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The Perceived Influence of Divergent Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Student Abilities on Students and the Establishment of Effective Family-School Partnerships

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THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF DIVERGENT PARENT AND TEACHER
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ABILITIES ON STUDENTS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

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PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ABILITIES ON STUDENTS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. This purpose was achieved through a qualitative investigation of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge. Analysis of data collected from 10 in-depth interviews with students, parents, and teachers revealed five themes and one subtheme related to discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. These themes included: family-school partnership qualities, impressionability of student attitudes, failure to resolve conflicts, challenging parents, and lack of teacher training. Communication was included as a subtheme of family-school partnership qualities. Exploration of these themes described the overall essence of participant experiences. Participants identified family-school partnership qualities that are consistent with those presented in the literature, but they lacked agreement on the qualities of family-school partnerships considered most important. Participants also desired improved communication between parents and teachers, and they recognized several aspects of communication that could improve family-school partnerships. Participants identified the impressionability of student attitudes and the failure to resolve conflicts as perceived outcomes of the conflict. Additionally, participants believed that demanding and disengaged parents presented additional challenges to partnership development, and teacher participants reported that they were not adequately trained to foster family-school partnerships. The experiences of parents, teachers, and students in this study provided insights that could help educators and parents build family-school partnerships that withstand conflict.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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I greatly appreciate the continued guidance and support of Dr. John Pijanowski, Dr. Ed Bengtson, and Dr. Michael Daugherty throughout the completion of this dissertation. I have learned a great deal under their mentorship, and I consider myself blessed that they so kindly and generously shared their expertise and direction with me. I also appreciate the efforts of all participants involved in this study. It was their experiences and insights that made this endeavor possible, worthwhile, and personally rewarding.

I am also thankful for the encouragement, commitment, and sacrifices of my family that made completion of this dissertation possible. Loving a “lifelong student” can be challenging and my family embraced this challenge and enthusiastically supported my efforts. The everyday tasks that I neglected, they graciously assumed. These “small” gestures did not go unnoticed; rather, they were the gestures that provided me mental reprieve while I was otherwise in a writing frenzy.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Asa and Drey. The most difficult aspect of writing this dissertation was sacrificing time with my daughter. Her smile, energy, and zeal for life constantly tempted me to withdraw from the writing process to play, and I am happy to say that I often succumbed to the temptation. Yet there were many moments that I know I missed. Her outgoing nature and “go-with-the-flow” attitude constantly reassured me that she was enjoying life, even though I was not always present to share those moments with her. The anticipated arrival of my son was the motivation I needed to keep working during those times that I wanted to stop. Now that he is here, I am so glad that I spent that time working so that I can now spend my time holding my newborn son. My children provided the balance and perspective that I needed to see this project through to its completion. Because of the example I hope to set for them, they constantly reminded me to work hard, to persevere, and to reach for my goals; yet they also reminded me to live each moment to the fullest, to take time to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, and that nothing is more fulfilling than the love of your children. This effort is dedicated to them.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This study provided an understanding of the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Learning about the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students, provides parents and teachers with insights and understanding that will help build effective partnerships, even in the presence of conflict. Semi-structured interviews with purposefully sampled participants, which included parents, teachers, and students, provided these perspectives.

The information contained in this chapter provides the context, problem statement, purpose, and research design of the study. Also included are the research questions, assumptions, rationale and significance, limitations and delimitations, subjectivity statement, and definitions that informed the study.

Context

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation spurred educational efforts to find evidenced-based practices to help every child succeed academically. The inception of this legislation created an increase in research focused on innovative ways to improve school performance. One research-supported movement is the establishment of family-school partnerships to improve student performance, as parental involvement in school positively impacts student academic achievement (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). Family-school partnerships are associated with superior grade point averages, standardized test scores, attendance, home and

school behavior, social skills, and adaptation to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family-school partnerships also improve school programs, school climate, family services and support, parent skills and advocacy efforts, family-school-community connections, and support the work of teachers (Epstein, 2011).

Though research clearly indicates the necessity of effective family-school partnerships, achieving these collaborative relationships remains challenging. Parents and educators may be working toward shared goals, but they often feel unsupported by the other party in their efforts to reach these goals. Schools want parents to support their practices and teaching efforts, and parents want schools to be responsive to the unique needs of their family and child, but far too often, neither parents nor educators are collaboratively finding ways to maximize the educational experience and academic outcomes of students (Christenson, 2004). This impaired relationship can quickly escalate into finger-pointing and blaming without either party taking responsibility for the part they play in helping the student succeed.

There are many barriers preventing successful partnerships between parents and schools. Discrepant perspectives of a child or child's needs have been identified as a factor that initiates and escalates conflict between parents and teachers (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Both parents and teachers may want what is best for a student, but their expectations and perceptions of a particular child can vary. This leaves educators and parents struggling to develop and foster effective family-school partnerships in a conflict-laden climate with limited knowledge about how best to handle these conflicts (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

Research currently demonstrates the individual impact of parent and teacher perceptions on students. Teacher perceptions of student ability predict academic performance (Jussim & Eccles, 1992), and parent perceptions influence their children's self-perceptions, achievement

expectations, and evaluations of task difficulty (Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). This research examines the impact of either parent or teacher perceptions on students, but it does not examine the influence of these combined perceptions on students, particularly when these perceptions may diverge. Research has demonstrated that students who receive inconsistent messages from teachers regarding student expectations can have difficulty adjusting and may adopt a passive learning style (Good, 1981). This indicates that inconsistent teacher expectations can have an academically harmful effect on students, but it does not address the outcomes for students when parent and teacher expectations and perceptions diverge.

Problem Statement

Research demonstrates the individual impact of teacher and parent perceptions on students; however, information about how students are impacted by the collective perceptions of parents and teachers, particularly when these perceptions diverge, is limited. Research is needed that explores the experiences of parents, teachers, *and* students in relation to these collective perceptions (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010). Research is also needed that investigates how diverging perceptions impact the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Family-school partnerships lead to positive results for both students and schools; yet they remain challenging to establish and maintain, particularly in the presence of conflict. Understanding the experiences of parents, teachers, and students may provide insights into the successful management of discrepant parent and teacher perceptions so that effective family-school partnerships are developed.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge;

of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. In phenomenological studies, the term essence refers to the universal understanding of the phenomenon that is achieved by examining the individual experiences of those who have lived it (Creswell, 2007). The goals of this study were to understand the overall essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge, to understand the perceived impact of these divergent beliefs on students and the family-school partnership, and to gain insights from these experiences that will help build effective family-school partnerships, even in the presence of conflict (see Figure 1.1). The purpose of this study was achieved by answering the following research questions:

- What is the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?
- What are the perceived outcomes for students and the family-school partnership when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?
- What changes can be made in practice and policy that will help parents and teachers overcome discrepant perceptions of student abilities to build effective family-school partnerships?

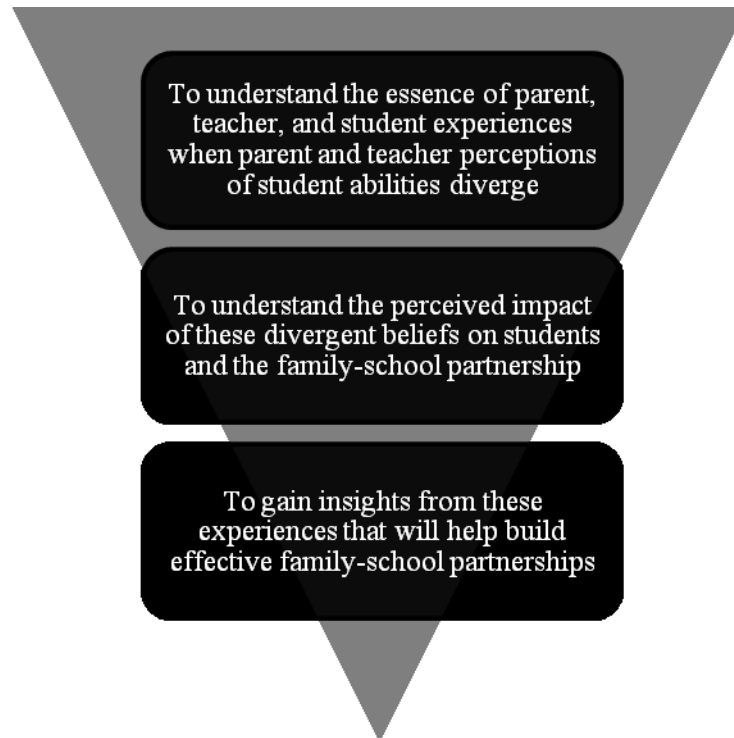


Figure 1.1 Goals of the study

Research Design Overview

This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parent and teacher perceptions of a student's abilities diverge. Of particular importance was how these experiences impacted the formation of effective family-school partnerships. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method. Field notes were also collected throughout the interview process. Data was collected from four teacher, three parent, and three student participants. Interviews were transcribed upon completion, and both interview and field note data were analyzed. Analysis involved both First and Second Cycle coding methods. Trustworthiness of the study was established through thick description, member checks, clarifying bias, and peer debriefing.

Assumptions

Research indicates that family-school partnerships lead to improved outcomes for students, parents, teachers, and schools (Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Research also suggests that conflicts between parents and teachers diminish parent trust in schools, create stress for both parents and teachers, and can serve as a barrier to the formation of effective family-school partnerships (Christenson, Palan, & Sculin, 2009; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Thus, it is assumed that conflicts between parents and teachers adversely impact student academic performance, attendance, social skills development, school programs, and overall school climate. It is also assumed that the divergence between parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities influences the manner in which families and schools work together, communicate, and ultimately establish partnerships.

This study relied on the open and honest portrayal of participant perceptions, even if these perceptions did not portray the realities of the event. It was assumed that participants would openly and honestly discuss their experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities, and it was further assumed that understanding these experiences would assist parents and educators in overcoming conflict to preserve and strengthen the family-school partnership.

Delimitations

This study was not intended to provide insights related to all conflicts that impact family-school partnerships but only those directly associated with a student's school-related abilities. There are many other sources of conflict that may influence family-school partnerships to an equal or greater extent than divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. This study did not identify or examine these sources of conflict. Additionally, this study only

interviewed parents, teachers, and students; however, it is acknowledged that other individuals, such as administrators and school counselors, also play a role in the establishment of family-school partnerships.

Additionally, this study identified the *perceived* impact of divergent beliefs on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships; understanding the true impact of these beliefs would require a quantitative investigation. A quantitative approach was not selected for the study for a variety of reasons. First, it would be difficult to control variables that may be impacted by discrepant parent and teacher beliefs regarding a student's abilities. For example, student attendance may be impacted by the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities; however, it would be impossible to control all other factors, such as illness, family functioning, school engagement, peer relationships, and so forth, that may influence student attendance. Second, empirical studies that describe the experiences of parents, teachers, *and* students in relation to parent and teacher perceptions of a student's abilities are rare. Finally, a qualitative approach was selected to understand the overall essence of what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities. Understanding this overall essence provides educators and parents with the insights and perspectives necessary to begin overcoming conflict and forming effective partnerships with families.

This study utilized a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenological methodologies seek to "explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 19). Analysis of these individual experiences provides a universal understanding of the shared experience. The phenomenological methodology was selected because it provides a description of the overall essence of discrepant parent and teacher beliefs regarding a student's abilities. This description is obtained by understanding personal

experiences. This methodology does not ensure the accurate portrayal of the phenomenon. The experiences of participants are only their portrayal of events, and they may not accurately describe events or reflect the experiences of other involved parties. A case study approach would have allowed for a more complete or accurate depiction of conflicts between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities. Rather than interviewing parents, teachers, and students from distinct conflicts, a case study approach would utilize interviews from parents, teachers, and students involved in the same conflict. This approach was not selected for this study due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Individuals may contradict one another in their depiction of events, which could easily lead to adversarial, negative, and blaming discussions and ultimately hinder the development of family-school partnerships. Individuals may also feel reluctant to share their experiences knowing that the other parties may be aware of their feelings, beliefs, and perceptions. A phenomenological approach allowed for an understanding of these experiences without escalating conflict between teachers and parents.

Limitations

The primary data collection method utilized in this study was interviews. Interviews rely on honest and forthcoming information from participants. However, with interview data, the possibility exists that participants may withhold information, attempt to present themselves in an overly favorable light, exaggerate personal experiences, or respond dishonestly. Interviews provide perceptual data, and perceptual data may not provide a complete portrayal of the event. These are limitations of interview data.

Qualitative studies also limit the generalizability of findings. This is due to the perceptual and contextual nature of the data collected. In the study, generalizability was also limited by the small sample size. However, qualitative studies do not seek generalizability;

rather, they focus on the usefulness of qualitative findings in similar settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This usefulness is referred to as transferability.

Rationale and Significance

A plethora of research related to the individual impact of parent and teacher perceptions on a student's academic performance exists. Research also exists that supports the establishment of effective family-school partnerships as a method for improving student outcomes. However, empirical studies that provide insight into the collective influence of parent and teacher perceptions on students, particularly when these perceptions diverge, are rare. Little is also known about how these divergent perceptions impact the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Finally, the need for research that investigates the multiple perspectives of students, parents, and teachers is supported in the literature (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010).

Conflicts surrounding a student's abilities occur often in education. Parents and teachers disagree on issues such as: placement in special education, placement in advanced courses, retention and promotion, and playing time on sports teams. Though these types of disagreements are not uncommon, little is understood about these experiences and their impact on family-school partnerships. This is an important area of research, particularly in an era that emphasizes the family-school partnership as a tool to meet national standards (Christenson, 2004).

Parents, students, and educators must work together to form effective family-school partnerships. These partnerships exist when parents and teachers share decision-making power, communicate openly and effectively, demonstrate respect, and invest time and effort to ensure that each student's opportunities for success are maximized (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004). Perhaps in an ideal world, these partnerships could exist free of conflict. But like in any relationship, conflict is inevitable, and educators need

information and resources to guide them in establishing and maintaining effective partnerships despite the presence of conflict. By understanding the experiences of parents, teachers, and students, insights can be acquired that guide practice and policy related to family-school partnerships. This study serves as a step toward a collaborative approach to problem-solving that maintains and strengthens family-school partnerships so that student opportunities for success are maximized.

Subjectivity Statement

I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership doctoral program at the University of Arkansas. This study fulfilled the dissertation requirements of the program. Prior to completing my doctoral coursework, I received my master's and specialist degrees in Counseling at Pittsburg State University. I also completed requirements for my school counseling certification in the state of Missouri through Evangel University.

I am currently employed as a professional school counselor at a rural school district in Southwest Missouri. I also serve as the Director of the Truancy Diversion Counseling Program in Crawford County, Kansas. Previously, I served as the director of operations at a non-profit organization devoted to the assessment and remediation of children with reading difficulties. I also completed a counseling practicum and internship with a state-contracted family services agency in southeast Kansas.

In my various roles, I worked directly with parents, students, teachers, and schools. I heard first-hand accounts of family-school partnerships from each of these perspectives, and I witnessed the many barriers that prevent the successful formation of family-school partnerships. Through these experiences, it became evident to me that parents, teachers, and students all play a role in building and maintaining quality partnerships; however, parents, teachers, and students

often display unique perspectives that challenge the development of family-school partnerships. As an educator and counselor, it became important to me to gain an understanding of the unique perspectives of parents, teachers, and students in relation to family-school partnerships and to provide insights from these perspectives that will help educators and parents work together to form effective partnerships, even in the presence of conflict.

Definitions

Family-school partnerships – ongoing, collaborative, and equitable relationships between parents and the entire school community (including teachers, administrators, counselors, special educators, school psychologists, and other school personnel) that utilize shared responsibility and power to develop an environment that maximizes each child’s potential for achievement

Divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities – any perceived variation between teachers and parents regarding a student’s abilities, including but not limited to academic, athletic, social, and behavioral abilities

Conflict – a divergence of opinions or perceptions between parents and teachers; in this study, the term conflict applies primarily to disagreements between parents and teachers specifically related to a student’s academic, athletic, social, or behavioral abilities or performance

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. The purpose of this study was achieved by answering the research questions presented in Chapter I. To examine these questions, the following subquestions were investigated in the literature.

- What are the perceptions of parents and teachers related to student abilities?
- How do individual and collective perceptions of student abilities impact students?
- What are the qualities of effective family-school partnerships, and how do these partnerships impact students?
- What is the role of teacher-parent conflict on the establishment of family-school partnerships?

The research examined below was obtained through an ongoing, extensive search of existing literature. Keywords used in these searches included: parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities, discrepant parent and teacher perceptions, parent and teacher expectations of students, parental school involvement, accuracy of parent and teacher reports, conflict between parents and teachers, and family-school partnerships. These keywords were entered into online search engines and academic databases. Google® served as the primary search engine utilized in the study, and it provided connections to several books related to family-school partnerships. The primary academic databases utilized in the study included ProQuest®, Ebsco®, ERIC®, and

Google® Scholar. These databases provided access to the scholarly, peer-reviewed articles discussed below.

Conceptual Framework

My personal experiences as an educator and parent, as well as my understanding of the relevant literature, inform my understanding of how the research problem in the study should be explored. The literature presented in this chapter laid the foundation for investigating the research problem, answering the research questions, and exploring their ensuing subquestions. The following presents research regarding: teacher perceptions of student abilities, parent perceptions of student abilities, collective perceptions of student abilities, family-school partnerships, and the role of conflict in the establishment of family-school partnerships.

Literature related to teacher and parent perceptions of student abilities includes the individual impact of parent and teacher perceptions on students and the accuracy of teacher and parent perceptions of student abilities. The section on collective perceptions of student abilities examines the influence of multiple perceptions on students. This section lays the foundation for understanding how students are influenced by divergent parent and teacher perceptions. Family-school partnership literature examines the qualities of family school partnerships, their impact, and barriers that impede the development of family-school partnerships. Finally, the last section of the literature review examines the role of parent-teacher conflict in the establishment of family-school partnerships. Understanding the literature in these areas provides the framework from which the research questions in the study were investigated. Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationships between the research questions, conceptual framework, goals, and research methods in the study.

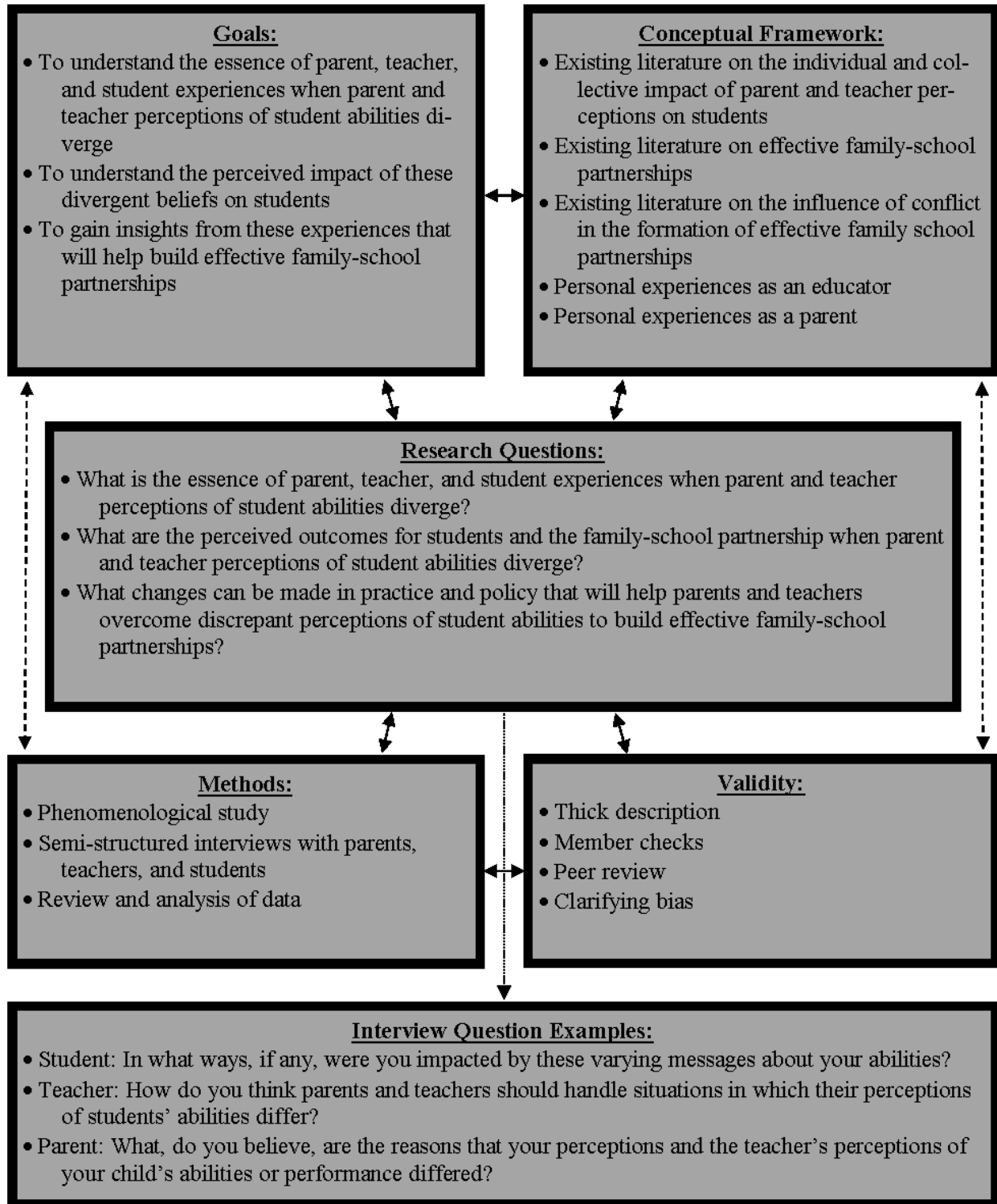


Figure 2.1. Concept map

Teacher Perceptions of Student Abilities

Research suggests that teacher expectations and perceptions of student abilities impact students. “Teachers make judgments on a regular basis about the ability of students, and their appraisals can have critical implications for curricular and instructional opportunities and for the messages about ability conveyed to children” (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999, p. 731). This is consistent with Rubie-Davies’s (2006) finding that teacher expectations influence student self-perceptions of abilities. Though it is intuitively appealing to assume that teacher expectations play a critical role in student achievement, much of the literature related to the impact and accuracy of teacher perceptions remains contradictory. Reviews by Brophy (1983) and Jussim and Harber (2005) illustrate these inconsistencies. However, both reviews conclude that teacher perceptions of student performance predict student outcomes because they align with the actual abilities of students. The research presented below consistently demonstrates the overall alignment of teacher perceptions with students’ abilities; however, it also identifies factors that interfere with the alignment of teacher reports. The research also examines the impact of teacher perceptions on students.

Jussim and Eccles (1992) examined the role of teacher expectations in relation to sixth graders’ mathematical performance and abilities. They found that teacher expectations of student performance predicted student performance on standardized assessments and mathematic grades. Teachers based their expectations of math performance on students’ previous performance on standardized math assessments, students’ previous grades in math, and students’ self-concepts of their math ability, and these indicators accurately reflected student mathematical performance. However, Jussim and Eccles identified factors that influenced the alignment of teacher expectations with student abilities. Teachers perceived girls as performing better in math

than boys, though there were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls on standardized assessments of mathematical performance.

Gender stereotyping was also evident in teachers' perceptions of student talent and effort (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Teachers based their perceptions of student talent on students' previous performance on standardized math assessments and their own perceptions of the students' performance. Teachers perceived boys as possessing more mathematical talent than girls. Again, this perception was not supported by student performance data, and it appeared to contradict the teacher perception that girls performed better in math than boys. When rating student effort, teachers based their perceptions on their own perceptions of the students' performance. Teachers believed girls exerted more effort in mathematics than boys, and they related student performance in math to perceived effort. However, results indicated no significant differences between girls and boys on time spent on math homework or self-perceptions of effort, and results further indicated that student performance was not an accurate indicator of student effort. Overall, the results of Jussim and Eccles indicated that teacher perceptions of student performance are aligned with students' actual abilities, as they are based on factors such as students' previous performance. However, results also indicated that teacher perceptions of student performance are influenced by gender bias.

Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999) investigated the role of early teacher perceptions on students' later academic performance. In this study, the researchers explored teacher perceptions of student abilities over time, demographic characteristics of students associated with discrepant teacher perceptions and IQ scores, long-term achievement of students with early discrepancies between teacher perceptions and IQ score, and possible characteristics within the home environment that may moderate between early teacher perceptions of student abilities and later

academic achievement. They found that student IQ and SES were significant predictors of the teachers' ratings of intelligence. When IQ scores were controlled, teachers tended to overestimate the intelligence of students from high socioeconomic backgrounds and underestimate the intelligence of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Personality characteristics were also found to be associated with teacher ratings of intelligence. "Teachers tended to overestimate the intelligence of children whom they perceived as competent, independent, assertive, and interesting and to underestimate the intelligence of children they saw as immature and insecure" (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999, p. 736).

Discrepancies between teacher ratings of intelligence and IQ score at age 4 were also predictors of high school GPA and SAT participation (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). When teachers overestimated students' intellectual abilities at age 4, students were more likely to have higher GPAs and to have taken the SAT than students for whom teachers underestimated their abilities. Finally, two home characteristics were identified as moderating teacher perceptions. These two characteristics were an orderly and predictable home and career or community-oriented mothers. These moderating factors had the most significance for children whose abilities were underestimated by their teachers.

Marjoribanks (1978) also investigated the influence of students' social environments and intelligence on teachers' perceptions of students' school-related behavior. Students' social environment was defined in terms of parental aspirations for students, parental support for education, home literacy, parental initiative and responsibility toward education, parents' involvement in education, and parents' knowledge of the school setting. Teachers evaluated student school-related behaviors in terms of obedience, work-ethic, participation, concentration, aggression, and restlessness. Results of the study indicated that when students were either

intellectually low or from disadvantaged families and perceived by their teacher as having poor school-related behaviors, the factors compounded to have an even greater negative impact on student achievement. However, when teachers rated similar students as displaying favorable school-related behaviors, they were able to compensate, in part, for the adverse effects of their intellectual abilities and family environment.

Hauser-Cram, Sirin, and Stipek (2003) investigated the role of perceived parent-teacher value differences on teachers' perceptions of students' academic competence. Using a questionnaire, teacher perceptions of educational value differences between parents and teachers were assessed. Teachers also reported on their perceptions of students' current and future academic competency. The teaching style of participating teachers was assessed through classroom observation and teacher self-reports and classified as either student-centered or curriculum-centered. Student-centered teachers encouraged students to take responsibility, communicate, problem-solve, and assume leadership roles. They also respected students, responded to student needs, and consistently applied rules. Curriculum-centered teachers held students to rigid rules and standards, provided few opportunities for student choice, dominated classroom discussions, and failed to modify classroom instruction to meet the individual needs of students.

Results of Hauser-Cram et al. (2003) indicated that teacher perceptions of students' academic competency and their expectations for students' future academic performance were consistent with students' actual abilities. However, when teachers perceived parents to have different education-related values than themselves, they rated the academic competency of students lower and held lower expectations for the future academic success of the students. These lowered perceptions and expectations were present even when the SES and actual abilities

of students were controlled. Finally, results indicated that curriculum-centered teachers were more likely to perceive that their values differed from parents than student-centered teachers, suggesting that students in student-centered classrooms were less likely to have teachers with lowered perceptions of their abilities and lowered expectations for their future academic success. This study did not examine parent perceptions of value differences; thus, discrepancies between parent and teacher perceptions of value differences could not be determined.

