.
> This changed over time. There is noted ease of coming in and getting started
> (quickly getting pizza, pop-- and getting settled in the childcare room).

On one occasion, the cadre was so immersed in their conversations and sharing of

stories, that the reflection cards were not completed. Early on in the study, parents noted

that they were already experiencing the transition to early adolescence with their fifth

grader.

> *Entry:* More communication and sharing are occurring as the parents got to know
> each other. Starting meetings is becoming increasingly "difficult" since they
> wanted to share—we did not even get around to reflection cards tonight. Some
> parent feedback indicated that they were already experiencing some of the
> changes we discussed tonight and were eager to learn more.

During subsequent meetings, additional journal notes taken indicated that the researcher observed that the change of settings (from a middle school to an elementary school setting) for this investigation was more effective. This group of parents was committed to attending and developed a rapport and cohesiveness with each other. The parent group had established relationships with one another and began to be viewed as a "support" system for each other. Demographic diversity was also noted and that usually just mothers attended; however, a couple of fathers attended as well as one grandmother. In order to get the reflection cards completed, procedural changes were made.

> *Entry*: Good to do this at elementary school. All parents seemed committed and returned on regular basis – expressed willingness to return and to learn more. Occasionally, husband attended instead of wife. But by meeting #3, though, two brought along the fathers as well. Usually only mothers attended. Parents were willing to share questions or concerns for future topics—verbally or with emails. I felt less and less dependence to make introductions, get things started (pizza, etc). More parents started giving me anecdotal feedback. The guest speakers well received. Participants had opportunity to give feedback, express concerns so that the guest speakers would be prepared for answer questions. Noted a change needed in order to get reflection cards completed (had allowed them once to take home and send back... Little response!) Increasingly, I am impressed with relationships forged in the meetings... a little "support group." By end of program, attendance waned. Soccer season had started & end of the year activities in the other schools.

In summary, the parent participants were committed to attending the meetings and forged relationships with each other that created a type of support system for each other. The camaraderie and communication evidenced in the meetings transformed the cadre from a gathering of fifth grade parents into a group of adult learners willing to share their concerns and questions with each other for support and encouragement.

<u>Observational Notes</u>

The researcher's observational notes were used for documentation of attendance and to make a record of the curriculum covered and the topics addressed by the guest speakers. The researcher's journal notes were used for more reflective observations.

<u>Reflection Cards</u>

Over the course of the study, three reflective questions were posed to the parents each week. The questions were:

1. Tell about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in these sessions—or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why or why not?

2. How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.

3. How have these sessions affected your relationship with the school and its staff?

After reviewing each of the week's reflection cards, summaries and themes generated from the parent responses are listed.

<u>Question #1</u>: The question, "Tell about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in these sessions—or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why or why not?" elicited several responses:

- Improved reactions to mood swings and forgetfulness. The parents noted that they now viewed this as a "normal" behavior among early adolescents.

- Not engaging in arguing with their children. The parents began using enforceable statements or walking away. Some noted that they now "pick their battles" and are less reactive-- more proactive with discipline issues.

- Used more humor. The parents noted that they tried seeing the humor in situations rather than engaging in an argument with their child.

- More consistency in disciplining them, additional responsibilities and privileges. Parents shared instances in which they felt they had become more consistent in disciplining their child. They altered or revised home routines to include additional appropriate responsibilities for child such as crating a time schedule for getting chores and homework completed.

- Change perspective of children—from kids to "small adults." Parents indicated that they had altered the way they viewed this child. They started to view them as young adults who have their own opinions and ways of thinking.

In summary, the parents involved in the program had applied the information presented in the meetings with their child. Notably, situations or issues involving conflicts, discipline, and early adolescent developmental characteristics emerged as significant areas in which the parents found the information applicable and useful.

Question #2: "How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe."

- Increased awareness and understanding of their children. The cadre of parents noted that they felt they were more effective parents as they gained new insights into typical pre-adolescent characteristics, thus were more understanding of all the changes their child was experiencing.

- Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, improved. Instead of immediately reacting to perceived disrespectful comments or actions, the parents indicated that they began describing their perception to their child and asking them to restate their comment in a more respectful manner.

- Forgetfulness and mood swings were observed as normal. Parents observed that their children were increasingly more forgetful and that they were often perceived as being unfair. However, the parents also noted they felt more effective since they knew that forgetfulness and mood swings were a normal part of pre-adolescence.

- Dealing with siblings in differing ways. All of the parent participants had younger children (kindergarteners or first graders) and felt more effective with their fifth grader by giving them more space (that the fifth grader could have control of) and started dealing with age the differences by other means.

- Increased communication at home. Parents recognized the power of their words and began not letting them "push my buttons." They also noted that they argued less at home with their children.

- More patience. Parents viewed themselves as more patient and calmer in interacting with their early adolescent.

- My child is normal. The cadre perceived that their children were "normal" and that they too were "a typical parent." They observed that they were developing a self-awareness of their parenting style.

In summary, the parents viewed themselves as a more effective parent in the areas of communication, understanding their child better, and knowledge of typical early adolescent behaviors.

Question #3: "How have these sessions affected your relationship with the school and its staff?"

- Community. A sense of community developed by having the meetings offered at "our school." Parents reflected that they enjoyed coming to school, relaxing, and "talking about all this stuff" with other parents.

- Most noted little change in their relationship with the staff. They perceived themselves as already in close contact with the teachers.

- Improved relationship with principal. Parents reflected that they felt that they knew the principal better and could maintain this relationship even after their child transitions to the middle school. One parent stated that she realized that I was "just an email away!"

- Transference of willingness to get involved at Walnut Creek. All of the guest speakers were on the faculty at Walnut Creek Middle School. The parents noted

that these meetings had begun start of a relationship with the middle school staff and now had an increased comfort level in approaching them.

- High opinion of staff. The cadre reflected that the Southern Hills staff was professional and caring and that they have great respect for them. The staff was highly respected and was perceived as being committed and interested in their child's development.

