THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: 
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Terri Garrison

LOIS CHRISTENSEN, COMMITTEE CHAIR
KAY EMFINGER
LYNN D. KIRKLAND
ROBBIE ROBERTS
DEBORAH STREVY

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A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

TERRI GARRISON

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool classrooms. Family involvement has been a relevant topic for early childhood educators for many years (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). When families are involved in their child’s school experience, it has added a positive benefit to the child’s development (Chavkin, 2005; Swick, 2004; Marcon, 1999). Regardless of this widely held belief, many families face barriers that prevent involvement from occurring (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001).

This multiple case study was designed to answer the following central and sub-questions:

Central questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their role in family involvement?

2. How do families describe the ways in which they become engaged in family involvement?

Sub-questions:

1. How do preschool teachers communicate opportunities for family involvement?

2. How do preschool teachers support family involvement outside of the classroom?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement in preschool?

4. How is family involvement defined? Who defines family involvement?
Purposeful sampling was used to select three administrators, three teachers and three family members from three different sites. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and artifacts from the classroom. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Through careful review of the data, five themes were identified as emergent. These themes coalesced to allow the reader to hear the lived experiences of the participants within the contexts of family involvement. The final compilation of data is flexible, written with thick, rich, descriptions (Geertz, 1973).
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family: my husband, Chuck, and my children, Erin, Phillip, Will, and Andrew. Their unfailing support throughout this study and my doctoral course work provided me with the time and encouragement necessary to accomplish this goal. And to my grandson, Hayden, in the hope that as he begins his journey through school, that teachers and families will work closely together to make his, and all other children’s, an extraordinary journey of learning.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I extend sincere thanks to the directors, teachers, and family members who lent their time and experience to this study. Without their contributions, this study would not have been possible.

I am thankful for my faith and belief in God. I know without doubt that He has watched over me not just through this process, but always.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Vignette: Where Are the Parents in Preschool?

Ms. Christie arrives at preschool on the day before the Spring Fling feeling frustrated. She stops by the office to speak to the director.

“I think I’ll need some help setting up tomorrow,” she says and then frowns. “I only have one parent who is coming to help.”

“Do you think any more will sign up today?” The director asks.

Ms. Christie makes another face, “Well, I’ve asked everyone personally, and I sent out another email yesterday saying we really need help, but so far no one else has volunteered.”

“Let me know if you still have only one parent at the end of today and I’ll plan to help tomorrow. At 10:00 right?” the director asks.

“Yes. I’m so frustrated!” Ms. Christie says with another frown wrinkling her forehead. “It has been this way all year. I have 10 children and other than dropping off and picking up, I only see 1 or 2 parents at best during special events and none just joining us in the classroom. What can I do to engage my parents in what is happening in our classroom?”

As a preschool administrator, families were an important part of my everyday life. Over the last 25 years, I saw various levels of involvement from families. Conversations
like the one above were commonplace. In addition, many times I heard family members say, “I’ll be involved when my child begins kindergarten.” This always made me think, “What about now?” I observed classes with great teachers struggling with uninvolved families, while next door an equally great teacher had more involvement than she could manage. These circumstances led me to further investigate families and how they are involved with their preschool-aged child and the role that teachers play in that involvement.

Background

Noted early childhood developmental theorist, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1974), supported the involvement of the family in the early childhood years. Bronfenbrenner believed that during the early childhood years, family was one of the most important support systems for children. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory indicated the home and school as the two most critical environments for young children (2005). Healthy relationships between the two systems supported the family’s involvement and the child’s development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1974), the family seemed to be the most effective and ecological system for fostering and sustaining the child’s development. However, not only development, but also family involvement has long been a factor in supporting children’s success in school (Arnold, Doctoroff, Ortiz, & Zeljo, 2008; Epstein, 2001; Marcon, 1999; Children's Aid Society, n.d.). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory placed the child in the center of complex and ever increasing concentric circles of interaction.
The two most prominent early childhood professional associations took a strong stance on family involvement as well. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published their Code of Ethical Conduct in 2001. It included strong language promoting the partnership between teacher and family. It stated explicitly that teachers must be welcoming, understanding, and respectful of all families. After much internal debate, the Association for Childhood Education International in 2003 adopted NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct (Freeman, 2004).

Family involvement has been a long-term facet of the early childhood classroom that few have challenged (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) due to the positive benefits on a child’s development (Swick, 2004). Marcon (1999) found that stronger and more varied parent involvement increased language, social, motor, and adaptive development for their children. In addition, greater mastery of early basic school skills was achieved. Chavkin (2005) stated that when families are involved in their child’s learning, the child does better not only in school, but also in life in general. Clearly, the literature indicated that family involvement was a positive aspect for the young child.

Even when families knew that involvement was important, they faced barriers to physical involvement such as scheduling conflicts and having younger siblings at home (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001). The definition of involvement by families in lower socio-economic circumstances often did not match the school’s definition (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001); yet, this could be overcome by intentionally planning for involvement (Bridge, 2001; Smith, 2006). Schools that had broader definitions of family involvement offered more alternatives for families to be involved with their children (Smith, 2006). Even though more experienced teachers had
more involvement than less experienced teachers (Castro, Bryant, Reisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004), it was important for teachers to learn to take initiative and show families how they could be involved in their child’s education (Flanigan, 2007).