In their review of the literature on retention and academic redshirting, Dougan and Pijanowski (2011) propose that student age and height likely impact teacher perceptions of students. They propose that teachers view older and physically more mature students as more competent and prepared for academic instruction. They further suggest that younger, less mature students internalize these negative teacher perceptions, which ultimately hinders their academic, behavioral, and social development. The assertions of Dougan and Pijanowski are supported in the literature on teacher perceptions. It has been demonstrated that teachers underestimate the IQ of students viewed as immature and insecure, and the underestimation of student IQ translates to lower high school GPAs and SAT participation (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). It has also been found that teacher perceptions of negative school behaviors, such as obedience, work ethic, concentration, and restlessness, negatively impact student achievement (Marjoribanks, 1978). As discussed by Dougan and Pijanowski, it is likely that younger students will demonstrate poorer, less mature school-related behaviors than their older classmates, and as student maturity impacts teacher perceptions and ultimately influences student achievement, it is likely that student relative age is another factor influencing teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Though much of the research on teacher perceptions of students is contradictory, the literature presented in this section provides a preliminary understanding of teacher perceptions

and their potential impact on students. It also provides a basis from which to compare and contrast the literature on parent perceptions of student abilities.

Parent Perceptions of Student Abilities

Parent expectations and beliefs also play a role in student achievement. Parents who convey high expectations for academic achievement have children who perform better in school (Englund et al., 2004). Parsons et al. (1982) examined the influence of parents on their children's math achievement expectancies and self-perceptions of abilities. This investigation included students enrolled in fifth through eleventh grade and their parents. Each student and parent completed a questionnaire assessing academic beliefs related to mathematics. The student questionnaire included items assessing constructs such as difficulty of math courses, mathematical abilities, anticipated performance in math classes, and effort required to succeed in math courses. The parent questionnaire included items pertaining to their past experiences with math courses and judgment of their personal mathematical abilities, their perception of their children's attitude toward math, and their perception of their child's mathematical abilities and performance.

Findings from Parsons et al. (1982) suggested that parents' mathematical abilities and personal attitudes toward math were not strongly correlated with their children's self-perceptions of their mathematical abilities, expectations, or performance. In other words, the parents were not serving as models for their children, as parent mathematical abilities and parent self-perceptions of their math abilities did not relate to the children's self-perceptions on their math abilities. Additionally, when parents were evaluating their children's mathematical abilities, their beliefs, expectations, and perceptions influenced their children's self-concept, expectations, and actual math performance. Thus, if parents believed their children did not possess strong

mathematical abilities, their children were also likely to believe they were not good at math and to have low expectations regarding their performance in math. However, this study did not specify the number of participants which makes generalizing the findings to a larger population difficult.

This research has implications regarding parental perceptions and their impact on academic achievement. Whether parents believe their children possess or do not possess certain abilities, their children are likely to adopt similar viewpoints. These perceptions are independent of students' actual abilities and may impact their decisions to pursue educational and career avenues. Children's beliefs about their own abilities and the difficulty of particular tasks are more greatly influenced by their parents' beliefs than by their previous performance, and children are not simply influenced by their parents' actual expectations and perceptions but by their perception of their parents' expectations and beliefs about their abilities (Parsons et al., 1982).

Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) investigated the school-related achievement beliefs and behaviors of parents with economically disadvantaged African-American students. Parental beliefs (such as projected academic achievement of the student) and behaviors (such as academic instruction provided at home) were examined in relation to students' self-concept of academic abilities and achievement. The study specifically examined relationships between the following: parental academic expectations for achievement and their home behaviors that facilitate academic achievement; parental academic beliefs and behaviors and student achievement; and, children's self-concept of achievement and parental perceptions of the student's abilities and achievement.

Findings from Halle et al. (1997) demonstrated that parental expectations for student achievement were positively correlated with parental home behaviors that fostered academic achievement; however, there was little association between parental home behaviors and student academic achievement. Conversely, parental perceptions of the student's abilities and parental expectations for achievement were significantly and positively correlated. This finding suggests that parental beliefs about a student's abilities and their expectations for achievement are more important factors in student achievement than parental home behaviors that promote learning.

Additional findings from Halle et al. (1997) demonstrated the impact of parental perceptions of student abilities on students' self-concept of their abilities. Specifically, children's self-perceptions of their abilities in math, reading, and overall academic competence were correlated with parental perceptions of the students' abilities. Parental perceptions of student abilities were also correlated with students' later achievement. Finally, the authors found that students' self-concepts of their abilities did not serve as a mediator between parental perceptions and student achievement. These findings reveal the relationship between parental expectations and perceptions of student abilities and student academic achievement. "Barring the aid of sources outside of the family, the maintenance of positive attitudes about academic abilities and skills may be one of the most important family characteristics associated with future success" (Halle et al., 1997, p. 535).

As discussed in the previous section, teacher perceptions of student abilities are strong predictors of student achievement because they are consistent with students' actual abilities (Brophy, 1983; Jussim & Harber, 2005). However, the alignment of parental perceptions with student actual abilities remains in question. Researchers debate on the appropriateness of using parent reports to describe their children's level of functioning. Researchers argue that the

quality, quantity, and uniqueness of the knowledge parents possess about their children is vital information that should be used when evaluating children's level of functioning, whereas, other researchers argue that the unique parent-child relationship interferes with parents' abilities to accurately gauge their children's level of functioning (Seifer, 2002).

Seifer, Sameroff, Dickstein, Schiller, and Hayden (2004) investigated this dilemma. They examined the appropriateness of using parents as raters of children's behavior. The study focused on the accuracy of parent reports with regard to their infant's temperament. One hundred twelve families participated in the study. The infants, 56 boys and 56 girls, were between the ages of 4.5 and 6.5 months. During the initial stage of the study, the infant and mother were placed in a small laboratory room and videotaped while demonstrating interactions. The mother and infant were exposed to a variety of situations designed to elicit various responses from the child. Upon completion of the recording, mothers were asked to rate the behavior of children in a number of recorded vignettes. Each mother viewed four recordings of their own child (which consisted of previously recorded interactions) and six recordings of other children. The vignettes included parent and child interactions on the participant videos and an individual child engaged in free play on the standard children video. Trained observers also watched the 10 vignettes and rated the behaviors observed in each. Parents and observers were asked to rate the infants' mood, activity, approach (i.e., exploring or reserved), and intensity (i.e., reactive or unreactive). The observer and parent ratings for each vignette were then compared.

Findings from Seifer et al. (2004) indicated a correspondence between the parent and observer ratings of standard children. The overall correlation between mother and observer ratings of standard children was strong enough to indicate that the mothers were accurate raters of these children, though the mothers tended to rate the standard children slightly more positively

than observers. However, when evaluating their own children, there was no relationship between parent and observer reports. Mothers rated their own children's behavior more positively than they did the standard children. There were some cases in which observer ratings indicated negative infant behavior, and even in these cases, the mothers rated their infants' behavior as positive. These findings suggested that mothers are unbiased and accurate reporters of other children's behavior, but when evaluating their own children, they tend to view them in a more favorable light. This study is a starting point for understanding the accuracy of parent reports; however, it only investigated children of a limited age range and investigated temperament only. Future research including children of all ages and examining parent perceptions of other domains, such as a child's academic abilities, could provide additional information related the alignment of parent perceptions with students actual abilities.

Another study investigating the validity of parental reports was conducted by Stifter, Willoughby, and Towe-Goodman (2008). They examined the convergence of parental reports with observers when examining infant temperament, particularly focusing on infant positive and negative reactivity. Nine hundred fifty-five infants, with a target age between 6 and 7 months, and their parents participated in the study. Each family was monitored by two observers during two home visits. Parents and infants engaged in a variety of tasks both together and individually. The individual tasks for the infants included "challenge tasks," a saliva sample, health screening, and mental and motor development assessments.

The "challenge tasks" in Stifter et al. (2008) consisted of activities that were designed to elicit specific reactions from the infants. The mask task (first challenge task) involved the home-visitor wearing four strange masks for ten seconds each while moving his or her head side-to-side slowly and calling the child's name. During the arm restraint task (second challenge task),

children were placed in a walker with their arms restrained by the home-visitor. The parents were asked to stay out of the infants' sight during this task, which lasted a maximum of two minutes of restraint or twenty seconds of hard crying. Parents could remove their children from the walker one minute after cessation of the task. The individual parent tasks included an interview, questionnaire, and saliva sample. During the joint tasks, the parent and infant played freely or engaged in structured activities (such as reading). After one home visit, parents completed selected subscales of the Rothbart's Infant Behavior Questionnaire – Revised (IBQ-R). Scores from the fear/distress to novelty, distress to limitations, and approach subscales were used in the study. At each home visit, the observers completed the social approach, positive affect, fear, and irritability subscales of the Infant Behavior Record (IBR). This instrument was designed to assess behavior viewed by the observers over the duration of the home-visit. Finally, trained coders viewed the videotaped challenge tasks and coded the infants' reactions to these tasks. Comparisons were then made between the parent, home-visitors, and trained coder reports of infant positive and negative reactivity.

Findings from Stifter et al. (2008) indicated that parent, observer, and coder reports assented to a degree when examining positive reactivity. However, when evaluating infant negative reactivity, there was nearly no relationship between parent reports and observer and coder reports. It would be beneficial to replicate this study with children of other ages and to evaluate other dimensions of personality.

The literature presented above indicates the impact of parent perceptions on students. Parent perceptions have been associated with student self-concept, academic performance, and expectations (Halle et al., 1997; Parsons et al., 1982). Though the relationship between parent

perceptions and student outcomes has been demonstrated, the ability of parents to accurately assess their children's abilities is disputable (Seifer et al., 2004; Stifer et al., 2008).

There are connections between the findings presented in this section and the current study. First, the findings seem to verify the positive outcomes for students when parents demonstrate affirmative perceptions of their abilities. Second, the findings seem to contrast the inaccuracy of parent assessments with the often accurate assessments of teachers. The purpose of examining the literature on parent and teacher perceptions is not to determine who is "right" and who is "wrong" when conflicts between parents and teachers emerge; rather, the purpose of examining the literature is to provide an understanding of the factors that influence perception formation. This literature also provides evidence for the necessity of perceptual data from parents, teachers, and students. Understanding the experiences of parents, teachers, and students provides an opportunity for participants to examine their perceptions and to gain insights from others that will enhance collaboration, perspective-taking, and effective problem-solving. Finally, the research in this section provides a framework from which to investigate the role of divergent teacher and parent perceptions on students.

Collective Perceptions of Student Abilities

The above literature describes the independent impact of parent and teacher perceptions on students; however, it did not address the shared impact these combined perceptions have on students. Benner and Mistry (2007) incorporated this missing piece of information into their research on teacher and parent expectations and their impact on the academic performance of low-income youth. Five hundred twenty-two students (50% male, 50% female) between the ages of 9 and 16 years participated in the study. The sample consisted of low-income and ethnically diverse students. The students' mothers also participated in the study, and teacher data

was obtained for 320 of the students. The students in the study participated in a home-interview and standardized achievement test. The mothers also participated in a home-interview and completed an academic performance rating scale. Finally, the teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and mock report card via mail correspondence. These data points were used to determine the independent impact of mother and teacher expectations on student academic performance, factors relating parent and teacher expectations with student achievement, and the impact of diverging parent and teacher expectations on student achievement.

The findings of Benner and Mistry (2007) demonstrated that both teacher and parent reports impact student academic achievement, including the student's academic beliefs and actual performance. Students who experienced both high teacher and mother expectations had the highest academic achievement; whereas, students with both low teacher and mother expectations had the lowest achievement levels. According to Benner and Mistry, findings from the study further suggest that when mother and teacher expectations diverge, with mothers having high expectations and teachers having low expectations, the high mother expectations serve as a protective barrier against the negative effects of the low teacher expectations.

Though Benner and Mistry's (2007) work provides a look into a largely unresearched area, there are concerns regarding the conclusions presented by the authors. According to Benner and Mistry, the results of the study indicate that "higher expectations from mothers partially buffer against the negative effects of low teacher expectations" (p. 149). One might conclude from this statement that mother expectations have a greater influence on academic performance than teacher expectations. However, in this study, those conclusions cannot be made. Data analysis did not include parent-low, teacher-high expectations due to the infrequency of this response pattern. Further, teacher data was not available for over 200

students in the sample. Thus, the findings of the study actually indicate that having one adult with high expectations leads to greater academic outcomes for students than no adult with high expectations. The study demonstrates the mother's ability to offset low teacher expectations; however, it is also possible that high teacher expectations could offset low parent expectations.

Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) provided a qualitative investigation of student, parent, and teacher expectations for achievement. In this study, the authors conducted student, parent, and teacher focus groups to examine the expectations that participants have for themselves and one another. Student participants were enrolled in their first or second years of high school at the time of participation. Findings from these focus groups were presented related to expectations of school, influences on student learning, and barriers to achieving expectations. Specifically, participants' expectations related to students' secondary and post-secondary achievement were discussed.

Findings from the study indicated that all groups considered school achievement an important factor in overcoming disadvantaged home environments, and all groups expressed primarily positive outlooks on the students' futures (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Students expected that they would travel, receive post-secondary education, or have a fulfilling career after secondary school. However, students did not always understand the qualifications necessary for achieving occupations, nor did they provide well-constructed reasons for traveling. Parents expected their children to complete secondary school and expressed hope that they would pursue a career in which they enjoyed. Teachers primarily believed students would achieve their expectations and goals; however, teachers also recognized that students are sometimes unrealistic about their abilities and expectations.

Students, parents, and teachers consistently identified streaming (or tracking) as a barrier to the achievement of high expectations (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Participants believed that streams were not always accurate, negatively shaped teacher expectations of students, and ultimately led to more negative outcomes for students. All groups also believed that negative teacher expectations could have a detrimental effect on students, particularly on student self-expectations and beliefs.

Parents in Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) consistently expressed high expectations for their children; however, they did not consider their expectations to have a direct effect on students. Teachers, on the other hand, believed that parent values of school were directly connected to the value students placed on education. Students reported feeling pressure as a result of their parents' high expectations. Some students reported feeling pressure because their parents' expectations were too high; whereas, other students felt self-pressure to please their parents.

Though little is currently understood about the impact of divergent teacher and parent perceptions on students, Benner and Mistry (2007) and Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) provide insights that begin bridging this gap in the literature. As discussed previously, findings from Benner and Mistry (2007) suggest that when mother and teacher expectations diverge, with mothers having high expectations and teachers having low expectations, high mother expectations serve as a protective barrier against the negative effects of low teacher expectations. Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) found that when parents and teachers held differing perceptions of the value of education, teachers perceived this divergence in values to negatively impact student motivation and success. Existing literature does not explore the potential impact of others' perceptions on student perceptions of parent or teacher expectations. For example, little is understood about how parent expectations influence students' perceptions of teacher

expectations or how teacher expectations may influence students' perceptions of parent expectations. Additional research is needed in this area.

Shin, Viet Nhan, Crittenden, Valenti, and Thi Dieu Hong (2008) also investigated divergences between parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. They specifically examined differences between parent and teacher judgments related to students' developmental disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, and the factors that contribute to agreement or disagreement between parent and teacher judgments. The study involved parents in Vietnam whose children were tentatively believed to have cognitive delays. Students' abilities were assessed using the ABILITIES index. This index provides information related to intellectual and physical functioning, communication, and social skills. The ABILITIES index was completed by teachers, mothers, and fathers, and comparisons between these groups were explored. Mothers and fathers differed in their perceptions of the student's abilities only in two areas of functioning (the left arm and leg); however, teachers differed from parents in their perceptions of the student's abilities in behavior and social skills, communication, tonicity, and intellectual functioning.

When examining predictive factors of agreement between parents and teachers, type of disability and degree of intellectual impairment significantly predicted agreement between mothers and teachers (Shin et al., 2008). However, as teacher perceptions of the student's intellectual functioning diminished, mothers and teachers were less likely to agree on the student's intellectual abilities. The type of disability and prior experience with raising children significantly predicted agreement between fathers and teachers. Fathers who had prior experience raising a child were 3.2 times more likely to agree with teachers regarding the child's intellectual functioning than fathers who did not. When examining predictive factors related to

agreement between mothers and fathers, the child's age was identified. Parents with older children were more likely to agree on the child's intellectual abilities.

Shin et al. (2008) provided additional insights into divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. On the ABILITIES index, parents rated students higher than teachers in almost all areas of functioning. This was particularly the case in relation to intellectual functioning, communication, and social behaviors. Additionally, agreement between fathers and teachers was much lower in almost all areas of functioning than agreement between mothers and teachers.

Findings from Shin et al. (2008) have implications for the current study. First, these findings recognize discrepancies between teachers and parents on important areas of student functioning. These areas include intellectual functioning, social skills, communication, and behavior. Though the study acknowledges that discrepancies between parents and teachers exist, it does not address the potential impact of these discrepant perceptions on students or parent-teacher relationships. Possible discrepancies between teachers and parents of non-disabled students are also unaddressed in this study. Further, Shin et al. does not provide participant experiences in regards to these discrepancies. The study demonstrates that discrepancies exist, but it does not explain how these discrepancies are experienced or understood by parents, teachers, and students. Additional research in this area could provide a better understanding of how students are impacted by divergent parent and teacher perceptions and how parents, teachers, and students experience this divergence.

Family-School Partnerships

To understand the role of divergent parent and teacher perceptions on the establishment of family-school partnerships, it is important to first examine the literature on the qualities and

barriers of family-school partnerships. For the purpose of this study, family-school partnerships are defined as the ongoing, collaborative, and equitable relationships between parents and the entire school community (including teachers, administrators, counselors, special educators, school psychologists, and other school personnel) that utilize shared responsibility and power to develop an environment that maximizes each child's potential for achievement. This definition is based on descriptions of family-school partnerships in Christenson (2004), Ferlazzo (2011), Epstein (2011), and Patrikakou, Weissbeg, Redding, and Walberg (2005).

When discussing family-school partnerships, it is important to distinguish between partnerships and parental involvement. Educators understand that relationships between parents and schools exist, but they do not always understand how to transform these relationships into partnerships. This is partly due to misconceptions related to the meaning of family-school partnerships, as parent involvement is often mistaken as partnerships with families (Auerbach, 2012). However, parent involvement fails to recognize the equity and shared decision-making characteristic of partnerships. Ferlazzo (2011) described the difference between family involvement and family engagement as the difference between *doing to* and *doing with*. Schools seeking involvement tell parents what to do to help their child; whereas, partnership schools collaborate with parents to determine how best to meet the needs of students.

The misuse of these terms hinders the establishment of successful partnerships and creates confusion related to the types of activities involved with each (Auerbach, 2012). Activities such as school carnivals, book fairs, parent-teacher conferences, and parent organization events are often classified as partnership activities, yet participation in these types of activities fail to address the components that are essential to successful partnerships, such as two-way communication, open dialogue, and shared goals (Theoharis, 2012). Though parent

involvement is good, partnerships are better (Epstein & Sheldon, 2011; Ferlazzo, 2011), and creating partnerships with families is a way for schools to not only improve academic outcomes for students but also to create schools that are equitable and socially just (Epstein & Sheldon, 2011; Riehl, 2012).

Research demonstrates the benefits of effective family-school partnerships. Family-school partnerships are associated with superior grade point averages, standardized test scores, attendance, home and school behavior, social skills, and adaptation to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family-school partnerships also improve school programs, school climate, family services and support, parent skills and advocacy efforts, family-school-community connections, and support the work of teachers (Epstein, 2011). The benefits of family-school partnerships necessitate educator knowledge and skill in establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships with parents. The benefits further indicate the necessity of school leaders to take an active role in school partnership efforts. The following provides a description of the qualities necessary for effective partnerships and the barriers that impede partnership development.

Partnership Qualities.

A well-known model for school-family partnership programs is based on Epstein's (2011) six types of involvement for comprehensive partnership programs. In this model, educators help families establish home supports for children (*parenting*), design two-way methods of communication (*communicating*), solicit parent assistance and support (*volunteering*), teach parents to support student learning at home (*learning at home*), incorporate shared decision-making with parents (*decision-making*), and connect families with community resources (*collaborating with the community*). Effective partnerships create schools that are

welcoming, encouraging, and aware of student strengths and families that emphasize the importance of school in life-long success (Epstein, 2011).

According to Epstein and Sheldon (2011), a review of multiple studies identified eight essential elements of effective family-school-community partnerships. These elements include: leadership, teamwork, action plans, implementation of plans, funding, collegial support, evaluation, and networking. Christenson (2004) also identified many aspects of effective family-school partnerships, including: families and educators listening to the other's perspective; approaching individual differences as assets to the partnership; sharing of information to develop interventions; focusing on common interests; seeking input from each other; collaboratively developing a plan to address the needs of all parties; shared decision-making; shared resources; establishing and communicating shared expectations of schoolwork and behavior; willingness and ability to appropriately handle conflict; refraining from placing blame; and shared commitment to success.

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) identified four core beliefs that must exist within schools to build meaningful partnerships with families. First, educators must believe that all parents have aspirations for their children and desire the best for them. Second, educators must believe that all parents have the ability to support their children's development and learning. The third necessary educator belief is that teachers view parents as equals. The final belief is that educators, particularly school leaders, must assume primary responsibility for the establishment of effective partnerships with families.

Auerbach (2012) described effective family-school partnership from the perspective of school leaders. She stated that school leaders should strive for "leadership for authentic partnerships," (Auerbach, 2012, p. 40) and she defined authentic partnerships as "mutually

respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue, and power sharing as part of socially just, democratic schools” (Auerbach, 2010, p. 734). In this type of partnership, the goal is to establish equity, open dialogue, family empowerment, and social justice, and the goals established for the student are based on the mutual interests of the school and family. Further, families and schools are viewed as full partners and the power differential between families and schools is minimized. Partnership schools operate under the premise that all parents have knowledge and skills that can contribute to the educational success of their children (Henderson et al., 2007).

Blue-Banning et al. (2004) investigated professional qualities associated with effective partnerships with parents of students with disabilities from the perspective of both parents and professionals. They identified six common themes that contribute to the establishment of collaborative partnerships. These themes include: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. Parent participants in Blue-Banning et al. described the need for quality communication with professionals. They reported that communication should be frequent, open, and honest. Parents emphasized the need for professionals to provide families with all of the information related to their child, even when these messages may be difficult for parents to hear; yet, parents also emphasized the need for professionals to simultaneously demonstrate tact when communicating with families. Parents also desired non-judgmental, two-way communication with families that was free of special education jargon.

Parents in Blue-Banning et al. (2004) identified the need for committed professionals in establishing effective family-school partnerships, and they described a committed professional as “one who values the relationship with individuals he or she serves as much or more than the tangible career rewards of the job” (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, p. 175). Parents further believed

that collaborative partnerships were established when professionals recognized the value of parent input and perspectives, and they described skilled professionals as those who could develop interventions specifically tailored to the student's needs and those who have the power and knowledge necessary to initiate program improvements for students (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Parents identified trust and respect as the final components necessary for collaborative partnerships with families (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Parents defined trust in terms of reliability, safety, and discretion. Specifically, parents expressed a desire for professionals who follow-through on necessary actions or promises, can be trusted to attend to the physical and emotional needs of their students, and can be trusted to keep personal information confidential. Parents identified two aspects of professional respect that they desired of professionals. First, parents reported the necessity of professionals to demonstrate respect for their child by “valuing the child as a person rather than as a diagnosis” (Blue-Banning et al., p. 179). Second, parents described professional respect as showing common courtesy toward parents, such as arriving on time to meetings and acknowledging parental contributions.

Partnership Barriers.

Many barriers exist that challenge the formation of family-school partnerships. Christenson (2004) categorizes the barriers that impede the development of effective family-school partnerships as those affecting families, educators, and those directly related to the family-school relationship. For example, family barriers that interfere with positive partnerships include: assuming a passive role in the educational process; distrust of educators; and, educator unresponsiveness to family needs and wishes. Educator barriers include: fear of conflict with parents; concerns about families' abilities to assist with school-related issues; negative

communication with families regarding a child's academic progress; and, difficulty seeing parents as partners in the educational process. Finally, barriers impacting the family-school relationship include: communication that occurs strictly when problems arise; lack of information and resources about how collaboration between families and schools should occur; lack of perspective-taking from both parties; failure to accept a partnership orientation; a win-lose attitude when presented with a conflict; and, varying perceptions of a child's performance (Christenson, 2004). This list does not provide a complete depiction of the complexity of effective family-school partnerships, nor does it provide an exhaustive list of the barriers that interfere with partnership development. However, it does provide a framework for understanding the issues that need addressed in order to create successful partnerships between schools and families. Lack of perspective-taking, a win-lose attitude when presented with conflict, and varying perceptions of a student's performance are barriers to effective family-school partnership that are addressed in this study.

Role of Conflict in the Establishment of Family-School Partnerships

Effective family-school partnerships are challenging in the best of circumstances. But when parents and teachers disagree about educational decisions related to a child, these relationships are further complicated. It is important for educators to think about conflict in terms of its affect on students and the establishment of family-school partnerships. Unfortunately, research examining the impact of parent-teacher conflict on students is limited. Nonetheless, research provides guidelines for teachers on how to preserve family-school partnerships by effectively managing and resolving conflict with parents.

Lake and Billingsley (2000) examined factors contributing to parent-school conflict in special education and identified the following eight factors: discrepant views of a child or

child's needs, trust, communication, constraints, reciprocal power, valuation, service delivery, and knowledge. This study did not directly investigate the impact of discrepant views on student outcomes; however, it provided evidence that the discrepant views "resulted in an unwillingness to take the risks necessary to continue communicating about the needs of the child" (Lake & Billingsley, p. 249). The discrepant views between parents and teachers had a direct impact on the family-school partnership, and when family-school partnerships are damaged, students ultimately suffer.

According to Christenson (2004), the willingness and ability to appropriately handle conflict are keys to the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Relationships between parents and educators are often cordial when no source of dissension exists; however, when a conflict arises, it becomes much more difficult for educators and parents to work together in an effective and meaningful way (Cornille, Pestle, & Vanwy, 1999). When conflicts arise, shared goals and values serve as the foundation for effectively resolving disagreements. Rather than viewing conflict as the destruction of partnership efforts, conflict should be viewed as an opportunity to discuss desired goals of the school and parents and to work collaboratively to reach these goals (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

When conflicts arise, Christenson et al. (2009) recommend that teachers block blame, reframe, ask questions, give specific examples and avoid generalizations, validate, and communicate respect. When blocking blame, educators can emphasize to parents that the purpose of communication is to collaboratively solve the problem, not to place blame for it. In reframing, educators learn to put a positive spin on identified difficulties or problems. This acknowledges the existence of the problem but it does so in a manner that is less abrasive toward parents. Teachers can also give specific examples of the problems to clearly illustrate for parents

the identified concern. Teachers can ask questions as a way to communicate to parents an interest in fully understanding the parents' perspective and concerns. Teachers validate parents by actively listening and responding to their concerns. Finally, teachers should always demonstrate respect for parents by listening, trying to understand, remaining nonjudgmental, and reacting to parent concerns non-defensively.

This research provides a framework for constructively approaching and solving conflicts between teachers and parents. However, research does not tell us what parents, teachers, and students experience when conflicts exist; thus, we do not have insights from these perspectives about how to effectively resolve conflict. Research in this area could provide educators with the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to resolve conflict and effectively partner with all families.

Summary

It is widely accepted that teacher perceptions of student abilities predict future student achievement, because teachers generally base their perceptions on students' actual abilities (Brophy, 1983; Jussim & Harber, 2005). Research consistently demonstrates the impact of parent perceptions of student abilities on student success. Parent perceptions of student abilities have been associated with student academic performance, student self-concept, and student expectations (Parsons et al., 1982). Unfortunately, most studies on parent perceptions utilize mothers as the sole or primary informants. Father participants are rarely included. Consequently, not only is the father voice largely absent in the literature, but the impact of family systems on parent perceptions is non-existent.

Understanding the individual impact of parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities is important, but it is also important to understand how students are impacted collectively by

these perceptions. However, most studies related to parent and teacher perceptions investigate the individual impact of these perceptions on students. Research related to the collective impact of multiple perceptions on students is limited (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Though the research in this area is limited, discrepancies between parents and teachers related to student intelligence, social skills, communication, and behavior have been identified (Shin et al., 2008). There is also preliminary evidence to suggest that high parental perceptions of a student's abilities may serve as a protective factor against low teacher perceptions of a student's abilities (Benner & Mistry, 2007). Additional research is needed that investigates the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities.