Concisely, the parent education meeting generated a greater sense of community among the parents. They perceived the study as positively affecting their relationships with the school and its staff. While the parents expressed a high regard for the staff and felt that they already had a strong relationship with the teaching staff, they noted an improved relationship with the principal (the researcher). The parent cadre expressed their willingness to get involved at Walnut Creek and noted that these meetings started a relationship with the middle school staff and had an increased comfort level in approaching them next year.

Summary

In summary, the parents involved in the study indicated that they had applied the information presented in the meetings. Notably, several large "umbrella" themes, or findings, emerged that are of significance. First, parents reported that they had an increased understanding of their early adolescent's developmental characteristics. More specifically, the parents indicated relief that they perceived their child as "normal." The second larger finding to emerge was that the parents perceived themselves to be more

effective particularly in situations or issues involving conflict resolution, discipline alternatives, and communication skills. Additionally, the parent education meetings generated a greater sense of community and support system among the parents. They perceived the study as positively affecting their relationships with the school and its staff. While the parents expressed a high regard for the staff and felt that they already had a strong relationship with the teaching staff, they noted a specific improvement in their relationship with the principal (the researcher). Finally, the parent cadre expressed their willingness to get involved at Walnut Creek and noted that these meetings started a relationship with the middle school staff and that they had an increased comfort level in approaching them next year when their child was in middle school.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS,

AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to discover what effects participation in a series of

parent education workshops focused on early adolescent developmental characteristics

and related issues had upon a cadre of fifth grade parents' parental efficacy, their early

adolescent children, and the teachers' perceptions of these parents and students. The

central areas explored were parent efficacy, student perceptions, and the teachers'

perceptions of the parents and the students. Three research questions guided this study:

<u>Research Question #1:</u>

As participants in workshops on early adolescent development, how will parents

view their own parental efficacy in the following areas:

A. Perceptions of the parent education program

B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

C. Parent-child relationships

D. Family-school relationships

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Research Question #2

As parents of early adolescents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent involvement at school, what are their early adolescent students' perceptions of:

A. The effects or impact of this parent education series

B. Their parents' knowledge base and parenting skills

C. The effect of their parents being involved at the school (e.g. academics/social-emotional/behavior)

Research Question #3

As parents participate in this parent education series, thus exhibiting parent involvement at school, what are the teachers' perceptions of:

A. The effects of parental participation in this parent education series

B. Parent knowledge base and parenting skills

C. The effects of having parents involved with the school (e.g. academics/social-emotional/behavior)

This study was composed of five chapters. Chapter I focused on the research problem and background information about the problem. The purpose and the importance of the study was presented and followed by a discussion of various national mandates, standards, and recommendations related to the problem. Chapter I continued

with conceptual definitions and the organization of the study followed by a discussion of

this study's delimitations and limitations, generalizability and reliability, and the

trustworthiness and accuracy of the information. Chapter II functioned as a review of the

pertinent literature related to the historical perspective of the development of the middle

school movement, the concept of early adolescence and developmental characteristics of

early adolescence, and parental involvement in education. Chapter III was the

methodology that guided this study. Action research and case study methodologies were

shared followed by a description of the selected school site and community. A

disclosure of the field procedures was discussed along with data collection and analysis

processes. Chapter IV presented the findings of this study including the findings of the

three research questions. The selected site and community is described and is followed

by the archival data and document analysis. Chapter V is a summary of the findings;

included as well are the implications, conclusions and recommendations from this study.

The researcher offers a discussion and interpretation of the findings related to the

general literature. Recommendations relating to educational practice are disclosed.

Lastly, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the findings of this study is reported through a discussion

and comparison between this study's findings and the themes found in the general

literature previously reviewed in Chapter II. This interpretation focuses on the three

essential arenas that are relevant to the problem and purpose of the study. The three

arenas used as the focus of this discussion and comparison between the findings and the literature include (a) benefits that the students receive, (b) benefits the parents obtain, and (c) benefits the schools accrue as a result of re-engaging families in the education of young adolescents.

The conclusion section either confirms or refutes this study's findings through a similar discussion comparing this study's findings to the themes found in the general literature. The three arenas used in the prior discussion (the benefits that the students receive, the parents obtain, and the schools accrue) formulate the framework for discussing the conclusions of this study.

Synthesis of Student Benefits in the Literature

A review and synthesis of the literature indicates that generally, students have greater success in school if parents are involved in their children's education (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; Cotton & Wikelund, 1-29-00; USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00). Three decades of research have shown that parental participation in schooling improves student learning not only in the beginning of a child's education, but throughout a child's entire academic experience (USDE, Parental Involvement Policy Guidance, 1994). Schine (1998) concurs that when parents show interest in the school, are supportive of learning, provide time and place and, where desirable, supervision for homework, children are more likely to have a more positive attitude toward school and a positive school experience" (p. 22).

The review of literature identified benefits to students in specific three areas--academic, social-emotional, and physical. Academically, students achieve academic development gains, make better grades, achieve higher test scores, have higher reading comprehension (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; USDE, 1994), graduate at higher rates, demonstrate improved attendance, have increased completion of homework, and result in fewer special education placements (Wherry, 1-29-00). Socially-emotionally, the literature postulates that students are better behaved, demonstrate improved behavior (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; USDE, 1994), exhibit personal development gains, have more positive attitudes about themselves and their abilities (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; Schine, 1998; USDE, 1994), have more positive attitudes about the school itself, see their parents as role models who act on their behalf (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; Schine, 1998), receive more support from adults as they confront the problems of early adolescence (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00), and observe their parents' trust and respect the staff, therefore they also respect the staff (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998). Physically, students are reported to receive more support from adults as they confront the problems of early adolescence (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00), exhibit personal development gains, and have more positive attitudes about self and their abilities (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; Schine, 1998; USDE, 1994). When parents are actively involved in their children's education, the children do better in school (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00). The review of the literature found that parents could increase children's academic success through involvement with schools.