It was essential for teacher educators and trainers to help teacher candidates view parents as an integral part of the child’s development and show parents ways that they could be involved (Sumsion, 1999; Flanigan, 2007). Teacher candidates were not being equipped to welcome families into the classroom. In addition, they were beginning their teaching careers with a negative attitude about family involvement. University Teacher Education departments had to take a closer look at supervising teachers and the attitudes they expressed toward families (Baum & McMurray-Shwarz, 2004).

As stated, there were many possibilities for the teacher-family relationship to dissolve or be overlooked. The literature available indicated that family involvement was a positive factor in a young child’s life. The problem was that not all families were involved with their preschool-age child’s school experience.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to explore how teachers described their role in family involvement. The teachers described the ways in which families became engaged with their child’s school experiences.

While research showed a clear connection between family involvement and early childhood success, there was little research addressing how early childhood teachers described their role in family involvement. Similarly lacking, but not as meaningfully, were the voices of family members and how they described the ways they become
engaged. Considering family involvement from the family and teacher’s points of view, this study added to the existing literature on family involvement and gave an authentic voice to both teachers and families. It also sought to provide insight to the target audience, teachers and administrators, about how to create an environment to encourage family participation within the preschool classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool classrooms in full-day child care centers that served families in urban areas in north Alabama. Furthermore, it was to investigate how families described the ways in which they viewed family involvement in early childhood education.

Significance of the Study

Looking at family involvement from the family and teacher’s points of view, this study added to the existing literature on family involvement and gave an authentic voice to both teachers and families. It also sought to provide insight to the target audience, teachers and administrators, on creating an environment to encourage family participation within the preschool classroom.

Research Questions

This study sought to hear the voices and add them into the literature accounts for both teachers and parents. Additionally, families and administrators would reap insight
from the information gleaned from the study. Therefore, two central questions were asked:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their role in family involvement?
2. How do families describe the ways in which they become engaged in family involvement?

In addition to these central questions, answers were sought to the following sub-questions:

1. How do preschool teachers communicate opportunities for family involvement?
2. How do preschool teachers support family involvement outside of the classroom?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement in preschool?
4. How is family involvement defined? Who defines family involvement?

Definition of Terms

The purpose of this section is to define key terms and their subsequent definitions in the context of this study. The definition chosen highlights the meaning of each term as it pertains to this particular study.

ACEI: Association of Childhood Education International

Cooperation: Within the study by Sandberg and Vuorinen (2008), cooperation is used as a term for involvement.

Early Childhood: Early childhood is typically considered the age between infancy and eight year olds.

Family: Family is defined as any adult who has a relationship with the child regardless of blood relation. It could be parents, grandparents, extended family, or friends.
*First Class PreK:* The state of Alabama’s First Class PreK program provides PreK education for children through grant funded classrooms set up in public, private, and not for profit child care centers and schools. The Office of School Readiness manages this program.

*Fun Learning Moments (tip cards):* Small laminated card with developmentally appropriate activities for family engagement at home. Simple activities on one side with more complex activities focused on the same concept on the reverse.

*Head Start:* Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families.

*NAEYC:* National Association for the Education of Young Children.

*OSR:* Office of School Readiness, State of Alabama.

*Teacher candidates:* Teacher candidates are those studying in a university’s teacher education program for a professional teaching position.

**Assumptions**

The assumptions of the study were as follows:

1. Preschool teachers were defined as teachers currently teaching in a PreK (four year old) full-day child care center classroom.
2. Family members were defined as a member of the family of a PreK (four year old) aged child enrolled in one of the research site classrooms.
3. Administrators were defined as center directors at a full-day child care center.
4. Participants held strong views on family involvement in preschool.
5. Participants would remain involved for the entirety of the study.
6. Participants’ responses during the interview were honest and reflective.
7. The researcher would become an advocate for family involvement in preschool.

Limitations

There were limitations associated with this study, as with all studies. Any or all of these limitations might have prevented transferability of this study to another with similar contexts. The limitations identified by the researcher were as follows:

1. There was a lack of observational data. Observing the interaction between teachers and families might have provided more insight into the relationships between the two. This type of data would have provided another source, which would have added to the validity of the study results.
2. Two of the three classroom sites had a mandatory component for family involvement. It is possible that this component provided a picture that was not transferable to classrooms without a mandatory component.
3. Families who participated in the study may have been more involved in their child’s preschool classroom than the typical family, skewing the data.
4. Lastly, the researcher bias presented a limitation as well. Through the researcher’s position as a preschool director, family involvement was a major priority. This bias may have caused the researcher to reach conclusions that another less biased researcher would not have found.
Organization of the Study

Chapter One provided the reader with a brief introduction of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, and the research questions, both central and sub-questions. A list of terms with which the reader may have been unfamiliar was defined, as well as a list of assumptions and limitations. Chapter Two presented a review of the relevant literature available as well as positions from professional organizations and developmental theories in which family involvement played a part. Chapter Three provided a description of the methods used in the qualitative multiple case study. Chapter Four included a description of the sites and participants and an analysis of the data collected throughout the study. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis was presented by case and the chapter concluded with a cross case analysis. Finally, Chapter Five concluded with an overview of the study, a summary of the findings, and implications for practice, future research and conclusion.