The literature universally indicates the importance of effective family-school partnerships. Family-school partnerships have been associated with improved academic performance, behavior, social skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), school programs, and school climate (Epstein, 2011). Unfortunately, conflicts related to discrepant views of a child or child's needs often interfere with the development of family-school partnerships (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

The majority of current studies are either quantitative in nature or they fail to include the perspectives of parents, teachers, *and* students. Research is needed that qualitatively describes the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities. Additionally, as discrepancies between parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities have been identified as a barrier to the formation of effective family-school partnerships, future research should provide insights that might help educators and parents successfully manage these discrepant perceptions to establish and strengthen the family-school partnership.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Research currently demonstrates the individual impact of parent and teacher perceptions on students. Teacher perceptions of student ability predict academic performance (Jussim & Eccles, 1992), and parent perceptions influence their children's self-perceptions, achievement expectations, and evaluations of task difficulty (Parsons et al., 1982). However, little research has been conducted that investigates the perceived impact of these collective perceptions on students.

Also lacking in the literature is qualitative research that specifically examines the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents when parents and teachers hold divergent beliefs about a student's abilities. Thus, a qualitative approach was utilized in this study. Further, the research questions (see Table 3.1) in this study were best answered using a qualitative approach, as this approach allows for the retelling of multiple realities in an in-depth, meaningful manner that can only be achieved through personal contact (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A qualitative approach also allowed for concurrent data collection and analysis. This permits a level of flexibility that incorporates analyzed data into future research decisions (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 3.1

Research Questions

Research Questions
1. What is the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?
2. What are the perceived outcomes for students and the family-school partnership when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?
3. What changes can be made in practice and policy that will help parents and teachers overcome discrepant perceptions of student abilities to build effective family-school partnerships?

The following provides the theoretical framework from which the study was developed and a description of the data collection and analysis procedures utilized in the study. It also provides information related to the research sample (including the sampling strategies and techniques employed), information needed to conduct the study, research design, data collection methods, data synthesis, and data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on how parents, teachers, and students experienced the phenomenon of discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. These experiences were investigated from a constructionist perspective. The individual experiences of each participant were examined to construct an understanding of the overall essence of the phenomenon. The research questions in the study were answered by adopting a phenomenological approach to gather and interpret data, and semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method (see Figure 3.1).

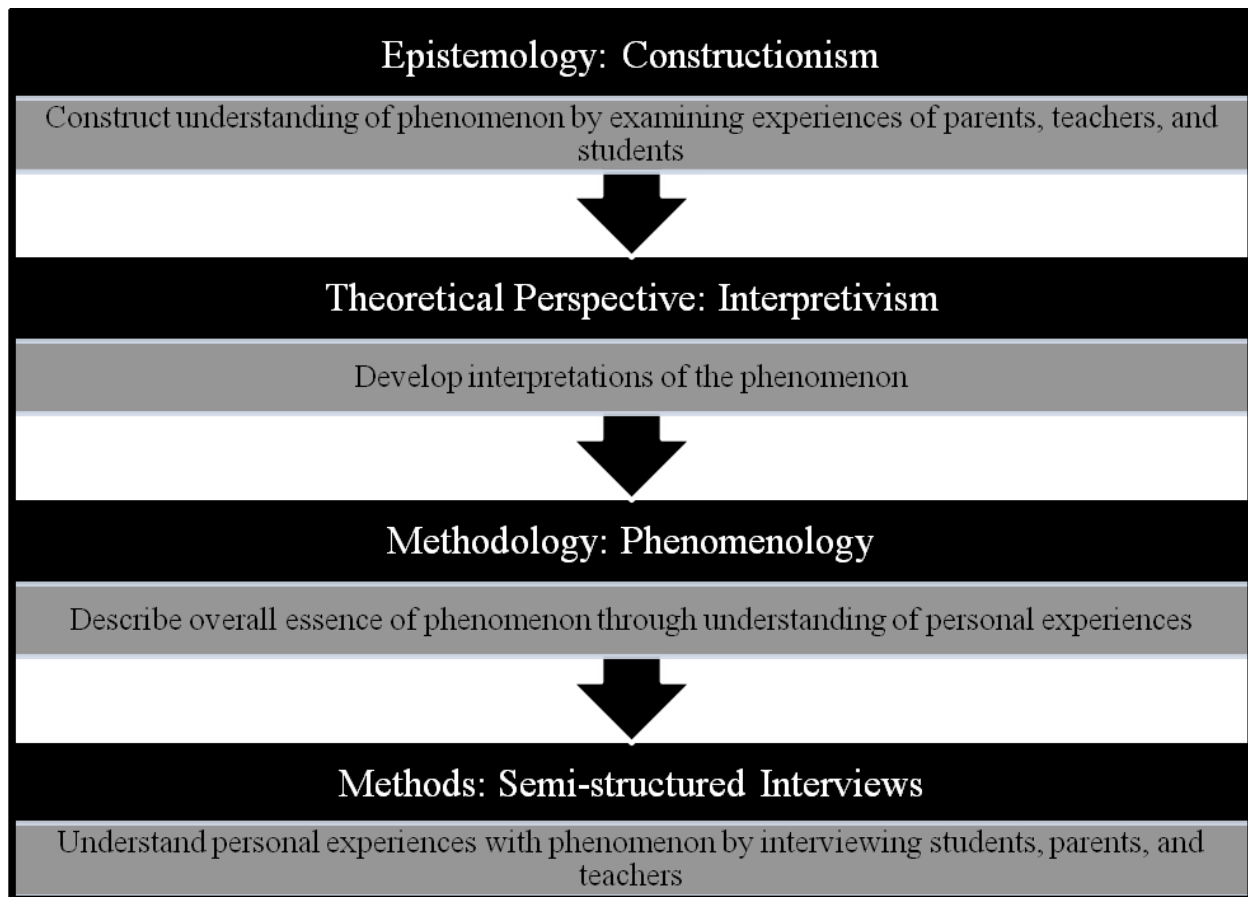


Figure 3.1. Elements of the study design

Epistemology: Constructionism.

This study examined the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parents and teachers disagreed about a student’s abilities. These experiences were examined to construct an understanding of the phenomenon and how it relates to the formation of effective family-school partnerships. Understanding was constructed through the questions asked, the context of the study, and the researcher’s personal experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). According to Crotty (1998), the focus of constructionism includes “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58). In this study, data from multiple parents, teachers, and students was used to construct the meaning of the experience of discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism.

The research questions and goals of the study contain signifiers of interpretivist research. These signifiers include *understanding, perceptions, and experiences*. As the study was focused on meaning, understanding, personal experiences, and participants' perceptions, it was well aligned with the interpretivist approach. This is in contrast to approaches typically utilized in the natural sciences that seek to explain and establish causation. The current study sought understanding, not causation, and was therefore consistent with interpretivist research. Interpretations of the phenomenon were developed by examining the experiences of parents, teachers, and students in relation to the phenomenon. Analysis of participant experiences identified themes, patterns, and connections related to their experiences with discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Methodology: Phenomenology.

Parents, educators, and students who have directly experienced the phenomenon share a common experience. They offer insights related to the phenomenon, and learning about their experiences offers the opportunity to understand the core of the phenomenon. Phenomenology provides the lens through which to explore this phenomenon as “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Phenomenological studies are based on the philosophical tenets of phenomenology which focus on the heart of lived experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As stated previously, the phenomenon of interest was conflict between parents and teachers regarding student abilities.

Research Sample

Sampling Strategies and Techniques.

Purposeful sampling was employed in the study. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of “information-rich cases with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). More specifically, participants were selected using two sampling techniques: snowball sampling and criterion sampling. These sampling techniques allowed for the selection of participants who had experienced divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities and provided information that could be used to describe the overall essence of this phenomenon.

Criterion sampling is recommended for phenomenological studies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007) as it ensures that all studied participants have experienced the phenomenon of interest. This allows the researcher to develop a common understanding of the phenomenon. Criterion sampling refers to the sampling technique that selects participants based on their experiences with the identified criterion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the participant level, the criterion used for selection was direct involvement with discrepant teacher and parent perceptions of student abilities.

Snowball sampling was also used to select participants. Snowball sampling refers to the sampling technique that uses the knowledge and experience of others to identify potentially “information-rich” participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, speaking with local educators served as a starting point for sampling. In addition, participants were asked to refer other teachers, parents, and students who had experienced discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Selected participants included three parents, four teachers, and three students who were directly involved in a conflict related to discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. Including parents, teachers, and students as participants ensured that variations of the phenomenon were represented. Further, “exploring various perspectives...enriches the data collected and enhances understanding of influences that can boost student success and achievement” (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010, p. 50).

College students served as student participants in the study. They were interviewed regarding their experiences as elementary or secondary students related to the phenomenon of interest. Two student participants were identified by speaking to college classes in the Department of Psychology and Counseling at a Midwestern university. The third student participant was obtained through snowball sampling. College students were selected because of their ability to process their experiences and to communicate insights related to the phenomenon that could inform the development of effective family-school partnerships. Though college students served as the sole informants for student data, they were asked to describe their experiences with the phenomenon that occurred during elementary or secondary school.

The sample consisted largely of female participants. This was anticipated, as the percentage of female teachers is much larger than that of males (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Additionally, it was presumed that mothers were more likely than fathers to be involved in their children’s education. This is supported by the various studies related to parental involvement that rely solely or primarily on mothers’ reports (Englund et al., 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005). The age of the college students participating in the study ranged between 21 and 24 years. The age of teacher and parent participants ranged between 26 and 57 years. Nine participants were White and one participant was Eurasian American, which was also

anticipated as the vast majority of the Midwest population is White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Table 3.2 below provides demographic data of all participants.

Table 3.2

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Annual Family Income	Yrs. in School of Interest	Interview Type	School
Martin	54	F	White	15 years	\$150,000	11	Parent	Rural
Smith	35	F	White	Bachelor's Degree	Unknown	5	Parent	Rural
Clark	31	F	White	Master's Degree	\$65,000	6	Parent	Rural
Abel	21	F	Eurasian Amer.	16 years	"Middle Class"	3	Student	Unknown
Wade	24	F	White	15 years	\$120,000	13	Student	Urban
Oliver	22	M	White	14 years	Unknown	12	Student	Rural
Kindle	26	F	White	Bachelor's Degree	\$30,000	1	Teacher	Rural
Sherwood	45	F	White	Master's Degree	\$85,000	16	Teacher	Rural
Best	28	F	White	Master's Degree	\$95,000	4	Teacher	Urban
Odem	57	F	White	Education Specialist Degree	> \$100,000	4	Teacher	Rural

Overview of Information Needed

Demographic, perceptual, and theoretical information was needed to answer the research questions of the study. To gather demographic data, each participant was asked to complete a personal data sheet. This personal data sheet obtained information related to participants' age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, and longevity within the school system of interest.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) recommend obtaining this type of demographic information on each participant to "help explain what may be underlying an individual's perceptions, as well as

the similarities and differences in perceptions among participants” (p. 70). The personal data sheet was completed prior to the collection of perceptual information.

In the present study, perceptual information refers to participants’ perceptions related to their experiences with divergent teacher and parent perceptions of student abilities. Divergent perceptions were defined as any perceived variation between teachers and parents regarding a student’s abilities. These abilities included but were not limited to academic, athletic, and behavioral abilities. For example, a parent may believe that his or her child has strong writing skills; whereas the teacher may perceive the student’s writing skills as weak, or vice versa. To obtain perceptual information from participants, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants (four teachers, three parents, and three students). Collecting data from this small sample allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is not possible to obtain when collecting data from larger samples (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Theoretical information was obtained through an ongoing review of relevant literature. Key terms used to conduct this search included parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities, discrepant parent and teacher perceptions, parent and teacher expectations of students, parental school involvement, accuracy of parent and teacher reports, conflict between parents and teachers, and family-school partnerships.

Research Design

Data was obtained through interviews and field notes. These data collection methods provided detailed information regarding the experiences of students, teachers, and parents when teacher and parent perceptions of a student’s abilities diverge. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants completed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) and a personal data

sheet (Appendix B). They were then asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. Field notes were also collected by the researcher throughout the interview.

Interviews were transcribed upon completion, and both interview and field note data were analyzed. To begin analysis, the researcher provided a description of personal experiences related to the phenomenon. Data was then coded using First and Second Cycle coding methods. Finally, textural and structural descriptions were provided. Figure 3.2 below provides an overview of the steps involved in the current study throughout the data collection and analysis processes. A more in-depth discussion of each step is presented in the subsequent sections.

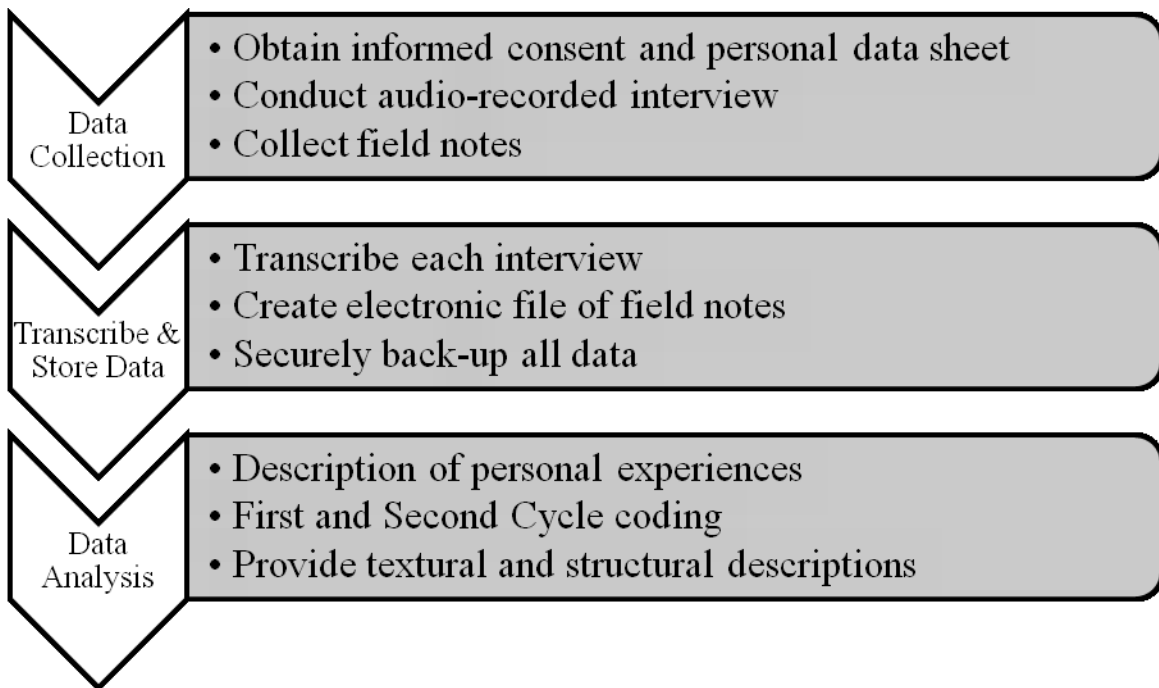


Figure 3.2. Overview of steps in research process

Data-Collection Methods

The primary data collection method utilized was in-depth interviews. Field notes were used to supplement this data. Combining these methods provided data that addressed the research questions of the study. It should be noted that all data collected throughout the research

process was stored on the researcher's private computer; thus, participant confidentiality was protected, as the researcher had sole access to data.

Interview.

To understand the perceived influence of parent and teacher discrepant beliefs regarding student abilities, interview data from parents, teachers, and students was collected. In-depth interviews are considered the most common data collection technique utilized in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Interview data is important in phenomenological studies as it allows each informant to depict their experiences with the phenomenon of interest, and using informants from multiple perspectives allows the researcher to capture the overall essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Consistent with phenomenological studies, this type of interview requires the participant to engage in personal reflection and retelling of these experiences, thus providing a means through which to gain an understanding of personal experiences and perceptions (Shank, 2006).

All selected participants were contacted to schedule a face-to-face interview. Participants were asked to participate in a maximum of three in-depth interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Student and parent data was obtained through one interview with each participant; however, teachers participated in one additional phone interview. The phone interview consisted of 11 questions and lasted approximately 10 minutes. In addition, each interview was audio-recorded using two audio-recording devices. The use of audio recording allowed for the transcription, coding, and analysis of data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. The researcher read the text while listening to the audio recording to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions and to promote initial reflection and analysis. This process occurred upon completion of all interviews.

Prior to the interview, the Informed Consent Form was discussed and reviewed with each participant, and each participant was provided the opportunity to ask questions or withdrawal from the study. Once consent was granted, participants were asked to complete a personal data sheet, which gathered demographic information related to age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level. The interview began after the participant completed the personal data sheet.

Three unique protocols were used when conducting interviews, though the same underlying themes were addressed in each protocol. Students answered questions from the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix C), teachers answered questions from the Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix D), and parents answered questions from the Parent Interview Protocol (Appendix E). Teacher participants also responded to questions from the Teacher Follow-Up Protocol (Appendix F) via phone. The selected interview questions for each protocol were based on Creswell's (2007) suggestion that interview questions reflect a more specific and narrow depiction of the primary research question and its subquestions. Thus, each interview question was designed to provide insight related to the research questions (see Appendix G).

The general interview guide approach was used to gather information regarding the experiences of teachers, parents, and students. This approach allowed flexibility when interviewing participants but ensured that identified content areas were addressed. The general interview guide approach allowed the participant to openly discuss potentially important topics and allowed for discussion of questions that did not appear on the interview protocol. Using an open-ended technique, such as the interview guide approach, is consistently seen in phenomenological studies and allows "important observation or interviewing categories to emerge as the project unfolds" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 176).

There are many benefits to using in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviewing allows the researcher to probe past surface level meanings to gain a deeper understanding of described experiences, generate impromptu exploration of statements, topics, and participant feelings, and simultaneously collect observational data. In-depth interviewing is of further benefit to participants because it provides an opportunity for them to voice their stories, to exert control over the telling of their stories, to share experiences that can lead to deeper understanding, and to obtain understanding (Charmaz, 2006). An additional benefit of using the interview approach to collect data is that new insights and awareness produced during the interview process can be noted and implemented into the remainder of the research process (Shank, 2006).

Relying on interview data as the primary data collection method presented some challenges. Interviews require the cooperation of participants to obtain needed information, are likely to present the researcher with ethical dilemmas, require participants to be open and honest to gather quality information, and require the researcher to exhibit strong interpersonal skills (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is possible that participants could have served as “gatekeepers” in the study by limiting the amount of information they were willing to share. To address these challenges, the researcher conducted all interviews based on the following interviewing principles:

- participants’ comfort takes precedence over obtaining colorful data;
- particular attention is paid to participants’ emotional wellbeing and probing questions reflect this consideration;
- the researcher listens with empathic understanding and provides validation to participants; and,
- interviews conclude in a positive manner (Charmaz, 2006).

Field notes.

The collection of field notes was utilized to further inform the study. Face-to-face interviews allowed for the collection of field notes; these notes were used to provide additional data, strengthen interpretations, and ultimately, to provide further understanding of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences (Shank, 2006). Field notes are the researcher's written account of the research experience within the field. Field notes in the study consisted of the running record and observer comments. The running record refers to the researcher's written description of all observations occurring during the research process; whereas, observer comments refer to the researcher's written account of all inferences, interpretations, emotional reactions, curiosities, perceptions, and insights generated during the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A template based on an example provided by Marshall & Rossman (2011, p. 141) was used to collect both the running record and observer's comments (Appendix H).

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis was based on Creswell's (2007) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analyzing qualitative data obtained through phenomenological studies. The first step in data analysis involved an in-depth description of personal experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. These experiences revealed the researcher's experiences that contributed to the identification and analysis of findings and strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

The next step in data analysis was to identify significant statements presented through the interviews and field notes. These significant statements were considered the units of meaning. Data that did not represent the units of meaning were removed from analysis. The significant statements were then used to identify themes and codes. To identify these codes, both First and

Second Cycle coding methods were utilized. First Cycle coding refers to the initial strategies employed to help organize and analyze data, and Second Cycle coding refers to more in-depth and analytic methods to help further understand, classify, and conceptualize the data (Saldaña, 2009).

Initial Coding served as the primary First Cycle coding technique utilized. This strategy allowed for a preliminary analysis of data that remained open to analytic possibilities and exploration (Saldaña, 2009). As is part of Initial Coding, other coding strategies were employed. These strategies included: Simultaneous, Descriptive, and Emotion Coding. Simultaneous Coding was used when selected data required the use of more than one code. Descriptive Coding was used to identify important topic areas discussed throughout the interviews, and Emotion Coding was utilized to explore participant emotions with regard to the phenomenon.

Focused Coding served as the primary Second Cycle method utilized. This type of coding “requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). By employing Focused Coding, initial codes were reduced to fewer categories that allowed for a deeper and more complete understanding of the experienced phenomenon. These codes were then categorized into broader themes for further analysis. Identified themes represent the essence of participant experiences and are further used to answer the research questions of the study. Appendix I contains a list of final codes and themes utilized in the study and their definitions.

The computer software ATLAS.ti® was used to store and organize data in a manageable format. The organization provided by this software provided the researcher with additional time and cognitive resources for further analytic reflection. Units of meaning were uploaded into ATLAS.ti® and coded accordingly. Analytic memos were also written in ATLAS.ti® and

attached to corresponding text. Coded interview data and analytic memos were then sorted into the thematic units that were used for further analysis.

In the final data analysis step, textural and structural descriptions were provided. Textural descriptions explained “what” the participants experienced in relation to the phenomenon, and structural descriptions explained “how” the experience occurred. Textural descriptions are provided in the “Participant Profile” section of Chapter IV. Structural descriptions are provided in all remaining sections of Chapter IV. The textural and structural descriptions were used to depict the essence of the study. The essence explained the heart of what is experienced when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge.

Ethical Considerations

Parent and school relationships and divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities could be considered difficult topic areas for parents, teachers, and students to discuss. Though the opportunity to discuss these issues can be viewed as a benefit for participants in many ways, the sensitive nature of the topic cannot be ignored. For many individuals, there may be strong emotions tied to these experiences and discussing them could be emotionally straining for participants. Thus, all interviews were conducted with an understanding of the deep emotions that may be connected with the processing and retelling of these experiences. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and participants were free to withdrawal from the study at any time. Participants were also free to refrain from answering any questions. Additionally, interviews were conducted in an understanding and sensitive manner with consideration of the unique experiences that were presented.

Consistent with phenomenological studies, the overall essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities is reported.

It is important to consider that participants may have difficulty accepting the overall essence of the issue, as it may not directly reflect their individual experience. Though the findings may be difficult for participants to process, providing this overall essence is imperative to understanding the phenomenon and must be done to maximize the success of every student.

It is believed that the benefits of participating in this study outweighed any potential risks. However, as human subjects, each participant had the right to individually weigh the associated risks and benefits and to use that information to make participation decisions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In addition, a number of safeguards were utilized to further protect participants from potential risks.

One safeguard involved the completion of the Informed Consent Form. Informed consent was reviewed and discussed with each participant. During this discussion, the researcher explained to participants the purpose of the research and their rights as participants. These rights include confidentiality, anonymity in the reporting of data, and the ability to withdrawal from the study at any time without penalty. All information obtained from participants was kept confidential; further, participants' names and any other identifying information was changed to protect participant anonymity. Commitment of participants in terms of time and resources was discussed. After discussing informed consent, each participant was provided the opportunity to ask questions or withdrawal from the study.

The study was submitted to the University of Arkansas's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved on December 2, 2011. The IRB number is 11-11-231 and will expire November 22, 2013 (Appendix J). IRB approval served as another safeguard in the current study. Additionally, all data was stored in a secure, locked location, further safeguarding participants.

When discussing ethical considerations of the study, it is also important to discuss the power dynamics that were involved with each group of participants. Teachers, parents, and students may have felt vulnerable when discussing their experiences with discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. Teachers may have had professional concerns associated with these experiences and may have felt pressure to disclose information in a professional and politically correct manner. Their experiences may have involved negative feelings toward parents, administrators, or the teaching profession, and they may have had concerns about discussing these experiences in a candid manner.

Parents may also have felt subject to unique power dynamics. They may have felt that their perspectives carried less weight than those of teachers because they did not possess teaching credentials. Further, they may have believed that the researcher was more likely to align with teachers, as the researcher is also professionally involved with education. Finally, students may have felt especially vulnerable when discussing their experiences. They may have felt caught between the discrepant views of teachers and parents and may have had concerns about discussing feelings or beliefs that did not align with those of their parents or teachers. They may also have felt self-doubt related to the discrepant beliefs of their parents and teachers and may have questioned their individual capabilities to accurately assess their abilities.

These dynamics were considered when conducting all interviews, and extra care and consideration were taken to build rapport with participants, to validate each participant's story, and to report findings in a manner that respected the stories of all participants. Additionally, member checks were conducted to ensure that the researcher's findings accurately reflected the messages of participants. It is acknowledged that the nature of the study is complex and sensitive, and this was considered throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The value of qualitative research is dependent on its trustworthiness. Several validation strategies were employed in the study to strengthen its trustworthiness. Validation techniques included thick description, member checks, clarifying bias, and peer debriefing. Thick description involved providing detailed information about the participants and the context of the study to determine the transferability of findings to additional participants and settings. Member checks were obtained by sending participants copies of the written transcript and allowing them to provide further clarification or input. Clarifying bias involved the description of the researcher's past experiences, perceptions, and biases related to the phenomenon under study. This provided a framework for understanding the researcher's stance when collecting and analyzing data. Finally, peer debriefing involved the critical evaluation of data analysis and interpretation by a knowledgeable peer. The peer debriefing process provided the researcher the opportunity to respond to difficult questions related to data collection and analysis methods, as well as reported findings. Incorporating multiple perspectives also strengthened the validity of the study. Each validation strategy served as a credibility safeguard and strengthened the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study.

Limitations of the Study

It is likely that many parents and teachers have experienced the phenomenon of interest; however, parent and school relationships and divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities may be difficult topic areas for parents, teachers, and students to discuss. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, it was acknowledged that many teachers and parents would be reluctant to share their experiences. Obtaining participants who were willing to share these experiences was identified as a potential difficulty. To overcome this potential difficulty, the

researcher informed participants that all interviews would be conducted with an understanding of the deep emotions that may be connected with the processing and retelling of these experiences. Further, participants were informed that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and they were free to withdrawal from the study at any time. They were also free to refrain from answering any questions.

It is acknowledged that the use of college students may have impacted the results of this study. The use of college students limited the sample to students and families who likely value education and have educational and career aspirations beyond secondary school. It is possible that many conflicts between parents and teachers involve students without college aspirations. It is also possible that these conflicts vary significantly in their presentation from students and families with college aspirations. The experiences of students who do not attend post-secondary school may vary dramatically in relation to the phenomenon. Limiting the sample to college students prevented these voices from emerging, and results of the study were interpreted with this limitation in mind. Nonetheless, it is believed that college students possessed the maturity and reflective abilities to understand the phenomenon and to clearly articulate their experiences with the phenomenon.

Similarly, parent participants in this study represented an additional limitation. Each of the three parent participants had earned a high school diploma and had completed three or more years of post-secondary education. The frequency of parent and teacher conflicts, as well as the parent characteristics most frequently associated with these conflicts, is currently unknown. However, it is possible that parents with limited educational backgrounds could provide insights and perspectives that vary dramatically from those perspectives portrayed in this study. Failure to capture and understand these perspectives is a limitation of the study.