Synthesis of Parent Benefits in the Literature

Parents generally become less involved as their children move through the upper

elementary and secondary grades (Cotton & Wikelund, 1-29-00; Jackson & Cooper,

1992). In recent years, research studies have been conducted with secondary students

and their families which indicates that parent involvement remains very beneficial and is

an important factor from kindergarten through high school graduation (Schine, 1998,

Epstein, et al., 1997). When parents are actively involved in their child's education, all

parties benefit-- the family understands the school better, the teachers understand the

students more easily, students receive support from adults in order to confront the

problems or early adolescence, and the school can be an extension of the home, aiding in

the preservation of families' cultures and values (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00).

Pertinent literature related to this study indicates that parents benefit from being

involved in their child's school. The benefits may be organized into five themes: school-

family relations, increased understanding of early adolescence, improved student

behavior, greater confidence in themselves as parents and more confidence in their

parenting abilities (i.e. parent efficacy). The school-family relationship improves as

parents develop confidence in their relationships with the school and its staff members

(Carnegie Council, 1996), have more confidence in the school (Swick, 1992), and gain a

better understanding of the school (USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00). Parents develop an

increased understanding of early adolescence-- specifically, an understanding of what

'normal' behaviors associated with early adolescent development means. Parents tend to

feel less isolated in dealing with difficult situations (Stouffer, 1992). Parents also note an

improvement in their child's behavior, see students' behavior improve and observe an improvement in their child's social adjustment (Wherry, 1-29-00). When involved in their child's schooling, parents also exhibit greater confidence in themselves, feel useful (Carnegie Council, 1996), and have a greater confidence in themselves and in their abilities due to more confidence in the school (Wherry, 1-29-00). This greater confidence in parent efficacy results in parents being more likely to attend school events and activities (Carnegie Council, 1996), having improved empathic responses to their children, and developing decision-making skills (Swick, 1992).

Synthesis of School and Educator Benefits in the Literature

Schools must seek ways to provide opportunities and support for parents in their desire to have a closer relationship with their young adolescents (Carnegie Council, 1996). Parent involvement is just as important in a child's success at school as it is in earlier grades. Schools and educators accrue certain benefits as parents become more involved in their child's education. The literature notes the following benefits: greater trust and respect between parents and school staff (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998), the schools gain powerful allies (Stouffer, 1992), gain more support from families (Wherry, 1-29-00), academic programs are more successful, schools are more effective (USDE, 1994), teachers have higher opinions of involved parents, teachers understand students more easily, teacher morale is improved, teachers receive higher ratings by parents, and schools have a better reputation in the community (Wherry, 1-29-00).

Conclusions

The conclusions, or understandings, associated with this study are reported in three sections. Each section finds areas of general agreement or disagreement between this study's findings as compared to those found in the review of literature. The three arenas used as the focus in the interpretation of findings-- the students, the parents, and the schools-- formulate the framework for discussing the conclusions of this study. The conclusions are reported through a discussion between this study's findings and the themes found in the general literature formerly reviewed and discussed.

Conclusions Associated with Students

This study found areas of agreement with the numerous benefits associated with student academic achievement, social-emotional behaviors, and physical support that are supported in the literature. Academically, the students in this study demonstrated academic gains by achieving better grades, demonstrating higher reading comprehension, having improved attendance, and an exhibiting an increase in completion of homework (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; USDE, 1994). This study, however, cannot find agreement in several areas in which student academic achievement gains are predicted in the literature. The literature states that students will perform higher on achievement tests, graduate at higher rates and will have fewer special education placements as a result of increased parent involvement (Wherry, 1-29-00). Since this study was not longitudinal,

these benefits cannot be confirmed nor can they be refuted. Socially and emotionally, this study substantiates the findings in the current literature.

Additionally, this study can agree that, as a result of this investigation and parental involvement, students behaved better and student behaviors improved, personal development gains were observed, the students demonstrated more positive attitudes about themselves and their abilities, and exhibited more positive attitudes about the school itself (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; USDE, 1994). Students participating in this investigation viewed their parents as role models who acted on their behalf and expressed that they did receive more support from their parents as they tackled the problems of early adolescence. The students also observed their parents level of trust and respect toward the school staff, therefore they too expressed that they too trusted and respected the school staff as well (Loucks & Waggoner, 1998; Schine, 1998; USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00)

Conclusions Associated with Parents

Parents are turning increasingly to parent support groups, which can reach a large number of families in an efficient way, to share information and experiences about handling the transition from childhood to adolescence, aspects of normal adolescent development, how to improve their communication skills, ways to negotiate the parent-adolescent development, etc. (Carnegie Council, *Great Transitions*, 1996). By offering non-threatening adult learning opportunities-- the parent education workshops conducted for this study-- the data collected at selected school site found agreement with the

benefits of increased family involvement as indicated in the literature. Through school workshops focusing on developmental characteristics, parents received the information they needed (Liontos, 1992; Kane, 1992; Hyde, 1992; Matz, 1994).

This investigation finds agreement with Kane's (1992) findings that by establishing parent institutes and resource centers on early adolescence, schools help the process of supporting and educating parents. White and Matz (1992) reported similar findings. They reported that as a part of a rural Pennsylvania middle school's parent involvement program, a parent education program was developed at the school. Included in the new program was a parent education component in which several evening workshops were offered for parents. Like this investigation, the workshops dealt with understanding pre-adolescents and communicating with pre-adolescents. Parents reported, "no longer feeling alone and were happy to know that their child's 'abnormal' behavior means they were 'normal' (White & Matz, p. 18). The findings from the parent cadre in this investigation support White and Matz's findings as well.

This investigation also generally finds agreement several other studies' findings. Kuykendall (1992) found that parents can be educated (i.e. through training institutes) so that they can play significant roles in schools and obtain the insight and understanding needed to be advocates for school success (p.96-97). Echoing Matz's findings, M. Lee Manning (1992) stated that parent education programs play a vital role in teaching parents about early adolescent development and behavior and the transition to the middle level. Loucks (1992) suggested that classes offered at school can assist parents with parenting ideas/problems, homework/tutoring strategies, and improving communication skills are helpful (Loucks, 1992).