Summary

The first chapter began with a vignette of a preschool teacher. It continued with an introduction to the study and included a concise discussion of family involvement in preschool, which briefly addressed key literature, developmental theory, and positions of professional organizations. The statement of the problem, purpose, significance of the study, and research questions, both central and sub-questions, were included. A list of terms with which the reader may be unfamiliar was defined as well as a list of assumptions and limitations. The chapter concluded with how the study was organized.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature that explores the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool. In addition, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory was described. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory placed the family at the center of the preschool child’s experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The literature was divided into four areas: family involvement, barriers to involvement, teacher candidates and education, and supporting families. The limited availability of studies, especially those conducted in the United States, that were related to family involvement in preschool illustrated the need for further research about the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner presented his Ecology of Human Development in 1979. Through this publication, he outlined a developmental theory that consisted of five systems of interaction: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem. These five systems made up the world in which each child and human lived and interacted. Within the ecological systems theory, a child both influenced and was influenced by the systems through which he developed. Therefore, it was impossible to understand the child without understanding the systems and places in which he
interacted within those systems (Levine & Munsch, 2014). Bronfenbrenner’s model stressed the importance of family, culture, and society while emphasizing the important role that each unique individual played within the historical context of his life.

The microsystem was the child’s most immediate environment. The microsystem comprised the interactions and relationships in which a child had direct contact. Home, family, neighborhood, and child care were structures for the preschool child. At the center of the systems, the microsystem offered the child a perspective of the world. Within this system, the child was influenced as well as influenced those around him. These bi-directional influences occurred at all levels of the environment, but were strongest at this central level (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The mesosystem linked humans together. When connections were made between two or more structures in which the child, parent, and family lived, this created the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner described these as a “system of microsystems” (p. 40). Mesosystems permeated every part of our lives because they were the support systems that took us from two-member relationships and interactions into overlapping and ever-expanding circles of relations.

The exosystem consisted of those environments with which a child had no direct contact, yet they had a direct impact on the child. These environments existed mostly for the individual in the mind. For example, stress in the parent’s workplace could ultimately impact the child without the child ever being in the parent’s workplace.

The macrosystem was the largest or most encompassing system. Its structure included society and the culture within which all other systems existed. Defining this system were the laws, values, and customs presented within the culture.
The chronosystem provided a historical perspective of the child and the life events and experiences that occurred within the child’s life, including those within all of the first four systems. This system impacted society and how it reacted within individual contexts, cultures, linguistics, nationalities, and countries at any given time frame (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cannella, 2006).

Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
From Bronfenbrenner’s theory we can conclude that children, indeed all individuals, grow and develop in context. It is impossible to study the child in isolation. The myriad possibilities of systems, i.e. contexts, which each child encountered and interacted within, influenced that child’s development.

Seen in different contexts, human nature, which I had once thought of as a singular noun, turns out to be plural and pluralistic; for different environments produce discernible differences, not only across but within societies in talent, temperament, human relations, and particularly in the ways in which each culture and subculture brought up the next generation. The process and product of making human beings human clearly varies by place and time. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 p. xiii)

Family Involvement

It was widely recognized in the global early childhood community that families were an integral part of the preschool child’s learning experience. Nationally, both federal and state agencies such as Head Start and Alabama’s Office of School Readiness First Class PreK, as well as early childhood professional organizations such as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), had adopted positions encouraging family involvement.

Alabama’s First Class PreK program boldly stated that “family involvement is necessary” (Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs, 2012, p. ix) as one of the guiding statements for administering the program. Further clarification included consideration for the child’s individual circumstances, including respect for families and recognition of the attachment between a young child and his or her family.

President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the “War on Poverty in 1965,” and Head Start was a crucial part. In 1965, almost half of the nation’s people in poverty were
President Johnson utilized funds to try to break the cycle of poverty (History of Head Start, n.d.). As one of the cofounders, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) advocacy of parental involvement in children's education led to his appointment in 1965 to a federal panel that laid the foundation for Head Start. Over the last 40 or so years, the school readiness program served over 20 million children and families labeled as disadvantaged (Woo, 2005).

Going a step beyond involvement, in 2011, Head Start announced a new framework called The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE, 2011). This new framework brought a more integrated approach to a program known for advocating family involvement. The following four programs influenced areas that supported the framework: program environment, family partnerships, teaching and learning, and community partnerships. Program environment was an area that supported staff to welcome families while respecting individual cultures and languages. Opportunities were provided to build relationships as well as family support and development. Family partnerships enabled staff and families to work together to identify and achieve family goals through program and community supports. Teaching and learning engaged families and staff as equal partners in their children’s learning and development. It provided for an atmosphere where families and staff worked together, building strong relationships that supported learning. Families shared knowledge about the child, and together staff and families set and worked toward goals for the child both at school and at home. Community partnerships supported families and encouraged engagement in their child’s learning. Staff and families collaborated with community services to build a network that linked families to needed services.
The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011, 2005, 2001) explicitly detailed family interactions and involvements and included the following statements:

Ideal 2.1—To be familiar with the knowledge base related to working effectively with families and to stay informed through continuing education and training.
Ideal 2.2—To develop relationships of mutual trust and create partnerships with the families we serve.
Ideal 2.3—To welcome all family members and encourage them to participate in the program, including involvement in shared decision making.
Ideal 2.4—To listen to families, acknowledge and build upon their strengths and competencies, and learn from families as we support them in their task of nurturing children.
Ideal 2.5—To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs to ensure a culturally consistent environment for all children and families.
Ideal 2.8—To help family members enhance their understanding of their children, as staff are enhancing their understanding of each child through communications with families, and support family members in the continuing development of their skills as parents.
Ideal 2.9—To foster families’ efforts to build support networks and, when needed, participate in building networks for families by providing them with opportunities to interact with program staff, other families, community resources, and professional services.
Principle 2.2—We shall inform families of program philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system, cultural practices, and personnel qualifications, and explain why we teach as we do—which should be in accordance with our ethical responsibilities to children (see Section I).
Principle 2.5—We shall make every effort to communicate effectively with all families in a language that they understand. We shall use community resources for translation and interpretation when we do not have sufficient resources in our own programs.
Principle 2.6—As families share information with us about their children and families, we shall ensure that families’ input is an important contribution to the planning and implementation of the program.
Principle 2.15—We shall be familiar with and appropriately refer families to community resources and professional support services. After a referral has been made, we shall follow up to ensure that services have been appropriately provided. (NAEYC, 2011, pp. 3-4)

The NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

Principle 8 stated, “Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple
social and cultural contexts” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 13). In order for a child’s development to be fully understood, all contexts including the family in which the child operates must be considered as all of these contexts are interwoven and have influence over the child. Furthermore, the guidelines for DAP stressed the establishment of a reciprocal relationship with families dictating mutual respect and cooperation. The guidelines also provided for multiple opportunities for family involvement and shared knowledge (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Further Literature

In 2004, Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, and Skinner examined parent involvement in Head Start. There were four programs that participated for a total of 127 (16%) parents and 59 (95%) teachers. The strongest predictor of parent involvement was classroom quality. It was difficult to determine if the conditions or characteristics in a high quality classroom promoted parent volunteering or if the presence of so many volunteers increased the quality of the classroom. In addition, teachers with more experience logged more volunteer hours as well. Parents who worked full time had less discretionary time and fewer hours volunteering. The programs that participated in this study counted at-home volunteering for activities that supported the program such as laundry or preparing materials for the classroom.

It would be necessary to assume a broader definition of parent involvement to include not only parents’ activities to support the program, but also activities parents conduct at home to support their children’s development and education. Expanding parents’ participation from home may include providing parents with ideas and resources for a variety of activities they can do with their children at home, in connection with the school and the community. This would have implications for developing effective communication strategies with parents. (p. 427)
Communication was a key factor in a study in Australia where the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) administered the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme (QIAS), which was a standards-based system for full-day child care centers. A qualitative study by Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) examined the perceptions of early childhood staff from a variety of settings in Australia with regard to their experiences with the QIAS, particularly the requirement to involve families in their program. Through questionnaires, focus group discussions, and follow-up telephone interviews, four broad themes in staff understanding of parent involvement were identified:

1. Parent involvement is problematic and complex.
2. Parent involvement is essential to working effectively with young children.
3. Informal, verbal channels of communication are the key to creating and maintaining parent involvement in their services.
4. The QIAS emphasis on formal and written channels of communication distracts staff from involving parents, rather than encouraging them. (p. 4)

Furthermore, many staff simply dismissed the required formal communication between staff and parent, citing that formal communication did not guarantee a shared understanding of the child. Additionally, the participants struggled with “their professional need to know [about the child’s life] against the parents’ right for privacy; their professional knowledge against the parents’ knowledge; their professional voices against parents’ voices; their professional practices against parents’ practices” (p. 11). The study revealed that while participants expressed the belief that parent involvement was important and beneficial for parents, staff, and children, they were consistently hesitant about involving parents. One major finding indicated that when superficially imposed, means and methods of formal communication created a formal and ritualized parental
involvement. According to Hughes and MacNaughton (2007), authentic parent involvement emerges from recognising the knowledge-power relations that are embedded in staff-parent communication and searching for ways to manage those relations that give parents a real voice without posing a threat to staff identity as professionals. Staff identified some keys to doing this when they listed the challenges they see in parent involvement.

The list included:

- Creating the time needed for meaningful face-to-face communication
- Negotiating differences between parents and staff about appropriate child behavior
- Discovering methods of communication that ‘worked’ both for parents and staff. (pp. 12-13)

In 2010, Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews, and Kienhuis studied the effectiveness of the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program. The quantitative study was conducted in 21 primary schools, and its primary focus was on strengthening parent efficacy during the transition process into school and increasing parent involvement in their child’s learning and development. All families of children enrolled to start prep grade (five year olds) at each school in 2007 were eligible to participate. The families were divided into two groups: Intervention=735 and Control=730. Many children attended at least one year of preschool, also known as kindergarten, prior to beginning primary school. All families were informed of the purpose of the program.

The AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program consisted of four sessions that addressed practical and developmental issues relevant to children and families as children began primary school. The sessions were
approximately 1.5 to 2 hours in duration each and conducted by school staff who had received professional training.

The program was divided into four sessions. Session 1 provided families with a look at school procedures and policies such as fees, uniforms, important dates, and the structure of the school day. Session 2 introduced families to the transition process and included topics such as helping children develop independence, ways to say goodbye, establishing family routines, and preparing children for school. Session 3 included an overview of children’s learning and development at the time of the transition, ways to enhance children’s learning at home, and how to get involved in their child’s school and the benefits associated with that involvement. Session 4 helped families connect with one another through shared experiences and helped families connect with school and community resources.