Females served as the primary participants in the study. However, Shin et al. (2008) found greater disagreement between fathers and teachers with regard to student abilities than between mothers and teachers. Based on the findings of Shin et al., it is plausible to assume that fathers may experience discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities differently than mothers. They may differ from mothers in terms of how they view the conflict, react to the conflict, and ultimately resolve the conflict. Understanding the potentially unique experiences of fathers in relation to discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities was not achieved in this study. This serves as an additional limitation.

It could also be argued that a limitation of the study is its lack of generalizability. This is a frequent criticism of qualitative work. However, the purpose of qualitative work is not to yield generalizable findings; rather, the purpose of qualitative work is to produce meaningful and useful results (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Thus, of greater concern than generalizability is the utility and transferability of findings. As suggested by Creswell (2007) and Rossman and Rallis (2003), the usefulness and transferability of this study were established by providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon, the context in which the phenomenon occurred, and the overall research process. This thick description provides readers with the information necessary to determine if the findings are transferable and useful in other settings of interest.

Summary

Existing literature currently demonstrates the individual influence of parent and teacher perceptions on students. However, little research exists that collectively examines these perceptions. Specifically lacking is qualitative research investigating this phenomenon. Thus, this phenomenological study provided information detailing the experiences of parents, teachers, and students when parent and teacher perceptions of a student's abilities diverge. Special

attention was paid to the relationship between this discrepancy and the quality of family-school partnerships established.

In-depth interviews with 10 participants (three parents, three students, and four teachers) were collected to provide this data. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. The specific sampling techniques employed included criterion and snowball sampling. Using these techniques ensured that all participants had experienced the phenomenon of interest.

To answer the identified research questions, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical information was collected. Personal data sheets, in-depth interviews, and an ongoing literature review were used to obtain this information. Each participant was asked to complete a personal data sheet and to participate in up to three in-depth interviews. One face-to-face interview was conducted with each parent, student, and teacher participant. Teacher participants also responded to follow-up questions in a phone interview. During the interview process, the researcher collected field notes. These field notes included researcher observations and personal reflections.

All interviews were transcribed and uploaded into the computer software ATLAS.ti®, and field notes were converted and saved electronically. All data was stored safely and confidentially on the researcher's personal computer. Interview and field note data were then analyzed. The first step in the analysis process involved a description of the researcher's personal experience related to the phenomenon of interest. Next, data was coded using First and Second Cycle coding methods. The selected methods utilized included Initial, Simultaneous, Descriptive, Emotion, and Focused Coding. Finally, textural and structural descriptions were provided.

The data collection and analysis methods outlined above provided the information necessary to answer the identified research questions. Answering these questions provided insights into the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when discrepancies related to student abilities occurred and was used to provide recommendations that could help families and schools develop effective family-school partnerships.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. The first section of this chapter provides a description of the researcher's personal experiences. This section is included to disclose experiences that contributed to the identification and interpretation of findings. Providing a description of personal experiences is recommended in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The second section of the chapter contains participant profiles. These profiles provide a description of the participant, as well as a description of their experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. The profiles provide the context from which to understand and interpret the findings of the study. They also help describe the overall essence of participant experiences.

The final section of Chapter IV presents the findings of the study identified by the researcher. The computer software ATLAS.ti® was used to aid in the identification of findings. Interview transcripts were uploaded into ATLAS.ti® and coded using the First and Second Cycle coding methods described in Chapter III. Codes were then organized into broader themes. These themes were used to describe the overall essence of participant experiences and to answer the remaining research questions.

Description of Personal Experiences

Understanding how to effectively resolve conflicts and to form effective family-school partnerships has both professional and personal meaning to me. My first realization of the complexities of teacher-parent relationships came as a result of my personal relationship with an educator. This educator spoke with me often about the conflict he was experiencing with a student and his parents. Through these conversations, the educator's frustration, confusion, and overall disheartenment related to the conflict were apparent. He often expressed frustration and resentment of the student and parents' behavior, yet he also questioned his own actions and the role they may have played in the conflict. Ultimately, he spent many hours wondering what he could have done differently and how he could move the relationship forward once the conflict had occurred.

As my professional experience developed and my exposure to educational settings increased, it became clear to me that this was not an isolated experience and that conflicts between parents and teachers occur often in education. My professional counseling experiences provided me the opportunity to understand parent-teacher conflicts from the perspective of parents. For over four years, I worked with the Truancy Diversion Counseling Program (TDP). In this program, I counseled and supervised counseling sessions with parents and students who were court-ordered to attend family counseling as a result of truancy. Reoccurring themes often discussed by parents were their frustration with teachers, the lack of communication provided by the school, and the disrespectful manner in which they believed they were treated by teachers and the school. When these situations and feelings were further examined, parents often disclosed their attempts to interact with teachers and the school. It seemed that in their interactions with educators, parents were often confrontational, demanding, and lacking tact.

Though the parents were trying to advocate on behalf of their children, it appeared that they were frequently doing so in a manner that further alienated them.

My experience as a professional school counselor provided me the opportunity to simultaneously view conflicts from both the parent and teacher perspectives. Parents have presented concerns to me about how a teacher treated their child or handled a particular situation. Conversely, teachers have communicated with me their frustrating attempts to work with parents and students. At times, it seemed that the parents did not fully understand the situation, the demands and responsibilities of teachers, or the policies within which teachers must operate. Other times, it seemed that the teachers failed to communicate positively with parents and failed to respectfully respond to their concerns. Often times, it was a combination of these issues. It was my responsibility, along with the administrator, to help the teachers and parents come to a mutual understanding. This was often challenging, particularly when both the parents and teachers lacked the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively partner.

Ultimately, these experiences raised my awareness of the challenges associated with family-school partnerships. They also strengthened my belief in their importance. I have observed teachers, parents, and students that experienced stress, frustration, and turmoil as a result of parent-teacher conflicts. Without the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively partner, these conflicts did not disappear. My experiences have also shown me that neither parents nor educators are alone in their need for improved partnership efforts. Both teachers and parents demonstrate behaviors that negatively impact family-school partnerships. This study was conducted to communicate the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students when parent-teacher conflict exists in hopes that understanding these perspectives might provide the insights necessary to resolve conflicts and establish successful partnerships.

Participant and Conflict Descriptions

Three parents, three students, and four teachers participated in this study. Participants were selected through criterion and snowball sampling. Experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities was the identified criterion. All student participants were attending a Midwestern university at the time of participation but were interviewed regarding their experiences in elementary and secondary school. It was originally intended to interview three participants from each subgroup. Upon completion of the originally intended nine interviews, it was recognized that the gifted education perspective was not included from the teacher perspective. This was considered a potentially important perspective, as it was thought that parents and teachers may often disagree on the results of intelligence testing and placement in gifted education. Thus, a fourth teacher participant was added to provide this perspective. The selected participant had experience working with both gifted and special education departments. During the interview, the participant reported that she had experienced multiple situations in which she disagreed with a parent regarding a student's abilities; however, they had all occurred in her experiences with special education. In her experience with gifted education, she found parents largely supportive of school testing and placement decisions.

The participant profiles below provide an in-depth description of participants. All descriptions represent the participants at the time of interview. Pseudonyms were used for all school, city, and individual names. The school system in which the disagreements occurred is often referred to as the "school of interest."

Each profile also contains a description of the conflict experienced by the participant. Findings related to the essence of these experiences, the perceived outcomes of these discrepant

perceptions on students and the family school partnership, and insights gained from these experiences that can inform policy or practice changes are discussed in the following sections.

Ms. Annie Wade.

Annie Wade was raised by both her mother and father in an urban, Midwestern city. Wade reported that she was raised in a family that valued education. At the time of this study, her mother was employed as a principal, her father was employed as the president of a state teachers' union, and her grandfather was employed as the dean of Arts and Sciences at a local university. Wade described her family as "very nuclear." She reported having close adult relationships with both her mother and father. However, she acknowledged that she frequently "butted-heads" with her mother as a child and teenager. Wade reported that her parents divorced her freshman year of college.

When describing her elementary and secondary school experiences, Wade stated that her "learning style was completely different from other kids." She was simultaneously placed in gifted education and special education based on a diagnosis of ADHD. She stated that she preferred learning activities in any subject that were "hands-on." Wade was involved in orchestra throughout elementary and secondary school. She described her overall school experiences as positive but now believed that she may have benefited more from a smaller school. Wade was enrolled in her junior year of college at the time of this study. She was majoring in elementary education. Wade accredited her decision to pursue a teaching career in part to her experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.

The conflict between Wade's parents and teachers began in the third grade when she began experiencing difficulties with inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Though the symptoms were present throughout her kindergarten through second grade school years, they

were considered age-appropriate and were managed by her classroom teachers. In the third grade, Wade changed schools, and her behaviors began to negatively impact her academic performance.

Wade's teachers were confused by her poor academic performance. She performed well on tests but routinely performed poorly on daily assignments. Wade's careless mistakes on assignments and failure to turn in assignments led her teachers to believe that she was lazy and failing to attend to her work. Wade's parents had her tested by a psychologist, and she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When the teachers were presented with Wade's diagnosis, they labeled her as "learning disabled" and treated her differently based on this label. It was at this point that the conflict between Wade's parents and teachers began, and it continued through her elementary, middle, and high school years.

The source of conflict between Wade's parents and teachers was primarily related to her cognitive abilities and the need for modified instruction. Wade's parents believed that her intellectual capabilities warranted more advanced instruction, and they further believed that providing her instruction at a higher level would help her maintain focus and attention. Wade's teachers believed that she needed to learn to "conform" to the rules of the school and thus were unwilling to modify their instruction or practices. Wade's parents requested homework at a more advanced level. Instead, Wade's teachers provided her additional homework at a lower level. Wade believed that her parents were concerned with the quality of her work; whereas, teachers were concerned with the quantity of work she completed. Difficulties surrounding Wade's abilities and the need for modified instruction consistent with these abilities were ongoing. In the eighth grade, "after six years of nobody listening to them," Wade's parents "finally gave up."

Ms. Emily Abel.

Emily Abel was raised by her father in various cities across the United States and South Korea. Her parents divorced when she was a young child, and her father maintained primary custody of both she and her younger brother. According to Abel, her father was supportive of her educational endeavors, and as an English professor, his interest in education cultivated her own interest in education. Abel lived away from her mother for most of her childhood. Thus, her mother was not as involved in educational processes and decisions as her father; however, Abel stated that her mother's high expectations for academic achievement were understood.

Abel's elementary and secondary school experiences were diverse. She received private, charter, public, and home schooling in various locations in the United States and South Korea. She was home-schooled by her father from kindergarten through second grade while living in Georgia and South Korea. She attended third grade in a Northwestern charter school, and fourth grade in a private school in the Northwest. She returned to the charter school for her fifth and sixth grade years. Abel returned to South Korea and was home-schooled during the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. She moved back to the United States her sophomore year of high school and finished her secondary career in the rural Midwest. Abel participated in several extracurricular activities while attending school. These activities included music, art, and sports, and she was also involved in several school clubs. The conflicts discussed by Abel in this study occurred while she attended the charter and public schools.

After graduating from high school, Abel attended a community college where she earned her associate's degree. She then transferred to a four-year university where she was completing her final semester of courses toward her bachelor's degree in elementary education. Abel described her overall educational experiences as positive; however, she reported having a few

negative experiences which stood-out due to their infrequency. She further acknowledged that both these positive and negative school experiences influenced her decision to pursue a teaching career.

I think the positive affected me in a way that I would want to be like the role models that I look up to. I'd want to be like that as a teacher, and I find that very satisfying to be able to do that. Then the negative is something that I would want to learn from and to try not to do – as an example of what not to do, I guess. (Abel).

Abel discussed three separate experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. Though Abel reported three distinct experiences, she stated that “in all three of my cases, it was a matter of showing ability.” In all three cases, Abel believed that educators were questioning her abilities. She felt that they were unnecessarily asking her to prove her abilities. By doing so, she further felt like they perceived her as “dumb” and “a cheater.” Each of these experiences is described below.

The first experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities experienced by Abel occurred while she was attending the fifth grade in a Northwestern charter school. Abel was asked to complete a budgeting assignment. On the assignment, Abel stated that she would place her money in a child's saving account and allow the money to collect interest. Abel received an “F” on the assignment because her teacher did not believe she was capable of understanding the concepts included in her report. Abel and her father discussed the assignment with the teacher, and they both explained that Abel was knowledgeable about the content of her project. The teacher discussed the project privately with Abel and asked her to further explain the project and to provide definitions of terms used in the project. Though Abel felt that she adequately explained the project, the teacher did not change her grade.

The second experience described by Abel was also related to a grade she received on an assignment. This experience occurred while Abel was attending high school. Abel submitted an

English paper that she reported working on extensively. She looked up new words and used a “broader vocabulary” in an effort to improve her paper. When the teacher returned the other students’ graded papers, Abel did not receive hers. The teacher eventually returned her paper. She received a “C” on the paper, and when it was returned, the teacher included a note stating that he did not believe she wrote it. She later received a phone call from the teacher. The teacher asked to speak with both she and her father. When speaking with Abel, the teacher quizzed her on the definitions of the words used in her paper. Again, Abel believed she adequately responded to the teacher’s questions, but he remained uncertain that she wrote the paper.

The final experience discussed by Abel also occurred while she was in high school. This experience was related to participation on her school tennis team. On the first day of tennis practice, Abel’s tennis coach divided the players into varsity and junior varsity squads. According to Abel, this occurred prior to playing any tennis. Because she was not first provided the opportunity to play, she believed the coach based his decision on a “popularity contest” rather than players’ abilities. Abel reported that many of the junior varsity parents “complained” to the coach about the manner in which teams were divided. After speaking to her father, the coach evaluated the players’ skills and divided teams based on “skill and ability and not on their social status.” Abel reported that, in this situation, her father’s relationship with the coach was not affected by the conflict. She stated that her father’s primary issue was the manner in which the coach divided teams, so he did not have any negative feelings toward the coach once the teams were re-divided.

Mr. Sam Oliver.

Sam Oliver was raised in a rural, Midwestern community by both his mother and father along with one younger sister. His parents divorced his senior year of high school, and his father moved to the Northeast. At the time of the interview, Oliver was living with both his mother and sister. He reported having close relationships with all of his immediate family members, particularly his mother and sister.

Oliver attended the same Midwestern school district throughout his elementary and secondary careers. In the first grade, Oliver's teachers began to notice learning differences. He was referred to special education for testing and eventually was diagnosed with dyslexia. Oliver was placed on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). His IEP provided him a paraprofessional in every class and additional study time in the school's resource room. Oliver described his overall educational experiences as "tough."

Oliver was enrolled in his sophomore year of college at the time of the interview. He was pursuing a physical education degree with a minor in coaching. He continued to receive additional academic supports in college. He received accommodations such as additional testing time, an individual testing environment, and a scribe.

Oliver's experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities was related to his learning disability. During an IEP meeting in the seventh grade, Oliver's science teacher told his mother, Ms. Oliver, that he was "lazy and didn't ever want to do any of the work." Ms. Oliver tried to explain his learning disability to the teacher. The teacher expressed his opinion that dyslexia should not influence Oliver's ability to do the work. Ms. Oliver reacted by standing up and yelling at the teacher.

Oliver was not present during the meeting. He reported never attending IEP meetings because of the stress and anxiety they caused. Oliver was initially unaware of the conflict and did not learn of the conflict until approximately six months later, when he was already out of the teacher's class. Thus, his knowledge of the specific events surrounding the conflict was limited, though he knew that the teacher later apologized to his mother for statements made during the meeting. Oliver reported that he was initially angry to learn about his teacher's perceptions of him; however, he now believed the situation served as motivation for him to succeed.

Mrs. Cindy Clark.

Cindy Clark was the mother of four children, three boys and one girl. She had been married for seven years. Her two oldest children were from her husband's previous marriage. She officially adopted the children one year prior to the interview; however, she had assumed primary parenting responsibilities of the children since her marriage. Her children ranged in age from 4 to 12 years.

Clark was employed as an educator in a rural, Midwestern school district for 10 years. She served as a middle school and high school science teacher for eight years. She had completed her second year as a high school counselor at the time of the interview. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in science and her master's degree in education. She was working toward her certification in school counseling. She described her personal experiences with education as "very positive."

Clark's children attended the same school district in which she was employed. She described the system as "typical" of rural communities. Teachers were predominately white women, and there was limited diversity amongst students as well. She reported that the quality of teachers within the district varied dramatically, which was a concern for her since there was

only one teacher per grade level. She believed some teachers were inadequate, but she also knew that her children would be in their classes.

Clark's experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities occurred when her oldest son was in kindergarten. At the end of the year, the school sent a letter home stating that they recommended retention of her son. The letter requested a parent's signature agreeing to retention. Clark did not sign the letter but requested a meeting with the school to further discuss concerns. During the meeting, the teacher expressed her desire to retain Clark's son based on his lack of maturity. Clark believed that the teacher was equating maturity with academic ability, and she did not believe this was appropriate. Clark agreed that her son was immature; however, she believed that he possessed the academic skills necessary to progress to the first grade. She asked the teacher for evidence that his academic skills were lacking, and the teacher told her that "he can't tie his shoes." Clark told the teacher that he could tie his shoes but did not at school because the teachers would do it for him. She also expressed her opinion that maturity was not directly related to academic abilities. Ultimately, Clark and her husband decided to promote their son to the first grade, despite the teacher's recommendation that he be retained.

Mrs. Holly Martin.

When Holly Martin graduated from high school, she immediately entered the workforce and started taking night classes toward a degree in special education. She worked for over four years with intellectually disabled and handicapped individuals. She then took a position as an intake counselor at a drug and alcohol treatment center. She worked in this capacity for several years. She did not complete her degree in special education, but she became certified to work in alcohol and addiction counseling.

Martin and her husband had been married for 26 years at the time of the interview. When they married, her husband had 4-year-old twin boys, and they later had two more children. Martin's daughter, Molly, was born with severe developmental disabilities. She finished high school at the age of 21 and continued to live with Martin and her husband. During school, Molly needed assistance with all activities of daily living. She was wheelchair-bound throughout much of her schooling, and her communication skills were limited. She was also visually impaired.

Martin's experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities was related to the educational experiences of her daughter. Her daughter attended a rural, Midwestern high school at the time of the disagreement. Martin expressed that she had disagreements every year with the school related to Molly's IEP goals. Martin continually communicated to the special education teacher that the goals of the IEP were inconsistent with her abilities. For example, one of Molly's IEP goals stated that "when you say Molly's name, she will turn and look at you." Martin explained that individuals with visual impairments do not stop and look someone in the face; rather, they freeze and listen. This was one example of a goal Martin believed did not take into account Molly's abilities. Some of the goals were changed, but others were not. According to Martin, the school positively received her feedback; yet year after year, she was faced with IEP goals that were inconsistent with Molly's abilities. Martin believed that the school failed to incorporate her feedback because they lacked the training, expertise, and resources necessary to work with visually impaired individuals.

Martin also disagreed with the school related to the speech services received by Molly. Molly was cut from speech services because she was not making adequate progress. At her IEP meeting, Martin expressed concern that Molly could not speak or use sign language to communicate with others. She encouraged the school to continue trying alternative strategies to

help Molly learn communication skills. Some of these strategies were implemented, and others were not. Ultimately, Molly was discontinued from speech services despite Martin's desire that she continue receiving assistance in this area. According to Martin, "rather than saying the methods I'm using are not engaging this student," the school was saying "this student is not interested, she does not like speech."

Mrs. Dee Smith.

Dee Smith lived in a rural, Midwestern community with her husband of 13 years and her three sons, ages 10, 6, and 2. She graduated from a small college in the Midwest with a degree in business. She and her husband owned their own mini-storage business, and she was also employed as a part-time secretary. She described her personal educational experiences as positive and further stated that she would eventually like to obtain her master's degree.

When Smith's oldest son started kindergarten, she substitute taught at his school. This was also the school that Smith attended as an elementary student. She continued substituting for three years, and this provided her the opportunity to form relationships with teachers at the school. It also provided her insights into their classroom practices and helped her form decisions about which teachers she wanted for her son.

Smith's experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities spanned several years. It started when her oldest son, Henry, was in the second grade. At the end of the third quarter, Henry's teacher contacted Smith to address concerns she had about his reading ability. The teacher told Smith that Henry was behind in reading, despite the fact that he had been receiving Title I reading services since the first grade. Smith became upset upon hearing this and questioned why the teacher had not notified her sooner. After this initial meeting between the classroom teacher and Smith, another meeting was held that incorporated

the school's Title I reading teacher. At this meeting, Smith requested progress reports on her son, as well as tools and resources she could use at home. She also requested another meeting at the end of the year to discuss his progress over the quarter. None of these requests were fulfilled. The Title I reading teacher also failed to respond to Smith's phone calls.

Though he continued to struggle with reading, Henry was promoted to the third grade. When he entered third grade, Smith felt that Henry was not making necessary progress in reading, so she began to seek community services. She took Henry to a psychologist for a comprehensive assessment of his abilities. The psychologist diagnosed Henry with ADHD, and it was also determined that his intellectual ability was in the superior range. When Smith shared the results of the assessment with Henry's school counselor, she was met with resistance. Smith suggested moving Henry into a different environment for tests, moving Henry's seat to a corner of the room, or removing unnecessary distractions from the classroom. None of these suggestions were implemented, and Smith believed the school dismissed or minimized his attention difficulties. The psychologist also recommended that Smith speak with the school regarding possible placement in gifted education. When discussing Henry's superior IQ score, the school counselor told Smith "Oh, it's not that high."

When Henry was in the fifth grade, Smith was notified that his scores on the state assessment qualified him for possible placement in the gifted education program. She received a letter in the mail stating that an intelligence test would be required before admission into the gifted program. Smith shared the results from Henry's previous evaluation with the gifted education teacher, and he was admitted into the gifted program based on these scores. These were the same testing results that the school counselor dismissed two years earlier.

Mrs. Charity Sherwood.

Charity Sherwood received her bachelor's degree in elementary education with a minor in early childhood education from a private university in the rural Midwest. She received her master's in elementary education with an emphasis in reading from the same university. Sherwood worked as a primary teacher for 24 years, 17 of which were at the school where the conflict occurred.

Sherwood described the school and community in which she worked as supportive, and she felt that school-community partnerships were strong. Community organizations provided back-to-school meals for teachers, and they hosted a community-wide back-to-school event in which students received free school supplies and haircuts and participated in fun activities with their families. The local paper often published articles on school events, and local businesses frequently made monetary and product donations to support the school. One community group also provided adult volunteers to tutor elementary students.

When describing family-school partnerships at her school, Sherwood believed they varied amongst teachers. Many teachers had recently retired, and Sherwood believed the quality of family-school partnerships had diminished as a result. She stated that new teachers were less accessible to parents and did not yet understand the important role of parents in educational processes. Sherwood believed that she fostered family-school partnerships by hosting parent nights, developing a personal webpage with weekly lesson plans, and distributing newsletters.

Sherwood's experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities occurred while she was teaching second grade. Sherwood had concerns related to the maturity of one of her students. At the beginning of the year, she expressed her concerns to the parents. The parents acknowledged their son's immaturity and stated that they would continue working with

him. The student struggled academically; however, Sherwood attributed his academic difficulties to a lack of maturity. According to Sherwood, the reasons identified by the parents for the student's difficulties varied. Sherwood continued to express her concerns throughout the school year. She often recommended that the parents consider retention, and the parents became increasingly upset at this recommendation. The parents and teacher decided to wait until the end of summer school to make a decision about promoting or retaining the student.

At the end of summer school, Sherwood and the summer school teacher expressed their opinions that the student would benefit from retention. Sherwood believed the parents continued to struggle with the idea of retention, particularly because they were both successful educationally and professionally. The parents developed negative feelings toward Sherwood because of her persistence on the issue. Ultimately, the parents decided to promote the student. After the student entered the third grade, Sherwood became more frustrated with the situation. The student's mother accompanied him to school every morning during the first semester to help him get organized, which Sherwood stated is "unheard of in third grade." Sherwood reported that the student continued to be a "B," "C", or "D" student. However, she believed that had he been retained, he would likely be an "A" or "B" student.

For the next year, the mother continued to display hostility toward Sherwood. She would not look at her or speak to her. Sherwood continued to address the mother and would provide short, positive comments whenever possible. The mother responded to Sherwood's continued efforts to build a positive relationship. Sherwood also acknowledged that the mother may have made efforts to rebuild the relationship as well. Over time, the relationship was repaired, and they regained a positive working relationship.

Mrs. Christy Best.

Christy Best received her bachelor's degree in speech communication from a large, Southern university. After relocating to the Midwest, Best pursued a career in special education. She attended graduate school at a large, Midwestern university where she earned her master's degree in special education and completed state requirements for special education certification. Best had four total years of teaching experience, all of which were as a special education teacher at a Title I elementary school in an urban, Midwestern city. She taught a resource classroom that provided services to students with mild to moderate disabilities. She described the student population of her school as transient and low-income. Before obtaining a position as a full-time special educator, Best was employed as a special education paraprofessional for one semester.

Best's experience with discrepant teacher and parent perceptions of student abilities occurred at an annual IEP meeting. The parent asked Best when her child would no longer be affected by his disability. Best was shocked by this question, because it indicated to her that the parent did not truly understand her son's disability. She was forced to tell the parent that the neurological basis of her child's disability suggested that her son would always be affected by the disability. The student had been in special education for almost three years when the parent asked this question. This led Best to believe that the mother had never truly processed or understood what the disability meant for her child. Best believed that the mother better understood her child's disability after having this conversation, but they continued to have disagreements about the child's education.

Consistent with his disability, the student often had difficulty distinguishing reality from fiction. Best first noticed these difficulties in kindergarten. The student often "pretended" that he was a popular cartoon character and assumed the identity of that character. For example, he

believed that the relatives of the cartoon character were actually his relatives. Each year, Best worked with the student to understand that it was appropriate to be interested in the characters, but it was also important to understand that the characters were fictional. Yet each year, the student would assume the identity of a new character. When Best discussed her concern with the parent, the mother responded that she believed the behavior was “cute.” Best believed the student’s inability to distinguish reality from make-believe was becoming a more serious problem as the student aged. Other students often teased him, which upset the student and his mother. Best believed that the parent encouraged or accepted the behavior at home without understanding how the behavior negatively impacted her son at school. This pattern continued over the course of several years and continued to be a source of disagreement between Best and the parent.

Best also disagreed with this student’s parent and grandparents regarding his level of independence. The grandparents, who often assumed responsibility for the student, carried his backpack and belongings each day. Best felt that a student in second grade should have the skills necessary to independently carry his belongings, and she disagreed with the caregivers’ decision to daily assume this responsibility.

Ms. Katrina Kindle.

Katrina Kindle was a teacher and coach at a rural school district in the Midwest. This was her fourth year as a physical education teacher and her first year at the school of interest. At the school of interest, Kindle’s responsibilities included: K-8 physical education, middle school health, head girls basketball coach, and assistant volleyball coach. Kindle received her bachelor’s degree in physical education from a Midwestern university with a major in physical education and a minor in coaching.

Kindle described two experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of a student's abilities. Both experiences occurred within an athletic context. Kindle reported that she had never experienced a conflict with parents regarding a student's academic abilities. In the first situation, the parent believed that her daughter deserved a position on the varsity basketball team, and Kindle believed the student should be placed on the junior varsity team. According to Kindle, the student's athletic abilities warranted a varsity position but her attitude did not. This situation was further complicated because the parent with which Kindle disagreed was also her assistant basketball coach. Kindle stated that though the mother observed and acknowledged her daughter's poor attitude, she was still upset that her daughter did not receive varsity playing time.

Kindle learned of the parent's dissatisfaction when she approached the mother about concerns with her daughter. Kindle discussed her concerns related to the student's emotional and mental well-being, and the mother used the opportunity to express her frustration with Kindle. The mother told Kindle that she believed her daughter was being treated unfairly. Kindle explained to the mother that her daughter could earn varsity playing time by demonstrating a more positive attitude. At the time, Kindle believed the mother understood her position; however, she later learned that the mother frequently told other people in the community that Kindle was treating her daughter unfairly.