In addition to the studies noted above, this investigation also finds agreement and corroborates the research findings that Swick (1992) suggested. Swick suggested that parents of adolescents could improve their empathic responses and develop decision-making skills when participating in learning opportunities designed for them and that schools can increase the probability that families will become involved in their young adolescent's education if options are made meaningful, address and known concern, or relate to a particular interest. Confirmations can be found in other studies. At an urban, predominantly African-American middle school, Goodman et al., (1995) reported that a series of six parent workshops addressed parents' concerns (e.g. adolescent development, family communication, behavior management, etc.) and were valued by the participants. Similarly, Amato (1994) designed a yearlong practicum at middle school to address the declining parental participation in school functions and activities. Amato's program also provided information to parents about adolescent development, their roles as parents, and school policies. As a result, PTO membership and attendance at meetings increased, participation in school committees rose, discipline problems declined while student grades and self-esteem improved.

This investigation supports and finds agreement with the numerous benefits noted in the current literature that parents accumulate when they are involved in their child's education. These benefits for parents include benefits associated with the school-family relationship, the parents' understanding of early adolescence, changes in student behavior, and parent efficacy. This study substantiates an improvement in school-family relations as parents developed more confidence in their relationships with school and staff members, gained more confidence in the school, and understood the school better

(USDE, Middleweb, 1-29-00). Parents noted an increased understanding of early adolescent developmental characteristics, specifically an understanding of what 'normal' adolescent behavior meant. They also confirmed that, as a result of the parent cadre meetings, they felt less isolated in dealing with difficult situations with their young adolescent (White & Matz, 1992; Manning, 1992). Parents in this investigation recounted that they saw an improvement in child's behavior and social adjustment during the course of this study. The parent participants also reported an increase in parent efficacy—specifically greater confidence in themselves, they felt more useful at school, and developed a greater confidence in their abilities due to more confidence in the school. In addition, this study confirmed the current research that they were more likely to attend school events and activities, had improved empathic responses, and developed decision-making skills.

Conclusions Associated with School and Educator Benefits

This study also finds agreement in a general way with the numerous benefits outlined in the review of literature that schools and educators receive as a result of re-engaging families in the education of young adolescents. Research indicated that adult learning opportunities increased parental support for young adolescents and middle school programs. Schine (1998) stated that, "the school that offers parents accurate information and reassurance about the physical, emotional, and social changes their children are experiencing, and about what they expect as they move to a different level in the school system, could be perceived as the parents' ally" (p.21). This investigation

substantiates Schine's (1998) assertion and found that as a result of this study, trust and respect was created between parents and the school staff, the school gained powerful allies, and the school received more support from the families. The teachers had high opinions of involved parents and noted positive teacher morale. The teachers received high ratings as evidenced by the positive remarks made by parents, and the school had a better reputation within the community.

This investigation cannot find areas of agreement with the literature's recommendation that, due to increased parental involvement, the academic programs at the school were more successful, that the school is more effective, or that the teachers understood the students more easily. Since this study was not longitudinal, these benefits cannot be supported nor can they be refuted.

Implications

Parent involvement is essential in the life of all young adolescents—parents are the link to improving the education for America's young adolescent children. The benefits are tremendous for all the stakeholders involved. Fundamentally, sowing the seed of parent involvement in schooling reaps enormous benefits in the life of all children. For the early adolescent, parent involvement in their education and schooling is essential. Numerous academic, social, and emotional benefits for early adolescents are attributed to parental and family involvement at their child's school. The benefits, however, do not stop with the students. Parents and family members benefit from involvement as well. Parent efficacy increases and a greater understanding of their

children develop as the parents become more involved in their child's education. Parents, in particular, gain valuable insights about the developmental characteristics associated with their early adolescent and are relieved to realize that what they thought was "abnormal" behavior is actually "normal" behavior for their son or daughter. Schools and educators benefit additionally. Schools garner greater support in the community as parents become stronger allies for the school and exhibit greater levels of respect and trust for the school.

Recommendations Relating to Practice

When the review of the literature was coupled with the data gathered throughout this investigation, several issues emerged that may suggest recommendations related to educational practice. The following recommendations are tentatively drawn and suggest opportunities for improving practice and extending the knowledge base regarding the effects of parent involvement related to early adolescent development.

This qualitative action research study has given the body of research additional knowledge regarding the effects of a parent education program emphasizing early adolescent developmental characteristics. This investigation confirmed that the fifth grade parents in the cadre were already observing various pre-adolescent developmental changes in their elementary children. Therefore, more attention should be given to the elementary school as a resource for meaningful, relevant, and needed information regarding early adolescent development and the transition to middle school. Waiting to provide this information until the child transits to the middle school is too late.

While the middle school has historically offered new student and new parent orientations, additional attention should be given to the middle school as a continued resource for information as well as a support system for parents of young adolescents. Additional emphasis should be placed upon assisting families with parent education opportunities. Educating and assisting parents in learning about early adolescent developmental characteristics and parent efficacy should be at the heart of middle level parent education programs. Rather than merely focusing on the elementary to middle school transition (e.g. hosting orientations about school procedures and organization), middle school practioners should search for avenues to offer meaningful support and adult learning opportunities for families and parents.

As schools and educators extend support to parents with young adolescents, parents realize that they are not isolated. They must be supported and shown that other parents of young adolescents experience many of the same concerns, questions, and day-to-day struggles of child rearing. The parents in this study noted that they felt the cadre represented a type of "support group" for them and that they were not alone in their experiences. An opportunity for parents to meet and to share information and stories is recommended at the elementary level as well as at the middle school level. This recommendation could also serve as a catalyst for improvements in parent efficacy. A change in the school-family relationship has occurred—this is the move toward the view that parents need to be collaborators in the schooling process (Johnson, 1994). Specifically, there is a need for parent education programs that reach out to parents and work with them to provide training on a variety of topics so that their needs are met. Johnson (1994) reviewed the literature on this emerging phenomenon and found no

research on the existence of "parent centers" in schools. The parent centers, Johnson states, are foremost a signal from the school to parents that they are welcome in the building to engage in "collaboration in the education of their children... [and] provide parent information and nearly all centers conduct parent workshops or classes on a variety or topics in response to parental needs" (p. 42). This study provided additional information regarding this recommendation. It will be the task of the selected school to continue the parent workshops in response to the needs of the parents at Southern Hills Elementary School.