The intervention increased parents’ overall sense of self-efficacy in children’s transition to school and found an increase in parental involvement during the first term that their children were in school. This study demonstrated the importance of parent experiences when children were transitioning to school and that when provided with important information, there was a level of improvement in parent involvement.

A qualitative study by Sandberg and Vuorinen (2008) sought to discover how Swedish preschool teachers and parents experienced cooperation between home and preschool. The findings expressed inconsistent definitions of cooperation ranging from “both one-sided and/or mutual information, spending time together, and a common progress towards a stated goal” (p. 155). The most emphasized definition of cooperation was the daily contact at drop-off or pick-up time and the conferences, which occurred
three times annually. During the preschool years, the focus of these conversations was emotional development and well being. While greatly desired by the parents, the conferences did not increase in frequency. Communication was moving more to written or figurative forms rather than verbal communication, which was the parent’s preference. Both groups acknowledged the importance of participation from the parents, but barriers such as time and economics, as well as the teacher’s uncertainty on how parents could participate, decreased the amount of participation.

In a qualitative study investigating teachers’ dispositions toward parent involvement in the Greater Toronto Area, Schector and Sherri (2009) found a mix of reasons for parent involvement. One of the focal participants believed that children’s cultures should be a part of the school culture and families should be encouraged to share their heritage with the school, thereby increasing the child’s self-esteem. Pavi, another study participant, stated that observation and modeling provided families with strategies that could be utilized at home in support of children’s learning. Kim saw parent involvement as a “critical means of support to both student and teacher” (p. 75). When parents were involved in school, it helped them comprehend the importance of experiential learning. Her hope was that when parents were able to see how important real-world knowledge was, rather than rote learning, they might further efforts to expose their child to community activities.

Barriers to Involvement

Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar Clark, and Peay (2001) explored barriers to involvement that Head Start mothers faced. This quantitative study provided
empirical analysis of life experiences that presented barriers to parental involvement in Head Start activities. Utilizing previous studies and a survey of Head Start families, researchers developed a list of 33 possible life experiences that they administered to participants. The survey attempted to discern barriers that prevented parents from being involved in Head Start. The study found that the families led challenging lives, yet the two most frequent barriers reported from the surveys were scheduling conflicts and having a younger child at home. Almost 20% of the responding mothers reported that work or school and lack of energy or interest as resultant barriers.

Arnold, Doctoroff, Ortiz, and Zeljo (2008) listed similar barriers with the addition of single parenting as a noteworthy factor. Single parenting was not listed as a life experience barrier in Lamb-Parker Piotrkowski, et.al research (2001), even though just over 60% of participants listed having no partner at home. The results from both studies pointed to possible benefits of supporting involvement by redesigning traditional parent involvement practices such as providing child care and meals for parental and/or family events, and providing a more flexible schedule for involvement opportunities. In addition, supporting Head Start families with difficult life experiences such as depression and the need for social services perhaps might have increased the families’ ability to participate. One possible limitation of this study was whether or not single parenting was a factor in the families’ ability or willingness to be involved.

In addition Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) cited multiple barriers in an examination of two Head Start programs that served predominantly African-American families. They found that there were multiple barriers to involvement including social environment, neighborhoods, parent-teacher connection, and economics. “It is clear that
parent involvement is a function of the interaction between family, school, and community factors and certainly not the responsibility of parents alone” (p. 634).

Interestingly, this study contradicted Lamb-Parker, et.al. (2001). Waanders, et al. (2007) found that economic and neighborhood were identified factors as barriers to involvement. Furthermore, teachers’ awareness of this impact could have cultivated a more positive response toward parents’ involvement in their child’s education.

Bridge (2001) investigated a strategy of intentional planning to increase family involvement in their child’s education. Through observation of children’s play, teachers came to understand that rich home experiences contributed to children’s play and thus their learning. Parent respondents of the Bell Preschool were all working parents unable to be involved in their child’s preschool day. Having a flexible plan for involvement did not fit the situation either. Intentional planning for involvement was usually on the teacher’s part, but in this situation, teachers asked the parents to talk with their child about activities for the following day at school. This intentional planning between parents and children guided the children in their play the following day. Parental involvement increased in several ways. The children came to school with a clearer plan of the day’s activities, older children brought in drawings of plans for what would be accomplished that day during play. Some work involving their play began at home including props and other materials needed to complete their plans and were brought in to school. Emotional support increased as children came to school with a purpose and were encouraged by planning with parents.

The plans helped children settle in at the start of sessions and to get on with their play, and this made children feel emotionally safe. Parents said this made it easier to leave their children. If children were happy in the preschool then so were the parents. (p. 18)
Communication between parents and staff improved as well. Conversations became more meaningful. The parent-child directed plans provided a tangible topic of conversation to discuss both at the beginning and at the end of sessions. “Parents felt on equal terms with staff because they knew what their children had been doing” (p. 19).