Kindle discussed another situation in which a parent disagreed with her daughter's playing time. In this situation, Kindle approached both the daughter and mother to discuss concerns. The daughter's behavior had changed throughout the course of the season, and Kindle wanted to address these changes. During the meeting, the mother and daughter told Kindle that they did not like her or the way that she was managing the basketball program. Kindle presented

her perspective that the daughter had stopped working hard and was becoming more isolated from the team. The parent and student seemed to understand Kindle's perspective. After that conversation, the student's demeanor changed and the disagreement was resolved. Kindle attributed the disagreement to a misunderstanding. She also believed her assistant coach was speaking negatively to other players about her. She believed the disagreement was successfully resolved because of speaking openly with the player and parent and because the assistant coach was dismissed from her position.

Ms. Ellie Odem.

Ellie Odem was the Director of Special Services at a rural, Midwestern school district. The student population of the district was both socioeconomically and racially diverse. This was Odem's fourth year in the district; however she had worked for over 30 years in various positions in education. As Director of Special Services, Odem served as the Compliance Coordinator for the district and oversaw issues related to students with disabilities, harassments, Title II, Title IX, and Section 504. She also oversaw the district's gifted education program, Parents as Teachers, and special education department. Prior to this experience, Odem served as a speech-language pathologist in California for several years. She also previously served as a diagnostic teacher, special education teacher, process coordinator, and special education administrator. Odem earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in communicative disorders and her education specialist degree in educational administration.

When interviewing Odem, she discussed her personal experiences as both an administrator and teacher. For the purposes of this study, only excerpts directly related to Odem's teaching experiences were included in analysis. Statements reflecting Odem's general approach or perspective on parent-teacher conflict and family-school partnerships were also

analyzed. Excerpts pertaining strictly to Odem's administrative experience were excluded from analysis, as the administrative perspective was outside the scope of the study. However, it is acknowledged that Odem's experiences, opinions, and insights related to parent-teacher conflict and family-school partnerships are informed by both her teaching and administrative experiences, and this should be considered when discussing Odem's perceptions.

Odem reported that she had experienced many disagreements with parents regarding students' abilities; however, she believed that the disagreements shared common themes. Rather than describing a specific situation, Odem discussed the themes of these experiences. She reported that the disagreements often occurred when students were referred for special education evaluation. Parents frequently believed that their students were performing poorly in school simply because they were bored. In Odem's experiences, these disagreements were typically easy to resolve. Odem explained to parents various reasons that students disengage from academic tasks. She explained to parents that boredom occurs when students could already perform the task but disengaged because the task was repetitive. She further explained that students also disengage because they are unable to attend to the material or are lacking the skills necessary to complete the task. After the evaluation, Odem presented existing data to the parents. She emphasized the strengths of the students in these meetings, and she believed this was an important component in the successful resolution of these disagreements.

Findings

The goals of this study were to understand the overall essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge, to understand the perceived impact of these divergent beliefs on students and the family-school partnership, and to gain insights from these experiences that will help build effective family-

school partnerships, even in the presence of conflict. These goals were accomplished by examining the personal experiences of students, teachers, and parents with divergent perceptions of student abilities. Data collected from in-depth interviews with students, parents, and teachers were analyzed and categorized into five thematic units. These thematic units provided organization to participant experiences and allowed for an exploration of the data that answered the identified research questions. These thematic units included: family-school partnership qualities, impressionability of student attitudes, failure to resolve conflicts, challenging parents, and lack of teacher training. Communication was also included as a subtheme of family-school partnership qualities. Themes were identified by using the First and Second Cycle coding methods outlined in Chapter III. Analysis of all findings occurred within the framework of these themes and codes. Table 4.1 below provides a list of all codes within their respective themes.

Table 4.1

Themes and Codes

<i>Theme: Family-School Partnership Qualities</i>			
Shared responsibility	Shared decision-making	Shared goals and values	Compromise and flexibility
Trust	Perspective-taking	Partnership attitude	Proactive relationships
Caring teachers	Respect	Administrative support	Communication
Proactive relationships			
<i>Subtheme: Communication</i>			
Open communication	Positive communication	Early communication	Frequent communication
Tools for parents	Listening		
<i>Theme: Impressionability of Student Attitudes</i>			
Anxiety and self-doubt	Negative perception of teachers	“Untouchable” attitude	Student perceives conflict
Students choose sides			
<i>Theme: Failure to Resolve Conflicts</i>			
Termination of relationship	Teacher fear of parents	Teachers treat students differently	Continued negative interactions
<i>Theme: Challenging Parents</i>			
Demanding parents	Disengaged parents		
<i>Theme: Lack of Teacher Training</i>			
Preparation programs	On-site professional development		

Analyzing the data from within the context of these thematic units described the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parents and teachers disagree about a student’s abilities (which answers research question one). All thematic units also provided insights to answer research question three: What changes can be made in practice and policy that will help parents and teachers overcome discrepant perceptions of student abilities to build effective family-school partnerships. The thematic units “impressionability of student attitudes” and

“failure to resolve conflicts” specifically provide insights related to research question two: what are the perceived outcomes for students and the family-school partnership when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge.

Thematic units are discussed in detail below. Between group comparisons of students, parents, and teachers were considered in the analysis of codes and themes. When group differences existed, it was because one group did not discuss a topic reported by other groups. For example, administrative support was discussed by both parents and teachers, yet none of the student participants discussed the need for administrative support in conflict-resolution and partnership development. Between-group differences, when they existed, are further discussed within each theme. Extensive participant quotes are used throughout the remainder of this chapter to provide evidence of the identified findings. Interpretations of each theme are provided in Chapter V.

Family-School Partnership Qualities

Participants identified 13 qualities they believed were necessary for family-school partnership development and effective conflict-resolution (see Table 4.2). On average, participants identified 49% of the partnership qualities. Students identified 44% of the qualities, teachers identified 52% of the qualities, and parents identified 51% of the qualities. Of the 13 qualities, only seven were identified by at least half of the participants. These findings suggest that participants understand many qualities of family-school partnership, but their perceptions of the most important qualities of family-school partnerships vary considerably.

Table 4.2

Partnership Qualities

	Students			Teachers				Parents		
	AW	EA	SO	KK	CB	CS	EO	CC	DS	HM
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Shared responsibility	X	X			X					
Shared decision-making	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Shared values and goals	X			X	X		X			
Compromise and flexibility	X				X	X			X	X
Trust		X	X	X	X					
Perspective-taking	X	X				X	X	X		X
Partnership attitude		X			X	X	X	X		X
Administrative support				X	X	X	X		X	X
Caring teachers	X		X						X	X
Follow-through	X					X		X	X	X
Proactive relationships						X		X		
Respect						X		X		

Communication was the quality of family-school partnerships most commonly identified by participants (90%). When asked what good family-school partnerships look like, Wade stated, “That’s the biggest thing for me, between teachers and parents, is all that communication between what is a student need and what’s going to help them succeed in their education.” Participants identified multiple aspects of communication that are needed for partnership development. Thus, communication is presented as a subtheme of family-school partnership qualities, and additional information related to communication is presented in the following section.

Shared-decision making was identified by 80% of participants as necessary in family-school partnerships. Shared decision-making referred to the willingness of parents and teachers to work with the other party and to incorporate their input in educational decisions.

According to Wade, “I think it’s really crucial that parents and teachers work together on what is best for the student.” When providing her advice on conflict-resolution between parents and teachers, Sherwood stated:

I’m kind of one of those “hit ‘em head on.” I mean take care of it right now. Take care of it and don’t let it build, fester. If you need to have a conference now, then let’s have it and get this out in the open. Let’s talk about what both sides know and what the issue is and then let’s brainstorm ways we can resolve it... I’ll tell parents, “I don’t know what else to do for Johnny. I’ve tried this and this and this. You tell me what you do at home that works.” Or they’ll say, “We’ll brainstorm some things we might try. Let’s try this for two weeks and touch back and see if that’s helped anything or let’s try this.”

The majority of participants (60%) discussed the role of perspective-taking in family-school partnerships and conflict-resolution. Perspective-taking was defined as the willingness and ability of parents and teachers to understand the position of the other party, including their wants, needs, concerns, and constraints. Some participants directly discussed the need for perspective-taking in successful conflict-resolution; whereas other participants described situations in which perspective-taking or a lack of perspective-taking was experienced.

According to Martin:

You can’t have a partnership unless you invest, and the investment has to be with time and with open mind and you know, that can create empathy for what the families are dealing with at home or what teachers are dealing with at school. I mean, you just have to be able to have that investment to take time to have a dialogue and to brainstorm and problem solve together.

Clark believed that parents and teachers often fail to effectively handle disagreements about a student’s abilities because of their varying perspectives.

From the parent perspective... I want what’s best for my child and I want to believe my child is honest and my child is good and can do whatever... From the teacher’s perspective, teachers don’t want to be undermined. You feel like what you do...was fair and it was just. And so when the parent comes in and tries to undermine then it’s like “wow, you really don’t respect my authority.” (Clark).

The code “partnership attitudes” was used to describe participants’ approach to and attitude toward family-school partnerships, as well as their willingness to engage in partnerships. Though participants were not directly asked about their attitude toward family-school partnerships, the partnership attitudes of the majority of participants were portrayed through the interview process. Some participants described attitudes and practices that promoted family-school partnerships; whereas, other participants seemed reluctant to create authentic partnerships. The contrasting attitudes of two teacher participants toward family-school partnerships are depicted below.

The parents are very, at least with the special education students that I work with, they’re not really involved – which is nice because I get to really decide and really put them on a track. But then I’d like the parents to be a lot more involved with the kids as well... It’s so hard to be like, well maybe if the parent was watching or seeing how significantly this is impacting their child then that could help, but it’s also nice not always having the parent in school. As I was saying earlier, I don’t love the fact that my parents aren’t super involved, but it’s nice not to be questioned about my job, about every single thing that I do. Like I think the parents have confidence in me that I will get their child where they need to go, but sometimes I do feel like the parents should come in and see exactly how it is impacting their child’s educational performance... I think that sometimes it would be nice for the parents to actually see the kids in the classroom. I just don’t know how much of a double-edged sword that would be. (Best).

I’m a big firm believer in parent interaction... This year, I had parents that helped in my classroom three days a week... For them, it was just a good experience to be in the room and to see how their kids react or how - so they could see that their kid wasn’t just being picked on... or this kid wasn’t just picked on... I think the more you can allow parents to do even little jobs, I think it gives them an investment in the school. I think, like here if you’ll cut these 20 things out so we’ll have take-homes tomorrow or if you’ll go over this with a marker and get that ready for us. Those little things I think go a long way in building relationships... I think it gives the parent a positive connection with the school. So when conflicts do arise, I think it’s huge. (Sherwood).

Both teachers were describing their beliefs about having parents in the classroom. Sherwood believed that it was beneficial to have parents in the classroom. She believed parent involvement in the classroom helped develop positive relationships with parents and helped provide a foundation from which to work when conflicts did occur. Best, on the other hand, was reluctant

to have parents in the classroom. She acknowledged that it would be nice for parents to observe their children in the classroom environment, but she was concerned that their presence would create additional problems for her.

The majority of participants (60%) believed administrative support was necessary to create true partnerships between families and schools. Administrative support was defined as support for family-school partnerships at the administrative level, including building, district, board, and policy support. All teacher participants and two-thirds of parent participants considered administrative support necessary; whereas, no student participants discussed the role of administration in partnership development. Of the six participants that discussed the need for administrative support, Martin was the only participant to specifically discuss the role of school policy in partnership development. When asked how parents and teachers should handle situation in which they disagree about a student's abilities, Martin stated:

I think the best way to handle that is to look at what policy is first. What does policy say the school is to provide? Sometimes I've seen parents, I think, be demanding that things happen that really are outside the scope of school. I mean, they were inappropriate requests, I think. To me, having good written policies about what's provided helps a lot. Based on that, that's how a parent can get logical requests for something, because it says right here that you all will provide this and it's how the teachers have something to stand on when they demand that they get some resource that they need for the classroom.

The code "compromise and flexibility" was used to describe the willingness of parents or teachers to make adjustments to personal desires or practices so that a mutual agreement between parents and teachers could be achieved. Compromise and flexibility was identified as a necessary quality of family-school partnerships by half of the participants. Participants described the need for teachers to demonstrate compromise and flexibility in their classroom practices. Sherwood described a situation in which her co-worker was unwilling to practice compromise and flexibility. A parent contacted the teacher to explain that her daughter was too

embarrassed to ask for help in class, but she believed her daughter could benefit from additional assistance. The teacher informed the parent, “No. This is my policy. This is the way we do stuff... If she doesn’t ask, she’s not going to get help.” Best described the need for compromise and flexibility when discussing how parents and teachers should handle situations in which they disagreed about a student’s abilities.

I would want to make sure that maybe even if we didn’t completely agree, that we could at least come to something where the parent would be okay with me addressing that situation in that way, because I do want the parent to be confident that their child is being taken care of in the school setting. So even if we can’t come to a complete and utter “everybody’s hunky dory, we’re all great and we all decide, yeah” at least we would have something that would be acceptable so that the student could continue to make progress and wouldn’t just stand there or be stagnant and waste a school year. (Best).

Half of all participants, and all parent participants, believed it was important for teachers to follow-through on stated plans or actions. One parent wanted the teachers and school to follow-through on established school expectations. Another parent wanted the school to follow-through on her requests for more communication. The final parent wanted the school to follow-through on additional supports and resources that were needed for her child. According to Martin, she continually communicated with the school and teachers about her child’s needs. She reported that the teachers were always receptive to her feedback verbally but would never actually implement the changes in practice.

Participants (40%) discussed the need for shared educational goals and values. These shared goals and values were demonstrated when parents and teachers communicated consistent values to students and worked toward mutual goals. The need for shared goals and values was discussed by Best:

When the parents and I are on the same page it works really, really great. We’re all saying the same thing. But when I’m working on one thing and the parents are still letting it happen, it’s either the student generalizes and just does what they need to do with me and completely switches to what they need to do with the parent or they

completely disregard and continue in their “bad” habits or continue to still have the problem... I feel if the parents aren’t involved with that part of it, then it’s not going to go anywhere or it won’t go as far as if we all have the same idea.

Two students and two teachers (40% of total participants) discussed the importance of trust in family-school partnerships. Trust was defined as the confidence parents, teachers, and students have in one another. Oliver described his middle school years as particularly challenging, and he attributed some of these challenges to a lack of trust for the teachers working with him. Two teacher participants also addressed situations in which their trust for parents was diminished. Kindle described a situation in which a parent spoke negatively about her to other parents and students. This caused Kindle to distrust the parent and made conflict-resolution with the parent difficult. Best also demonstrated distrust for parents when she described parental efforts to capitalize on their children’s disabilities by applying for government assistance. She believed that parents “are less interested in what the disability is and how it affects their child and more interested in what perks they can benefit off of.” None of the parent participants discussed the need for trusting relationships between parents, teachers, and students.

The importance of caring teachers was discussed by 40% of participants. The code “caring teachers” was used to describe teachers who demonstrated concern for students and a willingness to help. Oliver believed the difference between his positive and negative educational experiences was caring teachers. Teacher participants did not discuss the role of caring teachers in the development of family-school partnerships; however, they described situations in which they demonstrated care for students and families. For example, Sherwood reported that she made a home visit to discuss a student’s progress and areas of needed improvement.

Shared responsibility was identified by 30% of participants and was defined as parents, teachers, and students fulfilling specific roles in educational processes and sharing accountability

for student success. Wade believed there should be “a cohesive *team* of people that educate the student. It shouldn’t all fall on the parents or all fall on the teachers.” Best believed that shared responsibility was often lacking in her school.

Instead of it being the parent saying, “Oh, well, let me take responsibility for this point, or this”, it’s more of “well, what more are you going to do?...” Well what else can the school provide, instead of the parent stepping up and taking responsibility for at least some part of it. I will take responsibility for my portion that I can do here at school, but there is only so much that I can do during a school day... I feel like what happens here is the parents want us to take more responsibility, and I don’t know how a teacher can take more than what we have. (Best).

Proactive relationships were defined as relationships between parents and teachers that were established prior to the presence of conflicts and were identified by only 20% of participants. Sherwood described her efforts to establish proactive relationships with parents by stating:

Those are things I used. Things that I could go back and do with my parents and do with my kids to get the parents involved. Sending home projects for the parents to do, and having the parents come and share their projects with them. For me it was a good way to get on a positive note with parents, rather than making my first or second note be something negative because Johnny was in trouble. It gets them in for some positive things first, so we’ve already built that rapport so when the negative things come up, you’re not just hanging out there and not always the bad guy.

Respect was also only identified by 20% of participants. Respect referred to valuing the other party and treating him or her with acceptance and courtesy. The need for respect in family-school partnerships is illustrated in the following passage.

If you don’t respect the parents, that will reflect back and you won’t build that positive relationship. Because I think even if you don’t agree, if the kids see respect between the parent and the teacher, I think that will be a huge asset in the way a child looks positively at the teacher or the parents. They’re not caught in the middle so much. I think it’s okay to disagree; it’s that respect is ultimately what matters. (Sherwood).

Communication.

Participants (90%) identified improved communication as a needed quality of family-school partnerships; however, when describing their experiences with divergent perceptions of student abilities, participants discussed varying aspects of communication (see Table 4.3). The final codes used to describe communication were: tools for parents, positive communication, early communication, listening, frequent communication, and open communication.

Table 4.3

Communication

	Students			Teachers				Parents		
	AW	EA	SO	KK	CB	CS	EO	CC	DS	HM
Tools for parents	X	X				X		X	X	
Positive communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Early communication				X	X	X	X	X	X	
Listening		X	X				X	X		
Frequent communication	X		X		X	X		X	X	
Open communication		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Positive communication was identified by 80% of participants as playing an important role in the conflict between parents and teachers regarding student abilities and the establishment of family-school partnerships. The code “positive communication” was used to describe the messages between parents, teachers, and students that were encouraging, helpful, or optimistic.

I think one of the big keys, too, that helps is when there are disagreements or not seeing things the same way, are those teachers really also reporting on all the things the child does well? Hearing those positives about their child is really important too. “These things are great. These things are no issue. Here’s the concern over here.” (Odem).

Clark believed that her interactions with teachers were always negative because they only communicated with her when problems existed.

Discipline issues. It’s all about discipline... It’s never positive... When I see phone calls and I see certain names come up on it, I’m like “oh crap, here we go again.” I don’t feel

like it's positive or that they are going to call me just because... I always have that "oh my gosh, what happened now" feeling... I think instead of just the negative, maybe send out some of the positive so that when you do get the negative, it's not like that's all you feel like your kids... "oh my kids are troublemakers." So I think there needs to be a little bit more positive communication. (Clark).

Open communication was the other aspect of communication most commonly identified by participants (80%). Open communication was defined as communication between parents and teachers that occurred freely. Participants discussed the need for parents and teachers to openly share information so that concerns could be addressed and solutions could be developed. Both Abel and Oliver discussed their desire for open communication that also incorporated the student's voice. Oliver stated:

I think that the teacher should bring up what they think is wrong and I think the parents are going to know more than anyone, besides the student, but I think they should talk to the teacher what they think is wrong and then try to put the two together... And I also think they should talk to the student, because they are the one it is going on with and the student can tell them what's happening. Only the student really knows. I think both parties need to listen and figure out what they can do to make it better.

Nearly all (83%) of the parent and teacher participants (60% of total participants) discussed the need for early communication. Early communication referred to communication between parents and teachers that occurred as soon as a problem was identified. Participants discussed the importance of teachers sharing concerns quickly with parents rather than waiting for a formal meeting or for the concerns to escalate into larger problems. Clark reported that her son's school did not provide early communication. They sent a letter home at the end of the school year informing her of their recommendation to retain her son. Prior to the letter, the school had not informed Clark of their concerns regarding her son's progress, and she felt "blind-sided" as a result. Smith described a similar experience.

In 2nd grade at the end of the 3rd quarter his teacher came to me and said that he was *really* far behind... and she was super concerned and I was really upset. I said "why didn't you come to me sooner?" and she just felt awful... We just had this like piled on of

stressful, crazy, awful stuff and anyway this teacher was like “you’ve just had so much I didn’t want to burden you.” And I’m like, burden me, you know! (Smith).

None of the student participants discussed early communication.

Frequent communication, defined as communication between parents and teachers that occurred often, was discussed by 60% of participants. Both student participants that discussed frequent communication believed it was important for parents and teachers to communicate on a routine basis. They believed daily communication between parents and teachers would be ideal. Sherwood also discussed the importance of frequent communication, and she provided several different methods teachers could use to stay in frequent contact with parents. These methods included: phone calls, notes, emails, teacher websites, newsletters, parent programs, parent-teacher conferences, parent nights, and informal conferences. Smith explained that the school failed to frequently communicate with her.

He wasn’t going to the special help anymore, and they didn’t tell me that they were going to take him out of that specific program. He wasn’t even getting that help. One day he said, “Mom, I’m not going to that class anymore,” and I’m like “what?” I mean communication. I think it’s all about communication, and I don’t think it takes that much effort for a teacher... We have texting and e-mail now they don’t even have to speak or come into any kind of confrontation. (Smith).

The need for teachers to provide tools and resources to parents was identified by 50% of participants. The desire for additional tools and resources for parents to utilize at home with their students was most commonly discussed by parents and students. Smith described the type of information she would like to receive from the school.

It’s nice when the teachers send home tools “do this with your child,” because as a parent we don’t know what books they can read. They can tell us, “they’re at such and such level,” but that means nothing to a parent... A lot of times they do a lot of it in school and you don’t ever see it until they grade the homework and may or may not send it home. You can’t work with your children if you don’t know what they’re working on. Your only way to know that is teacher communication. (Smith).

Listening was discussed as an important component of communication between parents and teachers by 40% of participants. The code “listening” was used to describe the willingness of parents, students, or teachers to hear and attend to the needs or concerns of the other parties.

As far as parent-teacher relationships, I think communication is the biggest and most important thing for the child - to just understand each other... In order to communicate, you need to voice your opinion but also listen. If one person is not listening, there really isn't a communication there and it's hard to have a relationship off of that. (Abel).

When providing advice for parents and teachers on how to effectively resolve conflicts to establish family-school partnerships, Clark suggested:

Just listen to each other. Don't make a snap judgment. Let someone finish their conversation and then take a little bit – process it. I think everybody needs to process – don't just make that snap reaction and get angry... Don't just “no, I'm not doing that.” Think about it, assess it from the other side... listen to what the parent has to say and then you may not reach an agreement, but don't sit and dwell on it.

Impressionability of Student Attitudes

The majority of participants (90%) believed that student knowledge of divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities could have a detrimental impact on the student's attitude. This finding represents the theme “impressionability of student attitudes.” The final codes used to describe the impressionability of student attitudes included: students choose sides; negative perception of teachers; “untouchable” attitude; and, anxiety and self-doubt (see Table 4.4). Participants believed that students developed negative perceptions of teachers when their parents and teachers disagreed about their abilities, felt forced to choose sides between their parents and teachers as a result of the conflict, and developed an “untouchable” attitude. Students also discussed developing anxiety and self-doubt as a result of the conflict. All teacher participants and 66% of parent participants directly commented on the need for parents and teachers to keep the conflict private from the student.

Table 4.4

Impressionability of student attitudes

	Students			Teachers				Parents		
	AW	EA	SO	KK	CB	CS	EO	CC	DS	HM
Students choose sides	X	X						X		
Neg. perception of teachers	X	X			X	X	X	X		
"Untouchable" attitude	X			X		X		X		
Anxiety and self-doubt	X	X	X							

The majority of participants (60%) believed that students developed a negative perception of the teacher when aware that their teacher and parent disagreed about their abilities.

Wade described how her attitude was influenced by the conflict between her parents and teachers.

I specifically remember one IEP meeting my dad got so mad because they were just not getting the point that he walked out of the meeting. I mean, that was elementary school... but it was huge. So I kind of always felt like “okay, these teachers are really dumb” which didn’t help my enthusiasm for doing the work that I didn’t want to do. (Wade).

Abel also believed students developed a negative perception of teachers as a result of the conflict.

I think the main thing that stuck in my mind was just the way that ... my feeling towards the school system was shaped through my parents because they are our role models and we’re around them. So we, kind of like a sponge, soak it up. But I think if my family was against the school system, as far as they disagreed and weren’t happy with it, then I wasn’t happy with it at the time...because I would see those views and I would take their side and say “oh, yeah, that’s not how it should be done.” So I think that when they were unhappy, the kid’s kind of unhappy about it. (Abel).

Best believed that if students were aware of the conflict between their parents and teachers that it could “take away from the teacher’s credibility at school. If the parent’s ‘well, I don’t like the way she’s teaching you this...’ then that can greatly take away the student’s respect for the teacher.”

Forty percent of participants believed that students developed an “untouchable” attitude when they were aware of the discrepancy between their parents and teachers. This “untouchable” attitude referred to students’ belief that teachers could not hold them accountable for their work or behavior because their parent would protect or defend them. Kindle explained how she believed her experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities created an “untouchable” attitude in the student.

I just feel like, especially in that situation, that she feels like she can do anything she wants and her mom is always going to back her – no matter if it’s bad or good and everybody else is wrong but her. I mean, it’s like she can do whatever she wants and her mom is going to be okay with it, even though her mom probably really doesn’t agree. She is always going to back her. (Kindle).

Sherwood reported a similar experience. When asked how she believed the student was impacted by the disagreement between the parent and teacher, Sherwood responded:

I think it made him feel like he didn’t have to do anything he didn’t want to do... I mean he already had an attitude, but it really made his attitude worse in school the rest of that year. It was like “I can do what I want... My mom and dad won’t let me be retained, so I don’t have to try so hard.” I think it made him not work as hard, made him more of a behavior issue. More of that pushing the line, because you know “I can do what I want because my mom and dad don’t like you anyway.” I think when kids feel that at home, I think it definitely runs over into the classroom hugely. Kids know if their parents do not respect a teacher. I think that definitely caused some issues...which made him that much lower than he could have been and, once again, did not help his development.

Thirty percent of participants believed that students choose sides between their parents and teachers when they are aware of the disagreement. When asked about the impact of divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities on students, Abel stated:

I think when parents and teachers conflict and... short term they’re going to see the parents and teacher’s immediate reaction. They’re going to see their emotions toward each other and then they’re going to base their emotions off of that. They’re going to choose sides whether it be the parent’s or the teacher’s side. I feel like the child, at least at a young age, would choose sides because they feel like one is right and one is wrong.

Student participants reported experiencing anxiety or self-doubt as a result of the conflict between their parents and teachers. Abel described how, as a student, she was less concerned with the topic of the argument and more worried that her parent and teacher were in conflict.

I think the child kind of stops thinking about themselves and even the project or assignment they were working on and thinks more about the parent and the teacher's view of the child. When my parents and the teacher were arguing, I think I wasn't even thinking about the project or the grade that I got on it, but more the fact that the teacher disagreed with what I did and the parent agreed with what I did and that they were not happy with each other. I think as a child, you're wrapped up more in the parent and teacher's emotions about the topic and not the topic itself. So I wasn't even worried about the assignment at the time. I was just worried about how everybody was feeling and how they're not getting along and how as a child you wish they would get along because they're both supposed to be helping you. (Abel).

When asked about the messages he believed students received when their parents and teachers disagreed about their abilities, Oliver stated, "I think it makes the student stressed. I think it makes them nervous. They want the teacher to get along with their parents. They want people to communicate... Most of all it just adds unnecessary stress into your life."