Research indicates that although parent and family involvement may come in many forms, the benefits are still evident. However, practioners must continue exploring ways to involve all families in their child's education. Educational practice should explore how schools and educators perceive family involvement-- as opposed to parent involvement. With the reported changes occurring in how American families are constructed and defined, as well as the demographic changes predicted in American society, practioners should generate multifaceted opportunities for any and all family members to become involved at a variety of levels in the educational system.

These reasons are grouped into three main categories: (a) promoting personal and professional growth as practitioners gather knowledge about their own situation, (b) improving practice to enhance student learning by theorizing about practice, and (c) advancing the education profession. Essentially, action inquiry is a form of inquiry into practice concerned with the development of effective action that may contribute to the transformation or organizations and communities (Reason, 1998).

Allen and Calhoun's (1998) research recommends that experiences like this investigation have great value and offer tremendous opportunities for professional growth for educators who search for ways to improve the practice of teaching and learning. The opportunity to become both researcher and participant was beneficial. The information I gathered as a participant has offered me the opportunity to reflect upon my own practice and search for ways to improve it. This parent cadre reported that they became better acquainted with the principal, developed a high regard and respect for the school personnel, and perceived the school as a caring environment. Stringer (1996) echoes this same view of action research. Stinger states that action research is a process that is "rigorously empirical and reflective; engages people who have been called 'subjects' as active participants in the research process; and result in some practical outcome related to the lives or work of the participants" (p. xvi). It is recommended for all educators to become an active inquirer and meaning maker (Castle, 1995) to contributed to their own professional endeavors, thus resulting in professional growth and improvements in the practice of teaching and learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations suggest prospects for future research and to broaden the knowledge base regarding the effects of parent involvement related to early adolescent development. As reported in the findings section of this chapter, there are many benefits of parent involvement reported in the literature that this investigation could

not substantiate. These areas in which agreement could not be supported present themselves as opportunities for further investigation.

This investigation was a five-month study at a selected site bounded in time and in geographic location. In order to find agreement with or refute several of the recommendations in the literature, a longitudinal study of this parent cadre and their children would add to the research knowledge base. Further investigation at the conclusion of the participants' secondary education experience is recommended. This opportunity to further the research through a longitudinal study would provide information necessary to confirm or refute the literature's assertion that parent involvement reduces special education referrals, improves personal development, students graduate at higher rates, and whether or not students achieved higher scores on achievement tests. The literature overwhelmingly indicates that parent involvement declines in the secondary grades. Educators should explore ways to reverse this trend. A longitudinal study may confirm, deny, or reveal possible reasons for this phenomenon.

This bounded investigation could not find agreement with the literature's recommendation that, due to increased parental involvement, academic programs are more successful, schools are more effective, or that teachers understand students more easily. Any evaluation of an academic program or a school's effectiveness would require a longitudinal study of these issues. Particularly, educators' perceptions of involved families as compared to those who are not viewed as involved, in the traditional sense, should be explored as well. An investigation exploring educators' perceptions of parents who are viewed as involved compared to those who are viewed as uninvolved may enhance the research. Investigating possible prejudices in the school personnel's

perceptions of involved versus uninvolved parents may enhance practice. All of these are complex, multifaceted issues that would require more in-depth investigation.

In summary, although most research on parent involvement has been conducted with disadvantaged children, parent involvement is important for all children. Nevertheless, those who are disadvantaged or are "at-risk" have the most to gain. Societal and cultural influences have levied additional stress upon families and have resulted in reduced school involvement by parents. Families face many barriers when they attempt to become involved; even customary school practices and procedures may limit parent involvement. Nevertheless, research still indicates that as families are more involved in meaningful activities at school, positive benefits are evidenced.

Keenan, et al. (1993, p. 204), drawing upon the well-known African proverb about a village being required to raise a child, brings this discussion to the 21st century. Keenan ascertains that, "In the increasingly diverse and complex 'villages' of America's cities, traditional ways of working together are no longer viable...we need collaboration between families and schools to educate our children for a changed and changing world."

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 7/19/02

Date :   Friday, July 20, 2001   IRB Application No   ED017

Proposal Title: RE-ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS:
EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF PARENT EDUCATION IN EARLY ADOLESCENT
DEVELOPMENT UPON PARENTAL EFFICACY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Principal
Investigator(s) :
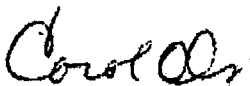
Joseph M. Pierce   Dr. Patricia Lamphere-Jordan
247 Willard   247 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078   Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed
and   Expedited (Spec Pop)   **Continuation**

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :   Friday, July 20, 2001
Carol Olson, Director of University Research Complian   Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications
to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office
MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited
and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW OUTLINES

Interview Outline for STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Time:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Describe project/purpose & that parents gave permission for participation.

I.   Perceptions of the Program (What do you think about your parents attending this program?)

        A. Effects of parent participation (Do you think it has made a difference in any area?)

        B. Impact on child (How has this program affected you?)

II.   Parent Efficacy (Do you think they understand you better?)

        A. Changes in parenting style (Have they tried anything new or different?)

        B. Impact on child (How has that affected you?)

III.   Effects of Parent Involvement (What do you think about having them involved at school?)

        A. Academics (Grades, tests, attendance, homework completion

        B. Social-Emotional (attitude toward self, abilities, school)

        C. Behavior (transition to MS, risk-taking behaviors)

Thank them for participating.

Assure confidentiality of responses and of potential future interviews.