Teacher Candidates and Teacher Education

Teaching is an art. There are intuitive teachers and prepared teachers, but all teachers grow, develop and become better teachers through practice. Teacher education is an important step to becoming a teacher. Within the structure of teacher education programs, there are many practicum or teaching experiences. These experiences are designed to provide teachers with a first-hand look at master teachers and real life in the classroom. There were numerous studies available in the area of teacher education. The following studies provide a look into universities, teacher educators, and the experiences that teacher candidates have regarding family involvement.

Sumsion (1999) followed a beginning teacher during her first two years in the classroom. This qualitative study drawn from a larger study with teacher candidates explored the nature of parent-teacher relationships and the role teachers’ personal qualities play in that relationship. Pia, a newly graduated preschool teacher, replaced a retiring teacher at a preschool housed beside an elementary school. Over a span of two years, interviews and an audio-diary illustrated her development from uncertain and hesitant, wondering if parents had a place in the classroom but with a strong belief in doing what feels right for children to a more confident teacher, toward developing a new philosophy about teacher-parent relationships. Key findings from these data included:
day-to-day contact rates were not as important as the responsiveness of the relationship,
caring relationships were an important part of the early childhood setting and characterized by mutual respect and responsiveness,
a greater connectedness between parents and teachers included more attention to the role of emotions and the part they played in the early childhood environment,
teacher candidates and in-service professional development needed to move beyond the traditional view of parents as passive recipients of teacher knowledge, and
sharing experiences with other teachers was an important part of developing and clarifying his or her philosophy about issues such as parent involvement.

Though uncertain and hesitant in her relationship with parents at the beginning of her teaching profession, Pia found that being responsive to parents’ and children’s needs provided a foundation for a growing mutual respect. This positive relationship promoted a pattern of teacher-parent connections that empowered both the teacher and the parent (Swick, 2004). Furthermore, a positive teacher-family relationship was reciprocal and distinguished by mutual respect and the sharing of ideas (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teacher education programs provided more and varied parent involvement experiences for beginning teachers. Encouraging and providing opportunities for teacher candidates to work more closely and in more meaningful ways supported teacher candidates’ beliefs in how successful the partnership with families could be (Baum & Swick, 2008; Baum &
McMurray-Shwarz, 2004; Swick, 2004). These experiences built the teacher candidates’ confidence in partnering with parents as they moved into classrooms of their own.

Through focus groups, Flanigan (2007) explored how universities prepared teacher candidates for involvement with both parents and communities. This review covered the findings of involving parents only. Professors of various levels and instructors from five different university colleges of education were invited to participate in this study. Flanigan found that among these universities, teacher educators did not think that traditional teacher preparation programs were adequately preparing teacher candidates to partner with parents and involve them in their children’s education. It was essential for programs to find ways to provide real-life experiences with parents so teacher candidates were able to hear what parents had to say. Concern was voiced over the negative parent involvement attitude that teacher candidates encounter from experienced teachers during field studies. Teacher educators’ support of family involvement was vital to help teacher candidates develop appropriate beliefs and attitudes toward families. The university’s program developers have to consider the supervising or cooperating teachers and their attitudes toward family involvement (Baum & McMurray-Shwarz, 2004). Many researchers thought that teacher candidates developed negative attitudes concerning parent involvement before they even stepped into their own classrooms.

The focus groups frequently mentioned the importance of collaboration and communication. Collaboration was important to take place at all levels. Helping teacher candidates to see the importance of taking initiative and showing parents how they can be involved was one way to accomplish this goal and to provide earlier and more applied
opportunities for family engagement (Baum & McMurray-Shwarz, 2004). Teaming with other faculty to increase family involvement and change attitudes about it was another means to achieve collaboration. Providing an environment that was welcoming and encouraging was necessary to parents. Communication and mutual respect was the basis for such an environment. Collaboration and communication were not left out at the university level. “Collaboration and communication are keys to preparing the preservice teacher to partner with parents and communities, because the successful education of children requires the collaboration of teachers, parents, and all other professionals who are working with children” (p. 108).

Teacher candidates are the future of early childhood education. The need for universities to take a hard look at the family involvement opportunities and experiences available to teacher candidates is crucial. Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed that teachers lacked insight and experience, particularly, with the complexity of family interactions within the many ecological settings. Indeed, it is crucial for teacher candidates and early childhood teachers to be extremely cognizant of cultural mores in order to engage all families in equitable relationships within all of children’s ecological settings. In addition, Morris and Morris (2002) suggested that most teacher education programs were missing the “caring” component. The mystery was how does one discover or create “caring” teachers (Chavkin, 2005).

Nager and Shapiro’s (2007) Bank Street College of Education’s “Guiding Principle 3: Understanding children’s learning and development in the context of family, community, and culture is needed for teaching” created a foundation in which it was the teacher’s responsibility to seek understanding of the families and cultures of the children
they taught. This principle acknowledged the fact that educators could not separate children from what happened outside of the school hours. Recognizing the lives that children are living while not in school, regardless of what those circumstances might be, helps teachers to facilitate children’s development within the classroom, but also helps teachers provide connections to the lives children lead outside of the classroom. For the preschool child, the time outside of school is spent primarily with the family. It is impossible to separate a preschool child from their family and culture. Teachers have to become cognizant that in order to best support the development of preschoolers, they have to find culturally relevant ways to meet and support the families of preschoolers, thus acknowledging, welcoming, and supporting the child’s family is a necessity.