Failure to Resolve Conflicts

All participants indicated that when conflicts between parents and teachers arise, they often are unresolved and continue to negatively impact the family-school partnership. This finding represented the theme "failure to move forward." The final codes used to describe this theme included: termination of relationship, differential treatment, continued negative interactions, and teacher fear of parents (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Failure to Resolve Conflicts

	Students			Teachers				Parents		
	AW	EA	SO	KK	CB	CS	EO	CC	DS	HM
Termination of relationship	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Differential treatment		X						X	X	
Continued negative interactions	X	X		X		X				
Teacher fear of parents	X		X		X		X			X

Nearly all (90%) participants reported that the parent-teacher relationship was terminated after the conflict between parents and teachers occurred, and they often attributed this termination to parent disengagement. When asked about the relationship between his mother and teacher after the disagreement, Oliver stated, “My mom never talked with that teacher very much or never brought him up, so I don’t think it was a strong relationship. I don’t think they got along too well.” According to Smith, she disengaged from the school because:

When I realized the school wasn’t going to be of assistance, I just decided that I would find help elsewhere... We decided it would be easier to pursue other avenues because they just didn’t seem interested...and that is probably what upset me the most... When I realized they just weren’t going to do anything, I didn’t see any reason to push it, so I went outside of the school and started trying to find help for him.

Half of participants reported that teachers develop a fear of parents as a result of the conflict or as a result of how the parents handle the conflict. Oliver reported that the manner in which parents approach the school can cause teachers to say “that is that kid’s mom that got mad at the other teacher...better watch out for him if he’s in your class. His mom will get mad at you.” When asked about how conflicts between parents and teachers impact family-school partnerships, Wade stated:

I think the teachers are going to start going “well this student is one of those ones with *those* kind of parents that are always going to come in and nit-pick you in the class, and

they're going to say you're a horrible teacher. And I think that affects how the student is treated in class... It's kind of like they walk on eggshells around you, because they're afraid your parents are going to come raise hell about something.

Forty percent of participants believed that negative interactions persisted between parents and teachers. Continued negative interactions were defined as harmful communication, attitudes, or behaviors between parents and teachers that occurred after the discrepancy regarding the student's abilities was initially addressed. According to Wade:

I think once there's a conflict... unless it is solved in a way that the parents are extremely happy about and it's basically exactly what the parents wanted to happen, without much fight, I think there's going to be constant conflict for most of that student's education. I don't think it ever really goes away... And I think even if it was kind of solved, it never goes away unless it's resolved quickly and exactly how the parent wants it done... I think once it's on a negative foot that it's going to stay there.

Kindle reported that the parent she experienced conflict with would "call all the other parents and tell them how horrible I was... I think she lied to a lot of parents about what was going on. I know she has tried to get me fired at the principal and superintendent."

Some participants (30%) believed that teachers treated students differently after the disagreement occurred. Sherwood believed that her son was treated differently as soon as she requested for a teacher to change grades that were figured incorrectly. Abel believed she was singled out by the teacher once her father confronted the teacher. According to Clark, "the teacher may, just because they're mad at the parent, take it out on the kid. 'Well, now you have a target on your back because your parent doesn't agree with me.'"

Challenging Parents

Participants (80%) described specific parent qualities that presented additional challenges to family-school partnerships (see Table 4.6). This finding represents the theme "challenging parents." The code "challenging parents" was used to describe the demanding or disengaged

parents that posed additional challenges to the development of family-school partnerships.

Martin described her observation of demanding and disengaged parents.

I'm thinking about the couple of situations that the parents were just over the top, like, "you have to, the law says you have to do this." Well, they would stretch that into the weirdest things, like you have to help my kid be happy here and be involved in these social activities. Well, not really, no. Usually, to me it's just whack parents. You know I think the schools do a pretty good job of trying to accommodate, but it's when people come in and start demanding this and that... I can so clearly see these certain parents who are just so...kind of had an entitlement attitude, you know, just like "well, my kid is disabled so you have to do this and you have to provide this and ..." somehow that partnership relationship was not in place and I know that the teaching staff and the paras were on the defense because they were being attacked when they really hadn't done anything wrong. The other thing that is really a problem I think in the partnerships is when the teaching staff at the schools give so much to students and they can't get *any* engagement from the families. You know, there were probably just a few parents in Molly's classes who were like us, you know, wanted to be involved, more involved. It seemed like the other two extremes were a little more, seem a bit more than us, just folks that didn't care or didn't have resources or not educated well enough to help or something. (Martin).

Table 4.6

Challenging Parents

	Students			Teachers				Parents		
	AW	EA	SO	KK	CB	CS	EO	CC	DS	HM
Demanding parents		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Disengaged parents					X		X		X	X

Best also believed that parents adopted an "entitlement" attitude that hindered the establishment of family-school partnerships.

It's beginning to be more of a... "you need to give this to me" rather than "I need your help..." more of that entitlement... We have a student whose parent is like "we will *not* be here, on time, when school starts and they will *not* be picked up on time when school ends, but I still *expect* you to provide my child breakfast, even if they are an hour late." So I feel like our population is more of the "we're entitled to this so you will provide it to me, but I'm going to break the rules." So we're trying to talk to them about what our expectations are and what the rules of our school are, because they have this entitlement, it becomes more hostile towards us. (Best).

According to participants, when parents demonstrated these qualities, conflicts were even more difficult to resolve and often were not. Odem believed that some parents are so challenging to work with that successful partnerships are nearly impossible to create. “For the two or three of what I would call the ‘high flyer’ parents, the ones that you’re really going to hear from constantly...there isn’t anything that is enough.”

Lack of Teacher Training

In a follow-up phone interview, teacher participants were asked to respond to questions related to their training and preparation in building effective family-school partnerships. They were asked to describe training opportunities in their teacher preparation programs, as well as training opportunities provided by their school districts. All teacher participants indicated that they received no formal training in their teacher preparation programs regarding the establishment of family-school partnerships (see Table 4.7). They also indicated that they received no formal training on effectively resolving conflict with parents in their teacher preparation programs. Sherwood reported having informal discussions in her educational psychology class. She also reported that she learned about working with families from her cooperating teacher in her student teaching experience. Kindle also indicated that the only training she received on family-school partnerships or conflict-resolution was from her cooperating teacher.

Table 4.7

Lack of Teacher Training

	Teachers			
	KK	CB	CS	EO
Preparation programs	X	X	X	X
On-site professional development	X	X		X

Three of the four teacher participants also reported that the school districts in which they were employed provided no formal training or professional development on building family-school partnerships. Odem indicated that the special education conferences she attended provided workshops on how to work with families, but she reported that she had never attended these workshops.

Sherwood was the only teacher who described training that aimed to establish true partnerships with families. She was asked by the school district, along with one coworker, to attend Practical Parenting Partnership (PPP) training. The training involved two days of meetings on how to include parents in educational processes. Both teachers were then asked to share their experiences from the training with other school staff. According to Sherwood, the school district initially tried to implement partnership changes within the school, but partnership efforts quickly discontinued.

Summary

Qualitative analysis of 10 in-depth interviews was conducted to identify thematic units that describe the essence of parent, student, and teacher experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. These thematic units included: family-school partnership qualities, impressionability of student attitudes, failure to resolve conflict, challenging parents, and lack of teacher training. Communication was also identified as a subtheme of family-school partnership qualities.

When examining research question two (What are the perceived outcomes for students and the family-school partnership when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?), it was found that participants believed student attitudes were influenced by the disagreement between their parents and teachers. Specifically, participants believed that students

felt forced to choose sides, developed negative perceptions of their teachers, developed an “untouchable” attitude with teachers, and developed anxiety and self-doubt as a result of the disagreement between parents and teachers. Participants also identified the failure to resolve conflicts as an outcome of divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. Once the conflict between parents and teachers occurred, participants believed that the parent-teacher relationship was terminated, teachers treated students differently, negative interactions between parents and teachers continued, and teachers developed a fear of parents. All thematic units answer research question one by describing the essence of participant experiences in relation to the phenomenon. They also provide insights related to potential practice and policy changes that would help parents and teachers overcome discrepant perceptions of student abilities to build effective family-school partnerships (research question three).

The purpose of this chapter was to identify findings from the study that answered the research questions. The next chapter provides interpretations of these findings. Interpretations are discussed, as well as implications of the findings on educational practice and policy. Finally, recommended changes to practice and policy and recommendations for future research are provided.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. Family-school partnerships are associated with improved grade point averages, standardized test scores, attendance, home and school behavior, social skills, adaptation to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), school programs, school climate, family services and support, parent skills and advocacy efforts, and family-school-community connections (Epstein, 2011); yet, diverging perceptions of a student's abilities can leave educators and parents struggling to develop and foster effective family-school partnerships in a conflict-laden climate with limited knowledge about how best to handle these conflicts (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). The goals of this study were to understand the overall essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge, to understand the perceived impact of these divergent beliefs on students and the family-school partnership, and to gain insights from these experiences that will help parents and teachers build effective family-school partnerships, even in the presence of conflict.

This chapter provides a discussion of the themes family-school partnership qualities, impressionability of student attitudes, failure to resolve conflicts, challenging parents, and lack of teacher training. The themes discussed in this section are largely interconnected. For example, teacher fear of parents directly relates to a lack of teacher training in partnership development. It also directly relates to experiences with challenging parents. Challenging

parents may be the result of poor parent advocacy skills, but they may also be a reaction to the poor partnership skills of teachers. For this reason, it is difficult to examine the themes in isolation. Rather, they should be considered as interwoven constructs that, when examined collectively, provide insights that can help parents and teachers effectively resolve conflicts so that family-school partnerships are maintained and strengthened. Each theme is presented and discussed below. Following a discussion of each theme are implications for practice and future research. Finally, the chapter closes with concluding thoughts and reflections from the study. Participant quotes are again used extensively in this section to support analysis and discussion.

Family-School Partnership Qualities

Findings from the study indicate that parents, teachers, and students are knowledgeable about many necessary qualities of family-school partnerships. However, participants varied considerably in the qualities they deemed most important for partnership development. Participants only identified an average of 49% of the partnership qualities, and of the 13 qualities, only seven were identified by at least half of the participants. Failure to understand the many aspects of family-school partnerships and failure to reach a universal understanding of the most important qualities of partnerships may further hinder their development. This is concerning considering the important role family-school partnerships play in student success.

Failure to have a universal understanding of family-school partnership qualities is concerning for three reasons. First, each of the qualities identified by participants plays a critical role in partnership development, and they are consistent with those presented in the literature. Second, some of the critical aspects of family-school partnerships were recognized by only a few participants. Third, many of the qualities of family-school partnerships are highly interconnected. These concerns are discussed in greater detail below.

Collectively, participants identified many of the qualities of family-school partnerships discussed in the literature that play a critical role in partnership formation; however, individually, participants failed to recognize many of them. For example, equity is considered an important characteristic of family-school partnerships (Epstein, 2011). Equity includes the shared responsibility, shared decision-making, and shared values and goals that were identified by participants. Ninety percent of participants identified at least one of the qualities that helps create equitable relationships between parents and teachers; however, only two participants identified all three of these qualities. If parents and teachers practice shared decision-making without also practicing shared responsibility and sharing common goals and values, the equitable relationships characteristic of family-school partnerships are not truly created.

Another concern was related to the infrequency with which some qualities were identified by participants. For example, respect was only identified by two participants as important in family-school partnerships. Yet, the literature consistently points to respect as a critical component of family-school partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Christenson, 2004). Proactive relationships were also only identified by two participants. This is alarming as proactive relationships play a critical role in the ability of parents and teachers to effectively resolve conflicts (Smith, Gartin, Murdick, & Hilton, 2006). Failing to recognize the role that proactive relationships play in conflict-resolution may contribute to the inability of teachers and parents to move forward once a conflict exists.

Finally, many of the aspects of family-school partnerships are interconnected. For example, when asked to describe how parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of a student's abilities diverge, Sherwood stated:

Sometimes I think you have to agree to disagree. I mean, you have to agree to say, "I respect what you're saying." I do try to take the parent's suggestions... A couple of

years ago, I had a little girl who had major behavior issues and was just struggling to read... Dad came to the conference, and he was not a happy camper... He was very upset. I mean that is probably an understatement. He was like “that’s because you read dumb books up here and she’s not interested in those.” So I said “well, what is she interested in?” I wrote all that down and said “okay, we’ll start working on these kinds of books and we’ll see if it improves.” Now, after Christmas she made huge gains. Was it because of the books he chose? Probably yes, probably no... But did we use the books a parent wanted? Yes! So by the end of the year, the parent was thrilled. I was thrilled. There are suggestions you can take from a parent that are not going to hurt a child. I think you need to take those. I think you need to “well you tell me what works for your child at home.” I think the more teachers ask parents to contribute or to use their knowledge and their expertise... helps alleviate some of that negative right off the bat.

This passage represents the qualities shared decision-making and compromise and flexibility, which illustrates the interconnectedness of partnership qualities. The interconnectedness of the various aspects of family-school partnerships, which is also identified by Blue-Banning et al. (2004), further supports the need for a comprehensive understanding of family-school partnerships. Understanding a few qualities of family-school partnerships in isolation fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of these qualities and how these qualities work together to establish strong partnerships. The interconnectedness of partnership qualities are like links of a chain. Each link plays a critical role in connecting families and parents. If one of these links is missing or broken, the connection between families and schools is severed and genuine family-school partnerships cannot be formed (see Figure 5.1). As the number of missing links increases, the gap between schools and families widens. Restoration of the partnership requires the installment of the missing links to bridge this gap.

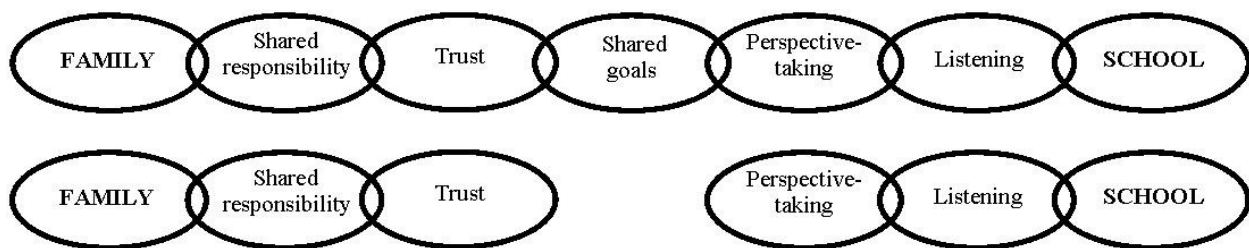


Figure 5.1 Interconnections of partnership qualities

The overall failure of participants to provide a more universal and comprehensive depiction of family-school partnerships likely reflects their limited exposure to and knowledge of authentic partnerships. It is also possible that participants primarily identified the qualities that reflected their personal self-interests. Participants may have neglected to discuss qualities of family-school partnerships that were important for other stakeholders yet did not directly reveal their individual needs. This may have served as another factor contributing to the lack of a universal and comprehensive approach to family-school partnerships.

A common understanding of partnership qualities is ideal and necessary for the development of authentic partnerships with families. However, it is possible that demonstrating any of the partnership qualities may serve as a protective buffer for family-school partnerships when other qualities are absent. For example, Martin believed that her daughter's teachers truly cared about her, and their willingness to demonstrate care for her daughter seemed to buffer against their lack of follow-through. Despite their inability or unwillingness to follow through on Martin's requests, she continued to harbor positive feelings toward the school. This would suggest that demonstrating any of the partnership qualities is helpful. Nonetheless, had the school demonstrated all of the qualities of family-school partnerships identified by participants, it is likely that the student's opportunities for success would have been maximized and Martin's positive regard for the school would have been strengthened. Partially understanding the qualities of family-school partnerships is certainly a step in the right direction, but a more complete and unified understanding would allow for better parent-teacher relationships and greater opportunities for student success.

Though participants lacked agreement on the most important qualities of family-school partnerships, their discussion of identified qualities provided insights into the development of

family-school partnerships and the resolution of parent-teacher conflicts. Abel believed perspective-taking played a role in how disagreements between her father and teachers were handled. In Abel's first experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities, Abel did not believe the teacher was willing to listen or practice perspective-taking.

I think it would have been fine if she voiced her opinion as long as she didn't point blank say the parent was wrong and that the child was wrong and that she was right... I think if she maybe, not necessarily agreed with the parent, but just stated that she understood what they were saying... it would have made things better. (Abel).

However, her second experience with the phenomenon was resolved more effectively because the teacher was more willing to listen to the parent's perspective.

I think the English teacher and my father talked it out a lot more than the 5th grade teacher did. The 5th grade teacher more just expressed her opinion and said that she was right and that whatever he was saying was wrong and wouldn't really listen to the parent perspective of it. Then with the English teacher, I think he expressed his opinion, he explained what he thought, and then my dad explained what he thought, and then I think the English teacher realized or explained that he understood that there might be more than one reason for what resulted or that, indeed, I might know those words, or that not everybody's cheating. I think he realized that and then he explained that he understood and so I think they came to an agreement. (Abel).

Though the teacher may not agree with the parent, the parent still wants to feel heard and understood. This suggests that teachers can help resolve conflicts by listening to the other party and understanding their perspective.

All participants recognized the important role that family-school partnerships play in the overall success of students. Despite this recognition, there continued to be no system-wide efforts within participants' schools to develop and maintain effective partnerships with families. There appears to be a gap in rhetoric and practice. Epstein (2011) refers to this gap as a "rhetoric rut," where "educators are stuck expressing support for partnerships without taking necessary actions" (p. 393). This gap may partially be due to a lack of administrative support for partnership development. All teacher participants and two parent participants discussed the

importance of administrative support for partnership development. However, like teachers, “most administrators are not prepared with new strategies to guide and lead their staffs to develop strong school programs and classroom practices that inform and involve all families about their children’s learning, development, and educational plans for the future” (Epstein, 2011, p. 10).

School leaders must establish a climate within the school that fosters family-school partnerships. According to Theoharis (2012), this type of climate is achieved when school leaders emphasize family-school partnerships as a foundational component of their schools, rather than an additional responsibility, desired luxury, or superficial display of political correctness. School leaders must take the initiative to establish a climate within the school that welcomes parents, values their input, and considers them educational partners. Creating a welcoming environment creates an atmosphere of reciprocal belonging – parents believe they belong to the school and the school belongs to them (Henderson et al., 2007).

For many schools, a partnership attitude would require dramatic changes in the school climate. Some of these changes center around the way family involvement in the educational process is viewed by school personnel. School leaders must make efforts to shift the perceptions of teachers and staff in relation to families and family-school partnerships (Riehl, 2012). In order to create a partnership-oriented atmosphere, it is necessary for school staff to have positive beliefs about the importance of family engagement (Henderson et al., 2007). Unfortunately, many educators reflect the attitude that parents are burdensome, that they should only be contacted when problems arise, that they are easy targets to blame when things do not go well, and that they are only useful for fundraising efforts (Ferlazzo, 2011). School leaders must work to establish a climate where families are accepted, appreciated, respected, and expected as

necessary partners to maximize the success of all students, and this can be accomplished by inviting parents to participate in educational decisions, establishing proactive relationships with families, and recognizing parents for their contributions.

It is also essential for school leaders to shift the power differential established within traditional models of school-family relationships. Though challenging, school leaders must share power with families to create successful partnerships (Auerbach, 2012; Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2006). “Sharing power in socially just schools means inviting stakeholders to the table as full partners, working in coalition with them, and empowering them to share leadership” (Auerbach, 2012, pp. 37-38). When school leaders have the mindset that parents are not capable of positively contributing to the education of their children, they are less likely to share power with parents and involve them in the decision-making process; but when school leaders genuinely believe that all parents have something to contribute to their children’s educations, they are more likely to develop collaborative partnerships with families (Auerbach, 2010).

Effective partnership efforts must extend to all families, especially those whose children are most at-risk for failing or dropping out of school (Liontos, 1992). School leaders must take deliberate steps to achieve equitable partnerships with all families. According to Auerbach (2012), “there is a double standard by which administrators apply different rules to different groups of parents, denying power to marginalized groups and ceding it to dominant groups” (p. 39). In one school district, the principal appeared to emphasize family-school partnerships for public relations purposes only (Gordon, 2012); however, the reality of her school was that input and involvement in shared decision-making were reserved for a select group of elite parents.

This creates a superficial value on family-school partnerships, but the message is clearly communicated to parents that their input is neither considered, valued, nor desired.

Communication.

Participants believed that improved communication between parents and school was necessary to foster effective family-school partnerships. This was consistent with findings from Lake and Billingsley (2000) that poor communication escalates conflict between parents and teachers. Participants in this study identified specific aspects of communication they considered necessary for partnership development, including: tools for parents, listening, and positive, early, frequent, and open communication. Examination of these necessary aspects of communication offered insights that may help teachers and parents develop effective partnerships.

An issue presented by participants in the study was a lack of communication as soon as concerns were identified. Both Smith and Clark had children that were struggling in school. Rather than notifying the parents as soon as difficulties were noticed, teachers waited for more formal meetings that occurred at the end of the year. Clark reported that she was unaware that her son was struggling academically until she received a letter from the school at the end of the year recommending retention. Both parents reported that had they been notified earlier of their children's difficulties, they would have tried to help their students at home. In all examples of "early communication," participants described being "blind-sided" by the information provided by the other party. Clark stated, "I feel like I was blind-sided. If there were concerns, tell me about them in October so I can work on those concerns."

Two students believed that they had no voice in educational processes. Abel reported that she felt embarrassed that her father had to be her voice, and Oliver discussed the importance of parents and teachers seeking student input when discussing educational processes. According

to these students, parents and teachers need to take extra measures to incorporate student voices in educational decisions.

Participants also believed that providing tools and resources for parents was one way for teachers to communicate with parents. Smith described her desire for improved communication with the school that included providing tools and resources for parents.

I was very specific with the reading teacher. I said, “I want progress reports. I want to know what tools I can use at home to help him.” If there is any kind of books, or whatever, she could send to me or direct me to via the internet, whatever, I wanted access to that... “I want to be able to visit with you at the end of the year and figure out where he’s at and what I can do over the summer.” And none of that happened... I never spoke to her again, even though I had asked. She just would not return calls... Then she never offered any tools. I mean she could have sent him home with just a quick note... I just wish that when I asked for a plan that they would have sat down with me and we could have just made that or some kind of communication as far as progress...but I didn’t know what his problems really were. I guess they didn’t help me identify the problem... They didn’t work with us to give us any tools and I would have liked that probably more than anything, because then when we’re home and doing the homework or whatever we could implement those tools. Just their disinterest...it saddens me... I would have liked them to have worked with him more. (Smith).

Because the school failed to provide the tools and resources Smith requested, she ultimately believed they were disinterested in helping her son. It seems that by providing tools and resources for parents and responding to parent requests, schools are communicating to parents that they genuinely care about the student’s progress, appreciate and value the parent’s input, and can be trusted to follow through on tasks.

Clark described the difference positive communication makes in the development of working relationships with teachers and in developing solutions to problems.

I’ve had the emails that are like, “Your kid did this! We are not allowed to do this!” It was all exclamation points, and I mean I had like four or five conversations about my child and all these were in exclamation points... My final reply, I just started making exclamation points because I thought, “I am so angry right now.” I was trying to be nice and helpful, and she’s not giving me any help that way. She just wants to yell at me... I was just like “what do you do?” at that point. It’s like there is no reasoning with that person. But then you have the others. I have had one be like, “Do you have any ideas?”

Can we do this? Can we do that?" I've had one or two that are like that, and I find that very helpful, like "what do you think we can do?" (Clark).

The teachers were trying to address the negative behavior of Clark's children; however, the manner in which the teachers communicated their concerns differed dramatically. One teacher presented her concerns in a manner that made Clark feel reprimanded and helpless. The other teacher presented her concerns in a manner that made Clark feel supported and hopeful. Clark appreciated that one teacher offered solutions, and she felt attacked by the teacher who scolded. West also believed that "there should be a lot more positive communication. Not, 'you need to do this. You need to do this.'" Similarly, Best stated "I'm happy to talk about parent's concerns. It's just when they make it like, 'well, what aren't you doing correctly?' That's when it gets kind of sticky."

Nearly all participants discussed situations in which difficult messages were communicated from the teacher to the parent. Smith was informed that her child was struggling to read. Clark was informed via letter that her child should be retained. Best described a situation in which she had to tell a mother that her child would always be affected by his disability. Kindle informed a mother that her child's poor attitude prevented her from earning a position on the varsity team. Abel's father was told by the teacher that he did not believe she was capable of doing the work she submitted. These are all difficult messages for parents to hear and difficult messages for teachers to communicate; yet, as illustrated in the above paragraph, there appeared to be differences in how sensitively and confidently these messages were communicated by teachers. Participant experiences suggest that messages are better received when they are offered as ideas, suggestions, or possible solutions than when they are communicated as something the other party needs to change. In situations where conflicts exist or teachers are forced to deliver "negative" messages to parents, it is better if these messages are

presented in a solution-focused manner. Rather than simply communicating the problems, possible solutions could be presented by the teacher. The parent could also be asked to identify possible solutions. Keeping the focus on helping the student rather than on reprimanding the parent or student seems to strengthen the parent-teacher relationship and increases the chances of finding a workable solution.

Impressionability of Student Attitudes

Participants believed that student attitudes are negatively impacted by their knowledge of discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities. They believed students developed a negative perception of the teacher, developed an “untouchable” attitude, and were forced to choose sides between their parent and teacher and would often choose sides with their parents. Participants believed that students no longer respected the teacher and believed they could do whatever they wanted because they were guaranteed “protection” from their parents.

When participants discussed the “untouchable” attitude that students develop as a result of the conflict between their parents and teachers, they often attributed the student’s reaction to parental attitudes and behaviors. They described parents as having unrealistic perceptions of their children, unwilling to acknowledge their child’s faults, and willing to defend their children regardless of the circumstances.

They are always going to think their kid deserves the best, the kid *is* the best. I think for the most part, it’s all parents. They think their kid is better than what they are most of the time.... When I grew up my parents were like “well, you didn’t get a good grade on this, it was probably your fault,” but parents nowadays think it’s the teacher’s fault, not their kid’s, so I think the kid thinks because of that they can get away with everything... “My mom is always going to protect me and always agree with me even though I’m lying or even though I didn’t do this right, she’s going to think I did.” (Kindle).

If they’re not happy with the school or whatever, it’s like... “yeah, I can do what I want, my mom said I can’t be spanked” or “My mom said you can’t touch me...” Those parents that have issues and keep that away from their kid I really respect. It’s okay to have

issues, but when you don't give them to your kid, I think that does make a huge difference. (Sherwood).

Participants believed that parents inaccurately viewed their children as “the best” and defended their children without listening to the teacher’s perspective, and they further believed these parental beliefs and actions caused students to develop an “untouchable” attitude. Kindle believed that these parental attitudes and behaviors prevented students from developing important life skills, such as the ability to take responsibility and accept failure. It is unclear as to why parents develop inaccurate perceptions of their children or feel compelled to indiscriminately defend their children. Nonetheless, it seems that parent attempts to protect their children from harm may be “protecting” them from experiences that teach them to handle disappointment and respond to challenges. Henderson et al. (2007) suggest that parents need to support their children without crossing the line, and they recommend open discussions between parents and teachers to establish this line.

Once students develop a negative attitude toward teachers or develop an “untouchable” attitude, moving forward would certainly be difficult. How can a teacher create a positive learning environment when the student no longer demonstrates respect for the teacher or her authority? How can the teacher have high expectations for the student when the student believes his parent will not support the teacher’s efforts? How can a student respect the teacher when he believes his parents do not? With these challenges present, the student’s opportunities for academic success are not likely maximized.

The impressionability of student attitudes suggests that parents and teachers must make the conscious decision to keep the conflict private from students. This belief is supported by 60% of participants who spoke directly about the need for teachers and parents to keep the information private from students. Parents and teachers must appraise both their verbal and

nonverbal behavior toward one another. As noted by two participants, the communication between parents and teachers changed when the conflict occurred. When in the presence of a conflict, participants must take note of what they say about the other party in the presence of the child, how they communicate with the other party, and their nonverbal behavior toward the other party. Keeping the conflict private is likely a difficult task while the conflict still exists, which suggests the need for teachers and parents to resolve conflicts and re-establish positive relationships in a timely manner.