<u>Interview Outline for PARENT INTERVIEWS</u>

Time:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewees:

<u>Describe project/purpose</u>

I.   Perceptions of the Program *(What is it like being in this program?)*

    A. Benefits of participation

    B. Most helpful information

II.   Parent Efficacy *(Do you have any new insights into parenting?)*

    A. Application of information/strategies

    B. Insights gained into middle schoolers

III.   Parent-Child Relationships *(How has it affected your relationship with your child?)*

    A. Insights gained into their child

    B. Effects of involvement in a school program

IV.   Family-School Relationships *(How has it affected your relationship with the school?)*

    A. Relationship with staff

    B. Understanding of the school culture

<u>Interview Outline for FACULTY INTERVIEWS</u>

Time:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Describe project/purpose & that parents gave permission for participation.

I.   Perceptions of the Program *(Have you heard anything about this program?)*

     A. Effects of parent participation (What, if any, difference has it made with parents?)

     B. Impact on child *(How has this program affected the students?)*

II.   Parent Efficacy (Do you think they are more effective as parents?)

     A. Changes in parenting style (Have you heard anything about them applying the

     training?)

     B. Impact on child *(How has that impacted students?)*

III.   Effects of Parent Involvement *(What do you think about having them involved in this way?)*

     A. Academics *(Grades, tests, attendance, homework completion)*

     B. Social-Emotional *(attitude toward self, abilities, school)*

     C. Behavior *(transition to MS, risk-taking behaviors)*

Thank them for participating.

Assure confidentiality of responses and of potential future interviews.

APPENDIX C

PARENT EDUCATION CURRICULUM OUTLINE

Parent Education Classes: Curriculum Outline

January, 2001   **Workshop #1:**   *How to Enjoy Living with your Preadolescent: Part I*

Jan. 11, 2001   *Present topics in HELP booklet:* **Developmental changes, Forgetting, Irritability, Power Plays, Friendships, Survival Guidelines, Chores, Worries, Joys**

        Other: Get all Consent Forms, Information Cards & 3rd Party Releases signed
                           Videotape workshop; have sign-in sheet
                           Childcare & refreshments provided

Workshop #2:   *How to Enjoy Living with your Preadolescent: Part 2*

Jan. 18, 2001   *Present topics in More HELP booklet:* **Developmental Differences, Denying, Privacy, Accepting Consequences, Blossoming Idealism, Facts About Young Adolescents, Discipline Processes, Dealing with Aggression, Communication**

        Other: Confirm: all consent forms & releases signed
                           Videotape workshop; have sign-in sheet
                           Childcare & refreshments provided

February, 2001   **Follow-up Session #1**

Feb-01   Provide childcare with HS Teacher Cadets; Provide refreshments.
            Videotape session.

Participants complete **"Reflections Card"** at start of session--sample questions on cards:
1. *"Tell a story about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in these sessions. Or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why/why not?"*
2. *"How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.*
3. *"How have these sessions effected your relationship with the school and it's staff?"*

After collecting Reflection Cards, select a few to read and open floor up for discussion with participants.
Time for questions and sharing of experiences. Review previous topics in booklets as needed.

March, 2001   <u>**Follow-up Session #2**</u>

    Mar-01   Provide childcare with HS Teacher Cadets; Provide refreshments.
                          Videotape session

Participants complete **"Reflections Card"** at start of session--sample questions on cards:
1. *"Tell a story about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in these sessions. Or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why/why not?"*
2. *"How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.*
3. *"How have these sessions effected your relationship with the school and it's staff?"*

After collecting Reflection Cards, select a few to read and open floor up for discussion with participants.
Time for questions and sharing of experiences. Review previous topics in booklets as needed.

April, 2001   <u>**Follow-up Session #3**</u>

    Apr-01   Provide childcare with HS Teacher Cadets; Provide refreshments.
                          Videotape session.

Participants complete **"Reflections Card"** at start of session--sample questions on cards:
1. *"Tell a story about an incident in which you used what you have been learning in these sessions. Or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you? Why/why not?"*
2. *"How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.*
3. *"How have these sessions effected your relationship with the school and it's staff?"*

After collecting Reflection Cards, select a few to read and open floor up for discussion with participants.
Time for questions and sharing of experiences. Review previous topics in booklets as needed.
·School personnel as resource speaker addresses concerns gleaned from previous Reflection Cards.

APPENDIX D

REFLECTION CARD

REFLECTION CARD

*Tell a story about an incident in which you used what you have been learning
in these sessions-- or didn't use and wish you had. Did it work for you?
Why or why not?*

How have you been a more effective parent because of these classes? Describe.

How have these sessions effected your relationship with the school and it's staff?

APPENDIX E

STATE SCHOOL REPORT CARD

FROM THE PRINCIPAL:

May 2001

Dear Parent/Guardian:

It is our hope that you will find the information in our *School Report Card* to be very informative in relation to your child's schooling at   Elementary School.

It is our desire that all children receive an education that is best suited to meet their individual needs. Further, we are dedicated to providing a safe, caring, stimulating, and productive learning environment that will equip children with the basic skills necessary to gather information, reason, think critically, communicate thoughts clearly, and to have a positive, cooperative working relationship with others.

Sincerely,

Need more Information?

Want report cards for other schools?

Visit the Office of Accountability web site at:

www.SchoolReportCard.org

1999-2000 SCHOOL REPORT CARD

Offering Grades KG-5

From the Secretary of Education:

In addition to considering the student performance data presented in this year's School Report Card, I would like to focus attention on standards of effectiveness by which patrons may judge their schools. Ensuring that all schools are effective is an important next step in our efforts to guarantee that all children receive an excellent education and that no children are left behind.

Is the school your children attend providing all students with the education they need to succeed in our increasingly knowledge-based society? I urge you to weigh the student performance information inside this School Report Card against the standards that I have provided below and determine the quality of the education provided by your local school. Where the school is strong, support it! Where it is weak, work with staff to improve it! Become an involved parent.

Standards of Effectiveness for Elementary and Middle Level Schools
- At least 95% of students reading at or above grade level by end of grade 3.
  (Data available at school per requirements of the Reading Sufficiency Act.)
- At least 95% of students reading at Satisfactory or above by end of grades 5 and 8.
- At least 85% of the students scoring Satisfactory or above on state tests in math, science, history, geography, and the arts in grades 5 and 8.