Supporting Families

In 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation began a program called Strengthening Families (Center for the Study of Social Policy, n.d.) The program was developed following research that indicated child abuse and neglect and early care and education were closely linked. In 2008, the Strengthening Families National Network was launched following a two-year pilot program involving seven states. It was aimed toward strengthening families, enhancing child development, and reducing child abuse and neglect. Strengthening Families focused on five “Protective Factors” that supported healthy outcomes. Those five factors were parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children (Center for the Study of Social Policy n.d.). Through the support
of multiple partners such as United Way Worldwide and ZERO TO THREE, Strengthening Families influenced policies and funding in more than 30 states.

Douglass’ study (2009) provided support that Strengthening Families Illinois (SFI) was influencing policy changes in early care and education centers. Through interviews, observations, and document reviews, this qualitative multiple case study explored the implementation of SFI, the staff perceptions of SFI, and how SFI influenced organizational changes within early care and education programs. As a result of SFI, this study found changes in three areas: management practices, services and service delivery, and beliefs and attitudes. “These changes reflect increases in the quality of family partnership practices” (p. 2).

From a management perspective, all programs changed the organizational structure to more family-centered practices. This included more collaboration with community resources and child welfare organizations. In addition, staff was trained about local resources for families. This allowed programs to better connect families with needed resources. The second change was in the services provided and how those services were delivered. One simple but significant change simply was greeting families by name. Also, real efforts were made to engage parents in casual conversation during drop-off and pick-up. These intentional connections supported a deeper relationship with families. The last change was in the beliefs and attitudes of both center directors and teachers. “Both teachers and administrators in three of the four programs talked about SFI as a personally transformative experience that fostered shifts from a child-centered to a family-centered, strengths-based philosophy” (Douglass, 2009, p. 2).
In addition to exploring how programs changed, this study sought to understand what facilitated or inhibited changes from taking place. Four factors that supported changes were the quality of the SFI training, the engagement of the program director, the supportive organizational culture within the program, and the SFI learning networks. Programs also found barriers to changes. The two most significant barriers were lack of cultural competence among the staff and a “disrespectful organizational climate” (p. 3). The second barrier was defined by a lack of respect not only among staff, but also between administrators and staff.

The implementation of SFI within the child care programs definitely influenced policies within those programs. It was noted that the multiple layers of context in both professional development and quality improvement were key factors in supporting real change. Douglass (2009) noted that SFI’s multi-level approach and system of learning networks should be preserved.

Mendez (2010) found that families engaged at a higher level of incidence when they participated in a program focused on family involvement. The Companion Curriculum (TCC) was developed as a preventive intervention. It consisted of four key components. First, teachers were trained regarding TCC’s educational themes and strategies for fostering parental involvement. Second, a space was set up in the classroom called “Family Corners.” This provided a culturally relevant area for adult-child interactions with the TCC materials within the classroom environment. There were also pictures and materials from the children’s home environment. Third, the educational activities support adult-child engagement to be playful and extend the learning outside of the classroom and into the home environment. Fourth, Head Start staff conducted a
series of monthly workshops designed to demonstrate and support family learning activities. Parent satisfaction with TCC was overwhelmingly positive, showing that the intervention program for family involvement was appropriate for preschool. While participation in the monthly meetings was not ideal, family engagement at home utilizing the TCC materials was. Almost half of the families involved reported using TCC materials with their child once per week and over a quarter (28%) reported utilizing materials at least three times per week. Families who engaged and had more school or teacher contact were reported by teachers as having a stronger connection to the school and classroom. Additionally, a stronger teacher-family relationship correlated to increased competency in literacy and math during the fall and spring. “These findings are consistent with predictions from ecological theory, suggesting that as a relationship forms between a child’s family and the school, the mesosystem reorganizes. Within this new, supportive context, parents and teachers are able to synchronize their approach to child development, with parents taking on increasing levels of educational involvement outside of the school setting and teachers becoming more responsive to the ideas and concerns of involved families” (p. 34). There were also indications that a quality relationship between teacher and parent increased a child’s social competence and reduced behavior concerns. These findings supported that a stronger connection between teacher and parent benefits a child’s social development as well as cognitive development.

Finding ways to support families within the structure of today’s more stringent standards is an indicator of a quality early childhood program (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel, 2011). Two important aspects of any high-quality early childhood
program are parental involvement and social resources. Hilado K allemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel (2011) found that social resources offered to families were just one factor in influencing parent involvement. For the purpose of their research, social services had a broad definition including but not limited to home visits, parent education, employment support, and helping families connect with social service agencies. The services offered from program to program varied greatly. Regardless of services offered, programs must develop alternative strategies in order to increase family involvement. Parental involvement was influenced more by strong connections and relationships between parents and staff. In addition, programs must look at the culture and characteristics of the community served. Parent involvement was described with a broad and differing definition according to the population served. It is imperative that individual programs define parent involvement as best fits the families and communities served by the program.