Sherwood discussed the need for parents and teachers to keep the conflict private from the students. She noted that the responsibility to keep the conflict between the parent and teacher does not fall solely on the parents. She addressed the need for teachers to be cognizant of their actions toward students that may also communicate the disagreement.

When he brings work home, how the parent responds about the teacher – “Oh, she gave you what to do,” as opposed to, “well, let’s get your homework done” – and keeps that negativity away from the child, I think that is huge – on both ends... It’s hard to because you are just frustrated with their parents. You get real short with the child because you’re frustrated with the parent. It’s not the kid’s fault, and I’m sure the same thing happens at home... I have to really be conscious that I don’t do that. But it is really hard when you just got done with the parent and he just chewed you out for five minutes and then Johnny comes in and does something really stupid and you just want to bite his head off... It’s really hard not to make those associations and hopefully a lot of that comes with maturity in teaching and maturity in just as an adult that you learn to not do that. I think that is a big pitfall teachers have to watch on their end, as opposed to always just being the parent they need to watch. (Sherwood).

From the parent perspective, Clark stated:

A lot of times when I come and talk, I don’t tell my kids I’m coming up here. I don’t want them to know and be like “oh, well my mom’s coming up to talk to so and so,” and I think that’s a picture that kids can get too. Like if you say “well, I’m going to go talk to that teacher” or whatever and then your kid is like “well, my mom is coming up and talking to you.” I think it just depends as a parent how you handle that. Do you even let them know that you’re going up there? Is it really any of their business to know? Do you really have those words like “I’m going to really set that teacher straight,” because there are parents that do that. And you can hear it in their kids’ voices, so I think if you

handle it where you're not really perceiving it like "oh, well the teacher was wrong or the principal was wrong" then your kid is not going to have that kind of attitude.

The differing experiences described by Abel and Oliver provide further evidence that students are better left uninformed of the conflict between parents and teachers. Abel reported that the communication changed between her father and the teacher. Her father openly discussed his feelings toward the teacher, and Abel felt singled-out by the teacher after the conflict occurred. Oliver reported that he was completely unaware of the conflict between his mother and the teacher until after he was out of the teacher's class. He never perceived any changes in the teacher's behavior or treatment toward him, and his mother never spoke of the conflict. Perhaps the two teachers handled the conflict differently. It is possible that Oliver's teacher did a better job of keeping the information private. It is also possible that Abel's knowledge of the conflict, or her negative feelings toward the teacher as a result of the conflict, caused her to infer the mistreatment. Regardless, it appeared that Oliver's unawareness of the conflict allowed him to continue the school year without harboring negative feelings toward the teacher or feeling mistreated by the teacher.

Failure to Resolve Conflicts

Parents, teachers, and students desired partnerships, yet they failed to resolve conflicts once they existed. In the presence of conflict, participants reported that parent-teacher relationships were terminated, teachers treated students differently, negative interactions between parents and teachers persisted, and teachers developed a fear of parents.

Abel's experiences provide an example of the terminated relationships, differential student treatment, and continued negative interactions between parents and teachers. Once the disagreement between Abel's father and teacher occurred, Abel reported feeling "singled-out" by the teacher. She also reported that her father and the teacher stopped communicating and

maintained negative feelings toward one another. Rather than working through the disagreement or trying to resolve the conflict, the teacher and parent terminated the relationship altogether.

To better understand how teachers develop a fear of challenging parents, it is helpful to examine an experience described by Best.

I've had another parent before that specifically told me that I wasn't doing my job...of course, as a professional I take that personally... I didn't react. I told the parent, "I'm sorry you feel that way. Let me show you what we've done this year and how far he has come. I'm sorry he has not gone as far as you would like him to go, but this is the progress he has made. Let's focus on this, and this is where we want him to be next year..." They are a parent now I always require my process coordinator to be sitting in with me, because I don't want to be personally attacked and that's how I felt that day when someone says something like that... I was really proud of myself. I didn't react at all... I take my job very, very seriously, so it really did affect me a lot. I moved on, and I focused on the positive...but they're a parent that I now flag... I still treat them the exact same way, but I don't like to be in conversations, just the two of us. I want to make sure there is someone else there with me at all times... It's real funny. She had that one comment, and she's never had any other comments again. (Best).

This situation illustrates the failure of parents and teachers to resolve conflicts, and it further illustrates the "climate of fear" that develops when teachers encounter challenging parents (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 151).

Closer examination of Best's experience focuses on three specific areas: Best's internalization and personalization of the parent's comment; her attitudinal and behavioral changes as a result of the conflict; and her fear of the parent after the original confrontation. The purpose of closely examining Best's experience is not to criticize her behavior or question her practices; rather, the purpose is to understand the barriers that often interfere with effective conflict-resolution between parents and teachers. Understanding these barriers may shed light on new ways of preparing both teachers and parents to effectively resolve conflicts and establish family-school partnerships.

Best stated that because she is a professional, she took the comment personally; yet it is worth considering that because teachers are professionals, they should not take parent comments personally. Counselors are trained to expect questioning, hurtful, perhaps even "attacking" statements from clients. This type of client behavior is referred to as "resistance," and it is often considered a natural part of the therapeutic process (Sommers-Flanigan & Sommers-Flanigan, 2012). When clients question, confront, speak rudely, or openly acknowledge dislike for the counselor or counseling process, counselors are trained to simply accept it as a part of the therapeutic process that must be managed and overcome. As discussed in the "Challenging Parents" section below, parents often communicate their dissatisfaction with educational processes much like resistant clients communicate their dissatisfaction with counseling. Training teachers to anticipate this type of response from parents may help prepare teachers to resolve conflicts when challenging parent behaviors are presented. This type of teacher training is discussed further in the "Recommendations for Practice" section of this chapter.

The second point of reflection from Best's experience is related to her response to the parent's remark. Best believed that she treated the parent no differently after the initial statement was made and she felt proud that she did not react to the comment. Though Best may not have immediately reacted to the parent's comment, her behavior toward the parent indicated that she did not treat the parent "the exact same way" as she believed. After the parent made the remark, Best always required her process coordinator to attend meetings, which did not occur prior to the disagreement. She also avoided private conversations with the parents and made sure "there is someone else with me at all times." Despite the fact that the parent never made another negative comment toward Best, the parent was permanently "flagged" by Best. Best's failure to recognize

her attitudinal and behavioral shift toward the parent may also suggest that she failed to recognize that the conflict was never truly resolved.

The final point of reflection is related to Best's fear of parents that was indicated by her frequent reliance on the process coordinator. At one point in the interview, Best described the process coordinator as a "neutral party" between the parent and teacher. However, throughout most of the interview, she described the process coordinator as someone who was primarily there to support and protect her. Best relied on the process coordinator when presented with difficult or challenging situations with parents. The process coordinator served as her "security" during these situations. Thus, it is likely that the parent did not perceive the process coordinator as an additional support for her but, rather, another person in the school's corner. Best's constant reliance on the process coordinator suggests that she feared parents and doubted her own abilities to appropriately handle conflicts and to successfully work with families. This demonstrates the link between teacher fear of parents and lack of teacher training. Epstein (2011) also recognizes that teachers and administrators are fearful to work with families because they lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively partner.

Best's "flagging" of the parent also warrants further discussion. Abel also believed her father was "flagged" once he approached the school. Are parents "flagged" because of the manner in which they approach teachers, or are parents "flagged" simply because they question the teacher? The answer to both questions is likely, "yes." It is likely that parents need to learn to express their concerns without attacking teachers. It is also likely that teachers need to learn to respond to parental feedback less defensively. Improvements in both of these areas would likely diminish conflict between parents and teachers and help build effective family-school partnerships.

It is possible that the failure of parents and teachers to effectively resolve conflicts may not speak specifically to conflicts between parents and teachers, but it may speak more to the manner in which individuals generally respond to conflicts. For example, when asked if there was anything she wished her parents would have done differently, Wade stated “I kind of wish they would have switched me schools or at least switched teachers.” Wade’s solution to fixing the family-school partnership was to go somewhere else. Rather than discussing strategies to resolve the conflict, she identified ways in which she could have avoided the conflict. The “termination of relationships” that was discussed by 90% of participants also suggests that when solutions to conflicts cannot be found, individuals terminate the relationship and avoid the conflict all together. Professional development for both parents and teachers on effective conflict-resolution is needed (Henderson et al., 2007). Participants in Lake and Billingsley (2000) believed that conflicts could be prevented or minimized if parents and teachers possessed the knowledge and skills necessary to problem-solve and communicate effectively.

Challenging Parents

Participants described specific parent qualities or behaviors that further challenged the development of family-school partnerships. Participants described these parents as either “demanding” or “disengaged.” Demanding and disengaged parents represent the two extremes of parent involvement. Gibbs (2005) describes these parenting extremes as the over-involved and the under-involved (as cited in Epstein, 2011).

Disengaged parents were described as removed from all aspects of the educational process. Participants believed that these types of parents presented additional challenges to the family-school partnership because they did not share responsibility with teachers for their children’s success and seemed to refuse teacher efforts to involve them in educational processes.

Smith stated that there “are so many parents that aren’t a part of their kids’ education. They don’t help them with homework. They don’t encourage them.”

Demanding parents were more frequently discussed by participants. These parents used commands, force, or threats to obtain desired results for their students. Martin described them as “whack” parents. For example, Abel reported that her father was “one of about seven angry parents that walked up to the coach one day during practice...and said ‘Hey, before you determine who is in what category you need to at least have them show their ability.’” When the parents approached the coach, they did not calmly present their concerns, nor did they express their opinions privately. Rather, they told the coach what he needed to do, and they did so in the presence of students. Oliver stated that his mother yelled at the teacher she disagreed with during an annual IEP meeting. “She said she stood up and yelled at him.” Both of these cases illustrate the demanding manner in which parents sometimes communicate concerns.

Teacher participants suggested that they welcomed parent communication and wanted parents to openly discuss their concerns; however, they believed the manner in which parents approached schools was often problematic. For example, Odem reported that parents often want more communication from schools, but the manner in which they approach the school causes teachers to be distrustful.

I would say teachers become leery. They’re afraid almost to email sometimes... Because these are the same kind of parents that would file an OCR complaint, even though people are doing a whole bunch of things, because they’re not happy or we can’t make them happy. Or they bring in advocates to meetings and that can make some teachers a little nervous... Then teachers become very leery about “what should I be emailing,” “should we have everything go through the case manager to be safer,” “should I stop calling?” Whereas, without those kind of high demands, they may just continue to call that parent or email that parent, but then I think they pull back even more. (Odem).

The manner in which parents approach the school can often be interpreted as attacking, rude, and occurring at inappropriate times. This causes teachers to feel nervous, pressured, and tense.

Odem described the impact of demanding parents on teachers.

I think it's a *lot* of stress on them... They're also the ones filing the OCR complaints and doing things like that and you know, we can think 'Oh, well, it's not that big of a deal...' Well that's really scary when you're a teacher and you've never been through that kind of a legal process. I do think that is something that can really kind of weed teachers out of the profession because it is so stressful. I mean, I have seen a few teachers where either they're going home crying or they're just feeling really stressed... When parents like that move out of the district, people want to have a party. You can just see the relief. (Odem).

Teachers may avoid contact with these parents, feel like they are “walking on eggshells” around their children, and even leave the profession. It is unclear as to whether or not parents intentionally employ “scare tactics” to obtain desired outcomes for their children, but it is clear that the behaviors that are intended to support their students further isolate them and their students.

Ironically, though “demanding” parents created additional stress for teachers, participant responses suggested that these parent efforts were most effective in generating teacher response to concerns. When Abel's father, along with the other “seven angry parents,” confronted the coach about his division of varsity and junior varsity tennis players, the coach ultimately re-divided the teams and Abel was moved from the junior varsity squad to the varsity squad. Odem discussed one situation in which parent demands for constant communication with the school resulted in more meetings with school personnel than were typically provided for less demanding parents. On the other hand, the less-demanding advocacy efforts of Martin and Smith were largely unsuccessful. Martin reported that year after year she made the same requests of school personnel without seeing results, and Smith reported that she eventually sought the help of outside agencies because the school was unresponsive to her requests and concerns. Participant

experiences suggest that though demanding parents create stress and anxiety for teachers, they are ultimately more successful in obtaining desired results for their children. However, parents are likely unaware of the negative impact their demands have on family-school partnerships and, ultimately, their children. Teacher responsiveness to demanding parents and unresponsiveness to less demanding parents raises concern and may perpetuate the cycle of poor parent-teacher relationships.

Ultimately, the manner in which parents approach schools suggests that they lack the knowledge and skills to more appropriately advocate for their children. Though parents were often perceived by participants as demanding and attacking, their efforts to communicate with teachers were efforts to assist, support, and protect their children. This finding is supported by Henderson et al. (2007). They suggest that “problem parents” are “trying to be advocates, but they don’t know how to act constructively” (p. 151).

Sherwood was the only participant in the study who acknowledged that parent demands were well-intentioned efforts to advocate for their children. When asked what she wished the parents would have done differently to resolve the conflict, Sherwood stated:

As a parent...I think you have blinders on. You just see the good in your child and the best of your child and I don’t know that I would want them not to have seen that... So I don’t know that I would change anything necessarily. I’m glad we’ve been able to re-communicate and re-fix that communication... I’m glad they defended their kid, and in fact, they did try to work with their kid more because I would say things... They did their part as far as trying to help their child as opposed to doing nothing and then complaining their kid would be held back.

Sherwood supported and appreciated the advocacy efforts of the parent. She did not interpret the parent’s behavior as personal attacks or affronts, but rather, she interpreted the parent’s actions as her desire to support and assist her son. The willingness of teachers to accept parent “demands” as well-intentioned advocacy may play a role in their ability to respond to parent

concerns non-defensively and in a manner that supports partnership development. Henderson et al. (2007) caution teachers to remember that “an advocate is not an adversary” (p. 156).

Lack of Teacher Training

When asked about family-school partnerships, one teacher participant responded, “family-school partnerships? Should I know what that means?” The teacher’s lack of knowledge regarding family-school partnerships demonstrates that teachers are not adequately trained or prepared to build partnerships with families. All teacher participants reported that they received no formal training through their teacher education programs related to the establishment of family-school partnerships. They were neither trained to build relationships with families nor to effectively resolve conflicts with them. In fact, three teacher participants reported that family-school partnerships were not even discussed within their teacher preparation courses. All teachers reported that they received little to no assistance in this area until working with their cooperating teacher through student teaching. The failure of teacher preparation programs to adequately prepare teachers to partner with families suggests that teachers enter the workforce without the knowledge and skills necessary to work with families. Failure to address family-school partnerships in teacher preparation programs also communicates to beginning teachers that partnering with families is not a priority.

It seemed that school systems only further perpetuated this mindset. Sherwood was the only participant who reported having any formal training on family-school partnerships once employed as a teacher. This training was optional, and only two teachers from the district were asked to participate. Additionally, the efforts of the school district to implement partnership practices quickly discontinued after the training. The school attempted to cultivate family-school partnerships, but their lack of follow-through suggests that the school made short-term changes

in partnership practices without attitudinal and philosophical shifts in the value and purpose of partnering with families.

When asked about the partnership efforts of her school, Odem described parent involvement activities. Odem appeared to confuse parent involvement for family-school partnerships without understanding the fundamental differences that distinguish these two concepts. Failure to understand differences between parent involvement and family-school partnerships serves as an additional barrier to the formation of genuine partnerships with families (Epstein, 2011; Ferlazzo, 2005).

Best reported that the only training she received from her school system was related to managing hostile parents.

We talked about today things that we could do, and a lot of it was just like “well, just tell the parents ‘I’m not going to continue this conversation with you. When you are calm, I would be more than willing to have a conversation with you then. But right now, I don’t need to have this conversation or this conversation needs to stop.’” So it was more of just that kind of thing. But I don’t deal well with confrontation, so I don’t know how much that little speech today is truly going to help in those situations. (Best).

The conversation described by Best does not reflect training on how to build partnerships with families, but rather, how to immediately respond to angry parents. This represents a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to working with families, and it does not provide teachers with the knowledge or skills necessary to form proactive relationships with families that foster genuine partnerships. Best believed that training on how to effectively partner with families would be helpful for teachers.

If we would have been given training... it would help *so* much more. It would probably feel like I don’t need my process coordinator with me as much as I do. Because obviously I know the laws, and I know what is required of me and what is required in the documents that we provide... but sometimes because I don’t talk in legal jargon, finding a way to tell the parents “no” or “that’s not what we do” or “this is why” can be a little bit difficult without messing up my relationship with the parent. (Best).

As identified by Christenson (2004), some of the barriers to effective family-school partnerships are related to educator's lack of knowledge and skills about how to establish quality partnerships with families. Teachers want parents to contribute to their learning in meaningful ways, yet they do not understand how to work collaboratively with families (Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007). Thus, school leaders and school staff need professional development opportunities related to family-school partnerships (Christenson, 2004; Epstein, 2011; Gordon, 2012; Smith et al., 2006) and overcoming conflict to effectively work with families (Cornille et al., 1999). Through appropriate training, educators may learn the value and importance of family-school partnerships. They may gain the knowledge necessary to foster partnerships with families, and they may gain confidence in their abilities to successfully collaborate with families when challenges exist. Additional information related to teacher training is provided below.

Recommendations for Practice

Teacher training.

Teacher participants in the study reported that they were not trained to build relationships with families or to resolve conflict with them. This type of training is necessary for teachers, particularly when they are faced with challenging parents that make demands or disengage from educational processes. The responsibility to incorporate teacher training in family-school partnership first lays with teacher preparation programs. It is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to equip beginning teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to help students succeed, and the knowledge and skills needed by teachers extend beyond curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. Teachers need to have a comprehensive understanding of family-school partnerships. They need to understand the multi-faceted nature of family-school partnerships and how these partnerships impact students. They also need to

understand how to build these relationships with families, the challenges that exist to their development, and strategies for overcoming these challenges. Failure to provide this type of training is a disservice to parents, students, and teachers.

Epstein (2011) believes that to provide teachers with the skills necessary to effectively partner with families, undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs must make significant changes. She suggests that teacher and administrator preparation programs require at least one course on family-school partnerships, provide more specific guidelines on course content, and increase teacher education faculty to meet the demands of added courses and content. Epstein's recommendation provides a starting point for teacher preparation programs. A required course ensures that every teacher entering the field has been exposed to family-school partnerships. It also communicates to beginning teachers that family-school partnerships are important.

Epstein (2011) also provides specific recommendations related to course content. She recommends that courses on family-school partnerships include the following: theoretical perspectives, research, effective policies and practices, and organizational strategies. Three findings from the study are utilized to provide further suggestions on the content of family-school partnership courses. These findings include: the lack of agreement regarding the most important qualities of family-school partnerships, the need for improved communication between parents and teachers, and challenging parents. The first finding from this study revealed that teachers, parents, and students understand many of the necessary qualities of family-school partnerships, but their perceptions of the most important qualities of partnerships vary significantly. Course content on family-school partnerships needs to provide teacher candidates

with a universal understanding of the qualities of family-school partnerships and how these qualities work together to develop positive relationships with families.

Participants' belief that improved communication between parents and teachers is needed and their identification of parent qualities that challenge partnership development suggest that course content should also equip teachers with improved communication skills and strategies to work with challenging parents. Training teacher candidates on the attending, listening, and responding skills that are utilized in counselor-training programs is a recommendation for course content that would address these areas of needed improvement.

As discussed in the "Failure to Resolve Conflicts" section, beginning counselors are trained to work with challenging clients. Sommers-Flanigan and Sommers-Flanigan (2012) devote an entire chapter of their book on clinical interviewing to challenging clients and demanding situations. In this chapter, the authors discuss their experiences with challenging clients.

We've had some clients refuse to be alone in the room with us, others who refuse to speak, a few who have entered the room but insisted on standing, and many who tell us with great disdain (and sometimes with exuberant and creative profanity) that they do not believe in counseling. (Sommers-Flanigan & Sommers-Flanigan, 2012, p. 312).

Sommers-Flannigan and Sommers-Flannigan refer to this type of client behavior as "natural resistance," and counselors-in-training are taught to expect this type of resistance as a normal part of the therapeutic process.

Counselors are further trained to refrain from personalizing these "attacks" so as not to become defensive of them. When clients question, confront, or acknowledge their displeasure with the counselor or counseling process, it is accepted as part of the therapeutic process.

Accepting natural resistance as part of the therapeutic process allows counselors to avoid the internalization of client statements, to react non-defensively to client statements, and to remain

focused on the client and therapeutic goals. Counselors-in-training are also taught specific skills and techniques to overcome natural resistance so that the therapeutic relationship is strengthened and progress toward goals is made.

Counselors are prepared to work with challenging clients, yet teachers encounter challenging parents without preparation. Training teachers in the attending, listening, and responding skills that are utilized in counseling settings is one recommendation that could improve teachers' ability to effectively partner with families, particularly in the presence of conflict. Attending and listening skills are the techniques and strategies employed to fully attend to client dialogue, reflect understanding of messages, and build rapport with clients. They are used to improve communication with clients, establish relationships, and they often help overcome client resistance (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2012). An in-depth discussion of these attending, listening, and responding skills is outside the scope of this study; however, one example of a listening skill and how it can be utilized in an educational context is briefly described in the following paragraph.

One listening response often used in counseling is reflection. Cormier, Nurius, and Osborn (2009) define reflection as rephrasing the client's affective message, and they identify several purposes of reflection. Some of these purposes include: encouraging clients to freely discuss their feelings, overcoming negative feelings of the client toward the counselor and counseling process, and helping clients feel understood. "When a client becomes angry or upset with the helper or with the help being offered, there is a tendency for the helper to take the client's remarks personally and become defensive" (Cormier et al., 2009, p. 107). The use of reflection prevents counselors from responding defensively, and it diffuses the client's anger by

validating his or her feelings. Reflection is one example of a useful tool that could be used by teachers to build relationships with parents and diffuse potential conflicts.

To clarify, the recommendation is to train teachers in attending skills and nondirective listening responses that could help teachers establish positive relationships with parents. It is not to train them in more directive listening responses or therapeutic techniques that are specifically designed to create and facilitate the therapeutic process. However, by providing teachers training on basic attending, listening, and responding skills, teachers could learn the communication skills necessary to build rapport with parents, to effectively respond to parent concerns, and to create a positive working relationship with parents. A simple recognition in teacher preparation programs that teachers will encounter resistant or challenging parents may go a long way in defusing potential conflicts. Rather than viewing angry or challenging parents as personally attacking, teachers may begin to understand that this is an expected aspect of educational processes. Negative parent-teacher interactions can be opportunities for relationship-building and partnership development, and the effective use of attending and listening skills could be the first step in transforming conflict and anger into rapport and trust.

It is also the responsibility of school districts to adequately train their staff on family-school partnerships. Professional development plans should incorporate topics related to family-school partnerships, such as how to build relationships with families, how to work with challenging families, and how to improve communication between families and school. Family structures and educational mandates are constantly changing, and research on family-school partnerships is constantly expanding. It is not enough for teachers to receive family-school partnership training in their preparation programs, but they must also have professional development opportunities once employed as a teacher. This professional development would

ensure that teachers have the latest strategies for working with families that are reflective of current family and school needs.

Parent advocacy.

The demanding and disengaged parents identified by participants suggest that improved parent advocacy skills are needed, and educators play a role in equipping parents with this knowledge. According to Henderson et al. (2007), schools need to “work with families, teachers, and other staff so that they can understand what it means to be an advocate, develop and use their advocacy skills, and learn how to resolve a problem” (p. 152). “Without good guidance, the under-involved wait for information and the over-involved set their own agendas, whether their actions benefit their children or not” (Epstein, 2011, p. 57).

Walker, Shenker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2010) recommend that school personnel assist parents in developing the skills necessary to successfully partner with schools. They suggest preparing parents to recognize and appropriately respond to school invitations for partnerships. Schools can accomplish this goal by sending home informational fact sheets, offering workshops on partnerships, and sending personalized invitations for partnerships (Walker et al., 2010). Martin suggested that parent education may be a way to prevent or deter conflicts between families and schools, and she believed that, as mediators between parents and teachers, school administration should provide this training.

Henderson et al. (2007) suggest that schools can support parent advocacy by: having a clear, proactive process for addressing problems; contacting families monthly to discuss student progress; and holding routine student-led conferences. They further recommend that parent programs provide families with an understanding of what students are learning at school, encourage high expectations, help parents learn the skills necessary to help their students at

home, teach parents to recognize good teaching, and facilitate discussions on improving student progress.

Administrative support through partnership programs and policies.

One of the specific roles of school leaders involves the development, implementation, and enforcement of school partnership policies (Christenson, 2004). School leaders must spur efforts to establish policies related to the establishment of effective family-school partnerships, and they must oversee the successful implementation of such policies and mandates. Research has demonstrated that even when school policies exist related to family-school partnerships, efforts to enforce them are nonexistent (Gordon, 2012). This lack of policy follow-through communicates to stakeholders that partnerships are only valued at a superficial level, and the creation of genuine partnerships with families is not a priority.

District and school leaders are the catalyst of school transformation through the development and consistent implementation of family-school partnership policies. Only one parent participant addressed the important role that policy plays in educational decisions and reform. None of the teacher participants mentioned the need for policies related to family-school partnership. It is as if they desired family-school partnerships without understanding or recognizing the underlying, systemic changes that could support partnership efforts. Research has demonstrated that schools often have policies related to the involvement of parents in the educational process, but these policies are stated vaguely and are not enforced (Gordon, 2012). According to Epstein (2011), “good policy is the first step on the path to partnerships” (p. 312). Policies are needed that not only address partnerships with families, but that also support the advocacy efforts of parents (Henderson et al., 2007).

The current gap between policy and practice suggests that district leaders must hold principals accountable for prioritizing the family-school partnership and clearly communicating this priority to building personnel. Gordon (2012) found that even when school administrators valued the importance of family-school partnerships and modeled partnership behaviors (such as open communication, accessibility, and visibility), there was no follow-through on the part of building principals to establish and maintain effective partnerships with families. When principals support partnership efforts within the school, partnership efforts are more effective and the partnership programs are of higher quality (Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). This necessitates the commitment of both district and building leaders to family-school partnership efforts.

Principals serve many specific functions related to the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. According to Christenson et al. (2009), principals should model partnership attitudes and behaviors, constructively approach and manage conflict, establish partnerships as a school priority, and create a welcoming environment for families. Principals set the foundation for this type of partnership by refusing to blame parents for problems, encouraging parent input, working collaboratively with families to solve problems, establishing ongoing opportunities for two-way communication with families, and demonstrating an understanding of parent perspectives (Christenson). As Best and Martin indicated, teacher demands are great; thus, administrative support of family-school partnerships requires the allowance of time and resources for teachers to effectively partner with families.

According to Epstein (2011), the school leader's role involves the development of an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). The purpose of the ATP is to assess current partnership practices and policies, plan for new partnership options, implement identified partnership

activities, delegate partnership responsibilities, monitor partnership efforts, and continue partnership improvements. Along with the ATP, the school leader's role is to secure funds and support for partnership programs, identify immediate partnership concerns and needed actions, create a one-year plan for partnership activities, and engage in ongoing evaluation and planning of partnership activities (Epstein).