It is important that you know if your children are performing at grade level. When students drop behind, it is very hard for them to recover. Please make your children your top priority.

Sincerely,

70% Performance Benchmark for   Core Curriculum Tests

	Math	Science	Reading	Writing	History, Const. & Gov't	Geography	The Arts
5th Grade	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	↓
8th Grade			Grade Not Offered at This School Site				

The 70% Performance Benchmark requires that the school have at least 70% of the students tested score Satisfactory in each subject area of the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests.

✓ = Benchmark was Met   NA = Not Applicable
↓ = Benchmark was Not Met   DNA = Data was Not Available
** = Too few students were tested for results to be released under federal privacy laws.

District: School: **Grades: KG-5**

Community Characteristics

Socioeconomic Data

	District	State Average
District Population (1990)	68,677	5,861.9
Population per Square Mile (1990)	654.1	41.0
Ethnic Makeup Based upon Fall Enrollment (1999):		
Caucasian	86%	66%
Black	6%	11%
Asian	2%	1%
Hispanic	2%	5%
Native American	3%	16%
Average Household Income (1990)	$37,600	$24,088
Average Property Valuation per Student (2001)	$34,781	$23,789
Teen Mothers w/o HS Diploma (1990)	3%	8%
Single-Parent Families (1990)	18%	23%
Population Age 55 and Above (1990)	13%	22%
Highest Educational Level for Adults Age 20+ (1990):		
College Degree	40%	17%
H.S. Diploma w/o College Degree	52%	59%
Less than 12th Grade Education	8%	24%
Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch (2000)	14%	48%

Preparation, Motivation and Parental Support

1st Graders that Attended a Pre-K Program	65%	68%
Parents Attending at least 1 Parent/Teacher Conference	65%	67%
Average Number of Days Absent per Student	7.9	10.6
One out of every __ students were suspended...		
for 10 days or less	47.3	17.3
for more than 10 days	795.2	143.3

1999-2000 Juvenile Offenders & Offenses (Office of Juvenile Affairs)

Juvenile crime statistics are provided as another indicator of the environment in which schools must operate. In most cases the offenses reported were not committed at school.

One out of every ___ students was charged.	173.2	56.0
Of those charged, each averaged ___ offense(s).	1.8	1.9
Of those charged, ___ were alleged gang members.	1	0.5

Symbols Used on this Report Card:

ADM = Average Daily Membership (Average Enrollment)
FTE = Full Time Equivalent
NA = Not Applicable
*** = Data Protected by Privacy Laws (Small Number of Students)*
FTR = School/District Failed to Respond to Survey
DNA = Data Not Available from Providing Agency
RM = Revised Methodology

Office of Accountability

1999-2000 School Educational Process

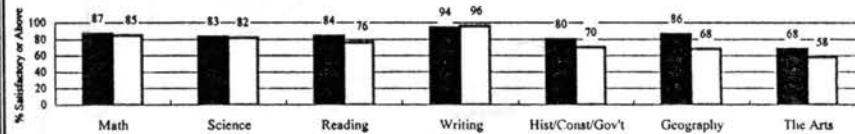*Accreditation: Your school was accredited with no deficiencies.*

Classroom & Administration Characteristics

	This School	District Total (All Schools)	Elem. School State Average
Student Enrollment (Fall 1999)	560.0	16,800.0	328.3
Regular Classroom Teachers (FTE)	32.6	857.4	18.8
Average Salary (w/ Fringe) of Regular Classroom Teachers (FTE)	$31,373	$31,573	$30,762
Regular Classroom Teachers with Advanced Degree(s) (FTE)	42.0%	37.7%	29.4%
Average Years of Experience - Regular Classroom Teachers (FTE)	11.5	11.5	12.2
Special Education Teachers (FTE)	4.0	124.5	2.1
Other Professional Staff (FTE)	2.0	90.4	1.1
Teacher Assistants (FTE)	0.1	85.4	4.1
Administrators (FTE)	1.4	58.4	1.0

1999-2000 Student Performance

5th Grade   **Core Curriculum Test**   % Tested as "Regular Education": Not Available from State Dept. of Ed.

	Math	Science	Reading	Writing	Hist/Const/Gov't	Geography	The Arts
This School	87	83	84	94	80	86	68
State Average	85	82	76	96	70	68	58

8th Grade   **Core Curriculum Test**

Grade Not Offered at This School Site

	Math	Science	Reading	Writing	Hist/Const/Gov't	Geography	The Arts

■ This School   ☐ State Average
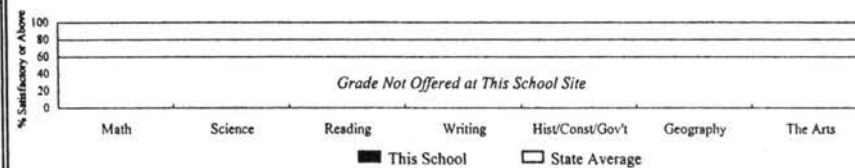
APPENDIX F

INFORMATION CARD

PARENT(s) NAME _____
                          Last   First

STUDENT NAME _____ Male____ Female____
                          Last   First   Middle

SSN _____ **Birthdate** ____/____/____ **Age** _____ **Home Phone** _____

ADDRESS _____ **E-MAIL** _____
                   Street   City   State   ZIP

ETHNICITY: Circle   *Hispanic*   *Black*   *Alaskan or*   *Asian or*   *Caucasian/White*   *Other*
                                              American Indian   *Pacific Islander*

Has your child ever received any type of the following services?
          <u>Check those that apply:</u>
- ❏ *Special Education (on an IEP or 504 Accomodation Plan)*
- ❏ *Remedial Education (before/after-school program, etc.)*
- ❏ *Gifted Program*
- ❏ *Developmental First Grade (Transitional First)*
- ❏ *Retention (repeated a grade)*
- ❏ *Free/Reduced Meal Program*
- ❏ *Title I Program*
- ❏ *Reading Recovery Program*
- ❏ *At-Risk Program (mentoring program, etc.)*
- ❏ *Limited English or English as a Second Language Services*
- ❏ *Indian Education Services*
- ❏ *Counseling (behavioral, etc.)*

Last school attended _____ City/District _____

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Joe Pierce, M.Ed. or his associates or assistants of his choosing, to perform the following treatment or procedure.