School leaders must also take the lead in changing how educators and families handle conflict. Many barriers specifically related to conflict between families and educators prevent the formation of effective partnerships. These barriers include: communicating only when conflicts or crises occur; avoidance of communication for fear of conflict; adherence to a win-lose mindset when conflicts arise; failure to understand varying perceptions regarding a student's abilities; failure to empathize with the other party; and, personalizing the behavior of the other party when conflicts exist (Christenson, 2004). These barriers indicate that the establishment of effective family-school partnership requires a change in the management of conflict between families and educators, and school leaders are responsible for initiating this change. Instead of dealing with the problem of the moment, school leaders must establish mutually supportive relationships with families that continually address student progress and concerns, and they must provide their staff with the knowledge and tools necessary to foster these relationships (Christenson). When families and educators "adopt a collaborative stance and make the relationship a priority, [it] allow[s] school personnel and parents to ask the question, even when differing perspectives are apparent: How can we work together to address a concern, shared goal, or promote the learning competence of a student?" (Christenson, p. 95). When parents know that their ideas and concerns are genuinely heard by the school and when both parties listen and

accept feedback from one another, disagreements are managed without escalating into major problems (Henderson et al., 2007).

Recommendations for Research

Impact of student-parent relationships.

When discussing Kindle's experience with discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities, Kindle briefly mentioned that the mother she disagreed with also had relational difficulties with her daughter. Examination of student-parent relationships and their impact on family-school partnerships was outside the scope of this study. However, this is a recommended area of future research. It is possible that parent-student relationships may influence the quality of relationships between parents and teachers or that parent-teacher relationships may influence parent-student relationships. Understanding the possible reciprocal role of parent-student and parent-teacher relationships may provide insights for educators and parents that can strengthen all relationships.

Gender differences.

Most studies on parent perceptions utilize mothers as the sole or primary informants. Father participants are rarely included. The present study relied on data obtained largely from female participants, and descriptions of parent experiences were obtained solely from female participants. Yet, findings from Shin et al. (2008) suggest that fathers may vary from mothers in their perceptions of their children's abilities. They further suggest that agreement between mothers and teachers in relation to student abilities is greater than the agreement between fathers and teachers. Thus, it is possible that males may experience discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities differently than females. Gender differences in family-school

partnership development and incorporation of male perspectives on discrepant parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities are recommended areas of future research.

Parent advocacy.

Many parents approach the school demanding results; whereas, many other parents avoid school interactions all together. Other parents respectfully approach the school to discuss their concerns. Though there are clear variations in how parents approach the school, reasons for these variations are not identified in the present study. Do parents make demands of teachers because these demands are successful in obtaining desired results? Do parents avoid the school because of a lack of positive experiences with schools? How does parental mental illness impact parent advocacy efforts and the family-school partnership? Are there personality differences that account for different approaches to parent advocacy? Are parental advocacy efforts influenced by the extent to which parents believe the teacher and school cares about the student? Or are approaches to parent advocacy representative of participants' general approaches to conflict-resolution?

A review of the literature revealed that most parent advocacy resources are related primarily to efforts aimed at obtaining specific programs or services for students. For example, many parent advocacy resources targeted gifted education, special education, and the arts. Information related to how parents can effectively support the general education of students was more difficult to find. Understanding the factors that influence parent advocacy efforts, as well as the general manner in which parents support students, are recommended areas of future research. This understanding may provide insights for parents and educators that could improve parent advocacy efforts and support family-school partnerships. It could also shed light on

school behaviors that may influence parent advocacy efforts. This knowledge could help schools increase school behaviors that support positive parent advocacy efforts.

Partnering in extreme situations.

Educators are called to establish partnerships with all families, yet there are parents that pose unique and extreme challenges to partnership development. According to Odem, there is a certain population of parents that is impossible to please. She referred to this population as the “1%.”

I think it is rare, but it is the same in any other business, education isn't any different, where you are going to have a few people, maybe 1%, that you're never, ever going to make happy – no matter what you do.... I think part of it is just ingrained in their personality. Look what a big percentage of the population has a mental illness. They're bi-polar. They have things like that. Then you have parents that maybe aren't on their meds or have been that way since forever and that's how they deal with life. They're not going to change how they deal with us in the schools. Some people are just very angry. I've had a couple of parents over the many, many years that never let go of the anger that their child was the way they were, that they had a disability, which is really sad, but to me that is more of a personality disorder or a really significant problem on the parent's part. I think your “normal, healthy person” can usually be brought in and fences can be mended. (Odem).

Kindle also seemed to believe there were no answers to working with some parents. When asked what she wished the parent would have done differently to resolve the conflict, Kindle stated, “I don't know because I think she's crazy.”

The reality is an estimated 57.7 million American adults (one in four) suffer from a mental illness within a given year (National Institute of Mental Health), 3.1 million individuals participate in illicit drug use (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and 18 million people suffer from alcohol dependence or abuse (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism). Many of these individuals are also the parents of our students. Working with these parents poses unique challenges to partnership development. For example, as mandated reporters, educators must protect the wellbeing of children by reporting suspicions of child abuse

or neglect. They must also work to establish partnerships with the parents that they have reported. Though this circumstance represents an extreme challenge to partnership development, it is a reality faced by educators. The literature currently provides little guidance on how to establish partnerships and resolve conflicts with these parents. This is a recommended area of future research.

Partnering in athletic contexts.

Kindle was the only teacher participant who discussed her experiences with divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities from a coaching perspective. Abel discussed one experience with divergent parent and teacher perceptions related to participation in varsity athletics. The present study does not identify differences that may exist between family-school partnerships in classroom settings and family-school partnerships in athletic contexts. It is plausible that differences in the purposes and nature of athletics may present challenges to the family-school partnership that are not present within the classroom. For example, in classroom settings, the goals and success of individual students are independent of each other. The success of one student does not limit the opportunities for success of another student, nor do the goals of one student interfere with the achievement of another student's goals. However, in athletic contexts, this is often not the case. Students are often competing for positions and playing time on sports team. It may be every student's goal to receive a starting spot on the varsity team, but obviously, not all of these goals can be realized.

These situations may present unique challenges for coaches. How can coaches share common goals with parents and students when these goals may jeopardize the goals of other students and parents? How do they participate in shared decision-making when the decisions of the parent may hinder the success of the team? How can coaches incorporate parent input when

this input may not represent the best interest of the team? Coaches are also unique because they must work with students and families in both an athletic and classroom context, and challenges that present themselves in one setting are likely to affect the parent-teacher-student relationship in the other. The uniqueness of athletic contexts and the challenges they may present to family-school partnership development is not explored in this study. However, it is a recommended area of future research. A search of the keywords “family-school partnerships” and “athletics” or “sports” on the databases ProQuest®, ERIC®, Ebsco®, and Google® Scholar yielded no results related to partnering with parents in sports-related contexts. Research on family-school partnerships in athletics could provide insights for coaches that might help them work effectively with parents and their student-athletes.

Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance was the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. The goals of this study were to understand the overall essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge, to understand the perceived impact of these divergent beliefs on students and the family-school partnership, and to gain insights from these experiences that will help build effective family-school partnerships, even in the presence of conflict. These goals were accomplished through a qualitative investigation of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge.

Analysis of data collected from 10 in-depth interviews with students, parents, and teachers revealed five themes and one subtheme related to discrepant parent and teacher

perceptions of student abilities. These themes included: family-school partnership qualities, impressionability of student attitudes, failure to resolve conflicts, challenging parents, and lack of teacher training. Communication was included as a subtheme of family-school partnership qualities. Exploration of these themes described the overall essence of participant experiences.

Participants identified family-school partnership qualities that are consistent with those presented in the literature, but they lacked agreement on the qualities of family-school partnerships considered most important. Participants also desired improved communication between parents and teachers, and they recognized several aspects of communication that could improve family-school partnerships. Participants spoke directly about the impact of divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities on students and the family-school partnership. They identified the impressionability of student attitudes and the failure to resolve conflicts as perceived outcomes of the conflict. Additionally, participants believed that demanding and disengaged parents presented additional challenges to partnership development, and teacher participants reported that they were not adequately trained to foster family-school partnerships.

The experiences of parents, teachers, and students in this study provided insights that may help educators and parents build partnerships that can sustain conflict. Conflicts are inevitable in any relationship, but strong partnerships can ensure that they are successfully managed and resolved. “Good partnerships encourage questions and debates, and withstand disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained – even strengthened – after conflicts and differences have been resolved” (Epstein, 2011, p. 393). Ultimately, family-school partnerships are about maximizing student opportunities for success. When both parents and teachers learn to improve their partnership efforts and students remain at

the heart of all relationships, family-school partnerships can be preserved – even in the presence of conflict.

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Appendix A

Issues Related to Divergent Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Student Abilities Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study titled "The perceived influence of divergent parent and teacher perceptions regarding student abilities on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships: The experiences of parents, teachers, and high school students." This research is being conducted by Kara A. Lasater (University of Arkansas). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate, or stop participating at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to describe the experiences of teachers, parents, and high school students when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge; of particular importance is the perceived influence of these divergent accounts on students and the establishment of effective family-school partnerships. This study may influence the quality of family-school relationships established, as well as help maximize academic success for all students.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I may be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Be personally interviewed up to 3 times, with each audio-taped interview lasting approximately 90 minutes.
- 2) Answer via telephone or e-mail any follow-up questions the researcher may have.
- 4) Review interview transcripts and findings for accuracy.

I will not receive any monetary compensation for participation in this study. Any compensation I receive is in the form of perceived benefit from possible feedback and insight gained by reviewing the said recordings. I understand that I may be asked to discuss sensitive topics and difficult subject matter; however, it is believed that the benefits of participating in this study outweigh any potential risks.

Information collected will be stored in a secure, locked location. Unless required by law, no individually identifiable information about me will be publicly disseminated. Participants and their districts will be provided pseudonyms, and all persons or places to which they refer will also be pseudonymized. Where details might allow outsiders to intuit identities, such details will be removed or changed. Interviews will be transcribed by the researcher, thus ensuring confidentiality. Records of participant names will be kept in a separate file from any other documents. Audio files will be stored on the secured computer in the researcher's office in Lockwood, Missouri. Only the researcher will have access to these files. Audio files will be destroyed through magnetic erasure methods after five years in December 2016. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research now or during the course of the project.

I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

For questions about your rights as a research participant please call or write:

Iroshi Windwalker

Compliance Coordinator, 210 Administration Building, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701

Telephone (479)575-2208

E-mail Address irb@uark.edu

December 1, 2011

Name of Researcher: Kara A. Lasater

Researcher's Signature: _____

Researcher's Telephone: (417) 276-9444

Researcher's Email: karalaser@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor: John Pijanowski

Advisor's Email: jpijanow@uark.edu

Name of Subject: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B
Personal Data Sheet

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Highest Level of Education: _____

Job Title (if applicable): _____

Annual Family Income: _____

Years in School System of Interest: _____

Appendix C

Student Interview Protocol Student Experiences (#1)

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: *“This is Kara Lasater. Today is [day and date]. It is [time], and I am in [location] with [interviewee], the [title] of [institution]. We will be discussing personal experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.”*

1. Tell me about your educational background.
 - Current grade level
 - Schools attended
 - Favorite subject
 - Least favorite subjects
 - Special services received
 - Extra-curricular activities
2. Overall, how would you describe your educational experiences?
Prompts: Tell me more about that, describe what you mean
3. Throughout this interview, we will be discussing a situation in which your parents and teachers disagreed about your abilities. For the purpose of this interview, I will refer to the school(s) in which the disagreement occurred as the school of interest. In as much detail as possible, please describe the school of interest.
Prompts: Size of school, size of district, staff, diversity, location, culture, climate, etc.
4. Tell me about your family make-up.
 - Parents (including marriages, divorces, etc.)
 - Siblings
 - People currently living in home
 - Other significant family members
 - Relationships with parents
 - Relationships with siblings
5. I am interested in learning more about effective family-school partnerships. When I talk about family-school partnerships, I am referring to the way in which families and schools work together to help students succeed. In your opinion, what would good family-school partnerships look like?
6. How would you describe the quality of family-school partnerships in your school?
Prompts: value of family-school partnerships; how family-school partnerships are fostered by schools; how your parents promote family-school partnerships
7. What messages did you receive from your parents regarding school?
8. What messages did you receive from your parents about your school-related abilities?
Prompts: strengths, weaknesses, value of school, perception of teachers, expectations
9. What messages did you receive from teachers regarding school?

10. What messages did you receive from teachers regarding your school-related abilities?
Prompts: strengths, weaknesses, value of school, expectations
11. Tell me about an experience in which your parents and teachers disagreed about your abilities? Or tell me about a situation in which you received varying messages from your parents and teachers regarding your school-related abilities?
Prompts: subject of divergence; how divergence was communicated to student; student's reaction to divergence
12. Describe the quality of family-school partnership between your parents and school prior to the disagreement about your abilities? What was your parents' relationship with the school prior to the disagreement?
Prompts: how frequently did your parents communicate with the school; how involved were they in educational decisions, etc.
13. Describe the quality of family-school partnership between your parents and school after the disagreement about your abilities?
Prompts: how frequently did your parents communicate with the school; how involved were they in educational decisions, etc.
14. In what ways, if any, were you impacted by these varying messages about your abilities?
Prompts: Tell me more about that, describe what you mean
15. What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe these varying messages regarding your abilities will have on you?
Prompts: How do you think these varying messages might affect you in the future?
16. What are your self-perceptions of your abilities?
Prompts: strengths, weaknesses, confidence in abilities
17. Do you believe your self-perceptions were influenced by your teachers' or parents' perceptions? If so, in what way(s)?
18. What, do you believe, are the reasons that your parents and teachers' perceptions of your abilities or performance differed?
19. Do you believe the conflict between your parent(s) and teacher(s) influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)?
20. Have your parents experienced other conflicts with teachers regarding your abilities? If so, how frequently?
 - a. In what ways were these conflicts similar to the one described above?
 - b. In what ways were these conflicts different from the one described above?
21. In general, what messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?
22. In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent or differing parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
23. How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of student abilities differ?
 - a) What, if anything, do you wish the school would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - b) What, if anything, do you wish your parents would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
24. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?

25. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?
26. What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Teachers Teacher Experiences (#1)

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: *“This is Kara Lasater. Today is [day and date]. It is [time], and I am in [location] with [interviewee], the [title] of [institution]. We will be discussing personal experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.”*

1. Tell me about your experience in education.
 - Positions held & total years of experience
 - Current position & years
 - Degrees & certifications
 - Additional responsibilities
2. Tell me about your interactions with parents as an educator.
Prompts: Tell me more about that, describe what you mean
3. How would you define effective family-school partnerships?
4. How would you describe the quality of family-school partnerships in your school?
Prompts: Value of family-school partnerships; how family-school partnerships are fostered by schools; how do you promote family-school partnerships
5. What role, if any, do your perceptions of a student’s abilities have on the student?
6. Throughout this interview, we will be discussing a situation in which you disagreed with a parent regarding a student’s abilities. For the purpose of this interview, I will refer to the school(s) as the school of interest. In as much detail as possible, please describe the school of interest.
Prompts: Size of school, size of district, staff, diversity, location, culture, climate, etc.
7. Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a parent regarding his or her child’s abilities.
Prompts: Specific areas of disagreement; who first communicated the disagreement and how was it communicated
 - a. What was your perception of this student’s abilities?
 - b. How did your perception differ from the parent’s perception?
 - c. How did you handle this disagreement?
 - d. Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between the school and this parent prior to the disagreement.
 - e. Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between the school and this parent after the disagreement.
 - f. What, if anything, do you wish the parent would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - g. What, if anything, do you wish you would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
8. What immediate impact, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on the student?

Prompts: specific outcomes for students (academically, self-perceptions, attitude toward school, attitude toward teachers, attitude toward parents, behaviorally, emotionally, socially, etc.)

9. What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on the student?

Prompts: How might this disagreement affect the student in the future?

10. What, do you believe, are the reasons that your perceptions and the parents' perceptions of the student's abilities or performance differed?
11. What, if anything, have you learned from this experience?
12. Do you believe the conflict between the parents and you influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)?
13. Have you experienced other conflicts with parents regarding their children's abilities? If so, how frequently? Describe these experiences.
 - a. In what ways were these conflicts similar to the one described above?
 - b. In what ways were these conflicts different from the one described above?
14. What messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?
15. In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
16. How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of students' abilities differ?
17. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?
18. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?
19. What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol for Parents Parent Experiences (#1)

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: *“This is Kara Lasater. Today is [day and date]. It is [time], and I am in [location] with [interviewee], the [title] of [institution]. We will be discussing personal experiences related to divergent parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities.”*

1. Tell me about your occupational background.
 - Occupations held & total years of experience
 - Current position & years
 - Certifications & special skills
2. Tell me about your educational background.
 - Highest level of education completed
 - Schools attended
 - Degrees held
3. Overall, how would you describe your educational experiences?
Prompts: Tell me more about that, describe what you mean
4. Tell me about your family make-up.
 - Children and ages
 - Marriage(s)
 - People currently living in home
 - Other significant family members
 - Family members attending school
5. Throughout this interview, we will be discussing a situation in which you disagreed with a teacher regarding your child’s abilities. For the purpose of this interview, I will refer to the school your child attended at the time the disagreement occurred as the school of interest. In as much detail as possible, please describe the school of interest.
Prompts: Size of school, size of district, staff, diversity, location, culture, climate, etc.
6. Tell me about your interactions with educators as a parent.
Prompts: frequency of communication, quality of relationships established, nature/subject of communications
7. I am interested in learning more about effective family-school partnerships. When I talk about family-school partnerships, I am referring to the way in which families and schools work together to help students succeed. In your opinion, what would good family-school partnerships look like?
8. How would you describe the quality of family-school partnerships in your child(ren)’s school(s)?
Prompts: value of family-school partnerships; how family-school partnerships are fostered by schools; how do you promote family-school partnerships
9. What role, if any, do your perceptions of a student’s abilities have on the student?

10. Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a teacher regarding your child's abilities.
Prompts: specific areas of disagreement; who first communicated the disagreement and how was it communicated
- a. What was your perception of your child's abilities?
 - b. How did your perception differ from the teacher's perception?
 - c. How did you know that your perception was different from that of the teacher's?
 - d. How did you handle this disagreement?
 - e. Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between you and the school prior to the disagreement.
 - f. Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between you and the school after the disagreement.
 - g. What, if anything, do you wish the school would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - h. What, if anything, do you wish you would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
11. What immediate impact, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on your child?
Prompts: specific outcomes for students (academically, self-perceptions, attitude toward school, attitude toward teachers, attitude toward parents, behaviorally, emotionally, socially, etc.)
12. What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on your child?
Prompts: How might this disagreement affect your child in the future?
13. What, do you believe, are the reasons that your perceptions and the teacher's perceptions of your child's abilities or performance differed?
14. What, if anything, did you learn from this experience?
15. Do you believe the conflict between the teachers and you influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)? Describe these experiences.
16. Have you experienced other conflicts with teachers regarding your child(ren)'s abilities? If so, how frequently?
- a. In what ways were these conflicts similar to the one described above?
 - b. In what ways were these conflicts different from the one described above?
17. What messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?
18. In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
19. How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of students' abilities differ?
20. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?
21. Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?
22. What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Appendix F

Teacher Follow-Up Protocol

In your teacher preparation program, were you taught:

- How to build effective family-school partnerships? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How to resolve conflicts with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How to establish or reestablish trust with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- To proactively establish relationships with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How useful did you find the training in these areas?

Has your school ever provided professional development or training on:

- How to build effective family-school partnerships? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How to resolve conflicts with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How to establish or reestablish trust with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- Proactively establishing relationships with parents? If so, what were you taught and how?
- How useful did you find the training in these areas?

Who is responsible for initiating family-school partnerships?

Appendix G

Research Question 1: What is the essence of parent, teacher, and student experiences when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?

Student Interview Questions:

- What messages did you receive from your parents regarding school?
- What messages did you receive from your parents about your school-related abilities?
- What messages did you receive from teachers regarding school?
- What messages did you receive from teachers regarding your school-related abilities?
- Tell me about an experience in which your parents and teachers disagreed about your abilities? Or tell me about a situation in which you received varying messages from your parents and teachers regarding your school-related abilities?
- What, do you believe, are the reasons that your parents and teachers' perceptions of your abilities or performance differed?
- In general, what messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?
- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?

Teacher Interview Questions:

- Tell me about your interactions with parents as an educator.
- What role, if any, do your perceptions of a student's abilities have on the student?
- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a parent regarding his or her child's abilities.
 - What was your perception of this student's abilities?
 - How did your perception differ from the parent's perception?
 - How did you handle this disagreement?
- What, do you believe, are the reasons that your perceptions and the parents' perceptions of the student's abilities or performance differed?
- What messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?
- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?

Parent Interview Questions:

- Tell me about your interactions with educators as a parent.
- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a teacher regarding your child's abilities.
 - What was your perception of your child's abilities?
 - How did your perception differ from the teacher's perception?
 - How did you know that your perception was different from that of the teacher's?
 - How did you handle this disagreement?
- What messages do you believe students receive when parents and teachers disagree about their abilities?

- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand what is experienced when parents and teachers disagree about a student's abilities?

Research Question 2: What are the perceived outcomes for students and the family-school partnership when parent and teacher perceptions of student abilities diverge?

Student Interview Questions:

- Describe the quality of family-school partnership between your parents and school prior to the disagreement about your abilities? What was your parents' relationship with the school prior to the disagreement?
- Describe the quality of family-school partnership between your parents and school after the disagreement about your abilities?
- In what ways, if any, were you impacted by these varying messages about your abilities?
- What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe these varying messages regarding your abilities will have on you?
- Do you believe your self-perceptions were influenced by your teachers' or parents' perceptions? If so, in what way(s)?
- Do you believe the conflict between your parent(s) and teacher(s) influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)?
- In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent or differing parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?

Teacher Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a parent regarding his or her child's abilities.
 - Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between the school and this parent prior to the disagreement.
 - Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between the school and this parent after the disagreement.
- What immediate impact, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on the student?
- What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on the student?
- Do you believe the conflict between the parents and you influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)?
- In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?

Parent Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a teacher regarding your child's abilities.
 - Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between you and the school prior to the disagreement.
 - Describe the quality of family-school partnership established between you and the school after the disagreement.
- What immediate impact, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on your child?
- What long-term consequences, if any, do you believe this disagreement had on your child?
- Do you believe the conflict between the teachers and you influenced the quality of family-school partnership established? If so, in what way(s)? Describe these experiences.
- In general, how do you think students are impacted, both immediately and long-term, by divergent parent and teacher perceptions of their abilities?
- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how the conflict between parents and teachers regarding a student's abilities influences the establishment of effective family-school partnerships?

Research Question 3: What changes can be made in practice and policy that will help parents and teachers overcome discrepant perceptions of student abilities to build effective family-school partnerships?

Student Interview Questions:

- I am interested in learning more about effective family-school partnerships. When I talk about family-school partnerships, I am referring to the way in which families and schools work together to help students succeed. In your opinion, what would good family-school partnerships look like?
- How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of student abilities differ?
 - What, if anything, do you wish the school would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - What, if anything, do you wish your parents would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
- What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Teacher Interview Questions:

- How would you define effective family-school partnerships?
- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a parent regarding his or her child's abilities.
 - What, if anything, do you wish the parent would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - What, if anything, do you wish you would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
- What, if anything, have you learned from this experience?

- How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of students' abilities differ?
- What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Parent Interview Questions:

- I am interested in learning more about effective family-school partnerships. When I talk about family-school partnerships, I am referring to the way in which families and schools work together to help students succeed. In your opinion, what would good family-school partnerships look like?
- Tell me about a situation in which you disagreed with a teacher regarding your child's abilities.
 - What, if anything, do you wish the school would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
 - What, if anything, do you wish you would have done differently to resolve the conflict?
- What, if anything, did you learn from this experience?
- How do you think parents and teachers should handle situations in which their perceptions of students' abilities differ?
- What advice do you have that could help parents and teachers resolve conflicts to establish effective family-school partnerships?

Appendix H

Date:	
Time:	
Participant:	
<i>Observation (Running Record)</i>	<i>Observer's Comments</i>

Appendix I

Definitions of Themes and Codes

Administrative support – support for family-school partnerships at the administrative level, including building, district, board, and policy support

Anxiety and self-doubt – feelings of stress or doubt that occurred as a result of the conflict between parents and teachers regarding the student’s abilities

Caring teachers – teachers who demonstrated concern for students and a willingness to help

Challenging parents – demanding or disengaged parents that posed additional challenges to the development of family-school partnerships

Compromise and flexibility – the willingness of parents or teachers to make adjustments to personal desires or practices so that a mutual agreement between parents and teachers could be achieved

Continued negative interactions – harmful communication, attitudes, or behaviors between parents and teachers that occurred after the discrepancy regarding the student’s abilities was initially addressed

Demanding parents – parents who used commands, force, or threats to obtain desired results for their students

Differential treatment – changes in teacher behavior toward students after the conflict between parents and teachers regarding the student’s abilities occurred

Disengaged parents – parents who are removed from all aspects of the educational process

Early communication – communication between parents and teachers that occurred as soon as a problem was identified

Follow-through – completion of agreed upon tasks or actions

Frequent communication – communication between parents and teachers that occurred often

Lack of teacher training – failure of teachers to receive training in family-school partnerships or effective conflict-resolution with families in either their teacher preparation programs or on-site professional development

Listening – willingness of parents, students, or teachers to hear and attend to the needs or concerns of the other parties

Negative perceptions of teachers – poor attitudes of students toward teachers that resulted from the conflict between parents and teachers regarding their abilities

On-site professional development – learning opportunities related to family-school partnerships provided by the school(s) in which teachers were employed

Open communication – communication between parents and teachers that occurred freely

Parent advocacy – efforts of parents to support their students' educational progress

Partnership attitude – participants' approach to and attitude toward family-school partnerships, as well as their willingness to engage in partnerships

Perspective-taking – the willingness and ability of parents or teachers to understand the position of the other party, including their wants, needs, concerns, and constraints

Positive communication – messages between parents, teachers, and students that were encouraging, helpful, or optimistic

Proactive relationship – the establishment of parent-teacher relationships before a conflict or problem exists

Respect – valuing the other party and treating him or her with acceptance and courtesy

Shared decision-making – the willingness of parents and teachers to work with the other party and to incorporate their input in educational decisions

Shared responsibility – when parents, teachers, and students fulfill specific roles in educational processes and share accountability for student success

Shared values and goals – when parents and teachers communicate consistent values to students and work toward mutual goals

Students choose sides – the tendency of students to either agree with their parents or agree with their teachers when a conflict regarding their abilities occurs

Teacher fear of parents – teacher apprehension to work with parents

Termination of relationship/parent disengagement – when the relationship between parents and teachers is severed as a result of the disagreement regarding the student's abilities

Tools for parents – resources or suggestions provided by teachers that parents can use to help their student at home

Trust – the confidence parents, teachers, and students have in one another

"Untouchable" attitude – students' belief that teachers could not hold them accountable for their work or behavior because their parent would protect or defend them

Appendix J

December 7, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kara Lasater
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 11-11-231

Protocol Title: *The Perceived Influence of Divergent Parent and Teacher Perceptions Regarding Student Abilities on Students and the Establishment of Effective Family-School Partnerships: The Experiences of Parents, Teachers, and High School Students*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/02/2011 Expiration Date: 11/22/2012

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 9 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

November 5, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kara Lasater
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT CONTINUATION

IRB Protocol #: 11-11-231

Protocol Title: *The Perceived Influence of Divergent Parent and Teacher Perceptions Regarding Student Abilities on Students and the Establishment of Effective Family-School Partnerships: The Experiences of Parents, Teachers, and High School Students*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Previous Approval Period: Start Date: 12/02/2011 Expiration Date: 11/22/2012

New Expiration Date: 11/22/2013

Your request to extend the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. If at the end of this period you wish to continue the project, you must submit a request using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation on or prior to this new expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

This protocol has been approved for 9 total participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

January 2, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kara Lasater
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 11-11-231

Protocol Title: *The Perceived Influence of Divergent Parent and Teacher Perceptions Regarding Student Abilities on Students and the Establishment of Effective Family-School Partnerships: The Experiences of Parents, Teachers, and High School Students*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/24/2012 Expiration Date: 11/22/2013

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is currently approved for 10 total participants.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form “Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects.” The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 210 Administration.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.