This is done as part of a doctoral research study at Oklahoma State University. The investigation is entitled *Re-engaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents: Exploring the Effects of Parent Education in Early Adolescent Development upon Parental Efficacy and Student Achievement.*

The purpose of the study is to discover what effects participation in a series of parent education workshops focused on early adolescent developmental characteristics and issues has upon parental efficacy, their children, and school personnel's perceptions of these parents and students using a case study design.

1. Procedure: Participants will be offered two parent education workshops and three (3) one-hour monthly follow-up sessions. Workshop sessions will cover pre-adolescent developmental issues and topics. Follow-up sessions will be held for parents to share concerns/questions and for school staff professionals to share information. Parents, students and school personnel will be interviewed at the conclusion of the series. Archival data will be collected from multiple sources (e.g. student academic, health, discipline, and attendance records). None of the procedures are experimental in nature.

2. Duration: This study will be conducted over the course of five months; two parent workshops held during the first month, then three (3) monthly follow-up meetings followed by interviews of the sample population during the last month of the study.

3. Confidentiality: Participants selected to be in the stratified sample population will remain confidential– known only to the researcher and his dissertation advisor. Securing third-party information releases as well as changing participant names to pseudonyms once the data is analyzed will maintain confidentiality. Reflection cards, used at the start of each follow-up session, will remain anonymous. As incentive to participate in the study, participants will receive free childcare and refreshments while at the meetings as well as copies of the parent education series materials How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent and More How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent (NMSA, Baenen)

4. Possible discomforts or risks: Parent participants will spend approximately three hours in training classes and approximately one hour once a month for three (3) additional months in follow-up sessions. Other participants will be requested to spend approximately 20-30 minutes of their time in interviews. Questions on the Reflection Card relate to family atmosphere or incidents involving family members. Responses to these questions might be seen by some as sensitive; some information might be considered confidential which participants might not want shared with others. Additional document analysis will be explored as the participants' children's attendance records, academic information, school health records, discipline referrals—or lack of them—are analyzed. This school information is confidential; therefore a third-party release form will be signed by the participants authorizing the school to release confidential records and information to the researcher.

5. Possible Benefits: The participants may request a copy of the research results in order to gain information about the findings of the study. The information offered in the parenting classes is seen as valuable for improving parenting efficacy and fostering family involvement in schools.

I understand that participation is voluntary; there is no penalty for refusal to participate and that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director.

I may contact Joseph M. Pierce at 405-340-2984 (FAX 405-330-3349) should I wish further information about the research. I may also contact Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary, 203 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; Telephone: 405-744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date _____   Time _____(a.m./p.m.)

Signed _____
(Signature of Subject)

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.

Signed _____
(Project Director or his authorized representative)

APPENDIX H

PARENT LETTER

January, 2001

Dear Fifth Grade Parents & Families:

Now that your child is in the last semester of elementary school, it is not too early to start thinking about making that all-important transition to middle school! Do you think you could use some direction as you start navigating the turbulent waters of preadolescence? Would you find it helpful to meet with other parents who share your concerns and questions about handling preadolescent issues?

As a help to any   Elementary School parent of a fifth grader, I am inviting you to attend a series of parent meetings here at our school. The workshops are called **"H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with your Pre-Adolescent."** There is no cost for attending these workshops; refreshments and childcare will be provided. All interested parents may attend the meetings; however, a small group of families may be asked to be further involved by participating in an interview at the end of the meetings. This information will then assist me in completing my dissertation project entitled *Exploring the Effects of Parent Education in Early Adolescent Development upon Parental Efficacy and Student Achievement.*

The first two parent meetings will be held on two separate evenings in January; thereafter, we will meet one evening a month over the next three months for follow-up meetings to share questions/concerns.

- ◆ Our first meeting (Part 1) will be **Thursday, January 11, 2001** from **6:30-7:30 PM**

- ◆ The second meeting (Part 2) will be **Thursday, January 18, 2001** from **6:30-7:30 PM**

Please RSVP to my office at   *by Wednesday, January 10th if you plan to attend.* Thanks for your interest!

Joe Pierce, Principal

APPENDIX I

PROMOTIONAL FLYER

"HOW TO ENJOY LIVING WITH A PRE-ADOLESCENT"

FREE
Parent workshop offered to

Fifth Grade Parents!
Thursday, January 11, 2001
6:30-7:30PM

Pizza, Drinks & Childcare provided

Please RSVP by either returning this to the office
or by calling

Your name: _____

1. Number of adults attending: _____

2. Number of people planning to eat pizza: _____

3. Childcare needed: Number of children: _____

See you Thursday!

VITA

Joseph McConnell Pierce

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: RE-ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG
ADOLESCENTS: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF A PARENT EDUCATION
PROGRAM EMPHASIZING EARLY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENTAL
CHARACTERISTICS

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Chrysler High School, New Castle, Indiana in May
1979; Attended Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, 1979-1981 and
received Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Olivet Nazarene
University, Kankakee, IL in May, 1983; received Master of Education in
Elementary School Administration from University of Central Oklahoma,
Edmond, OK in May, 1986. Earned Standard Elementary Principal's
Certificate from University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 1988; earned
Superintendent's Certificate, July 1999. Completed the requirements for
the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Curriculum and
Instruction at Oklahoma State University in December 2001.

Professional Experience: Employed by Putnam City Schools, Oklahoma City,
OK, 1983-1989 as an elementary teacher; employed by Edmond Public
Schools, Edmond, OK, 1989-present as a teacher, assistant elementary
principal, assistant middle school principal, middle school summer school
principal, and an elementary principal.

Professional Memberships: Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School
Administrators, National Staff Development Council, Association of
Supervision and Curriculum Development, Oklahoma Association of
Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Association of
Elementary School Principals and Oklahoma Association of Elementary
Principals, Oklahoma Middle Level Education Association