Grant and Ray (2013) described theories and models for family engagement in their book, *Home, School, and Community Collaboration: Culturally Responsive Family Engagement*. In order to support families, it is imperative for the classroom teacher to have a clear picture of what a family is. The traditional family of mid-20th century television was an entity of the past and should not be used as a standard for today’s family. The U.S. Census Bureau defined family in the broadest sense of the word as a “group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Understanding Barriers to Parent Involvement in Head Start: A Research-community Partnership</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nager &amp; Shapiro</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>A Progressive Approach to the Education of Teachers: Some Principles from Bank Street College of Education</td>
<td>Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association for the Education of Young Children</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Code of Ethical Conduct</td>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandberg &amp; Vuorinen</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Preschool-home Cooperation in Change</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schector &amp; Sherri</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Value Added? Teachers’ Investments In and</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Chapter Two provided a review of the currently available literature on family involvement in preschool. In addition, it included a glimpse of developmental theory as it pertained to family involvement in preschool. The literature review was divided into four main sections: family involvement, barriers to involvement, teacher candidates and education, and supporting families. Chapter Two also included a brief summary of early childhood’s two major professional organizations’ stances on family involvement.

Included in this chapter was a chart of relevant studies that were reviewed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool classrooms in full-day child care centers that served families in urban areas in north Alabama. This chapter presented the design of the study including descriptions of the approach, philosophical assumptions, sampling, sites and participants, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is holistic, contextual, and naturalistic in nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hatch (2002) described qualitative research as “the lived experiences of real people in real settings” (p. 6). Each setting is unique and dynamic. Settings are studied as a whole with all of the inherent complexities unbroken. This description of qualitative research speaks to the intricacy and individuality with which each study is constructed. The qualitative researcher enters the world of the participant in order to glean the true perspective of the individual. The researcher adds to the individuality of each study as the gatherer of data charged to provide a written narrative of the results.
Qualitative research is primarily interested in the process through which the research is conducted rather than the outcome of the research (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research helps to understand a central phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience the phenomenon (Hatch 2002). In simple terms, qualitative research is oriented toward discovery. Because the researcher sought to observe and interpret meanings in context, it was neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies before data collection had begun (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research is not like putting together a puzzle whose picture is already known; it is constructing the picture as the researcher gathers and analyzes data. Qualitative researchers become a part of their research and are intimately involved with the study (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1992). The final compilation of data is flexible, written with thick, rich, descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and include the researcher’s biases. These two characteristics are representative of qualitative inquiry, which is interactive and evolving.

Tradition of Qualitative Inquiry

The tradition of qualitative inquiry selected for this study was a multiple case study. This approach was selected as the research method so that the contextual conditions inherent in individual classroom communities remained authentic. Merriam (1988) defined case study as an exploration of a specific phenomenon. This phenomenon was bound by circumstance. Merriam (1988) further stated, “Qualitative case study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomenon” (p. 2). Case studies seek to understand a particular social circumstance that requires an extensive and in-depth description (Yin, 2009). Accordingly, a multiple case approach
was utilized to more thoroughly explore the phenomenon due to the myriad contextual possibilities. Multiple cases are especially more compelling than single cases creating a more credible study (Yin, 2003). Case studies can involve anything from one person, to an entire classroom, to an entire school system. Common ground for the case study is a “bounded integrated system with working parts” (Glesne, 2006, p. 13). Individual classrooms bound this study. This enabled the researcher to better hear the individual voices inherent within each context. The interest rested in the phenomenon exhibited within the cases (Stake, 1995). The individuality of each classroom context allowed the researcher and audience to gain a clear sense of the phenomenon within each case. Therefore, while findings might be transferable to another similar case, no generalizations could be made.

During the course of this multiple case study as individual classroom contexts were revealed, this investigation began to make more sense as a cross case study. Engaging in cross case analysis broadened the researcher’s scope beyond the individual case. It prompted the researcher to ask new questions, expose new dimensions, and construct new ideas (Stretton, 1969). Cross case analysis provides an opportunity for the researcher to make sense of distinct findings and understand the relationships inherent in individual cases (Ragin, 1997). However, due to the constraints placed by the Office of Institutional Review Board, the title of the study cannot change.

Philosophical Assumptions

Researchers who choose a qualitative approach use philosophical assumptions to guide their investigation (Hatch, 2002). Every researcher begins a study having
formulated philosophical assumptions. The researcher’s chosen method points to the researcher’s beliefs about what qualifies as valuable knowledge and the nature of reality (Glesne, 2006). These assumptions form the lens, or paradigm through which the researcher looks at the study. “Paradigms represent a distillation of what we think about the world (but cannot prove)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15).

Many qualitative researchers adhere to the constructivist worldview, case study included (Glesne, 2006; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions followed the constructivist paradigm in this study. Ontology was the belief system. It was what informed us that multiple realities were believed to exist and that those realities were socially constructed and ever changing (Glesne, 2006). The realities existed and were inherently unique because individuals using their unique perspectives constructed them (Hatch, 2002). Knowledge was viewed as a human construction according to constructivist epistemology (Glesne, 2006; Hatch 2002). Only through close interactions and subjective explorations with participants could one come to know the realities of the participants (Glesne, 2006). In essence, researchers and their participants were joined together as co-constructors making it impossible for the researcher to be distant and objective (Hatch, 2002).

Naturalistic inquiry was the tool used in this qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the constructivist paradigm, naturalistic inquiry was the method for collecting and analyzing data. Research was conducted in the natural setting in order to reconstruct the participant’s constructions used to make sense of their worlds (Hatch 2002). Accessing the world of the participant required the researcher to utilize a gatekeeper, or a person who could facilitate the researcher entering the natural setting.
Sampling

In choosing the case, the researcher understood the boundaries of an individual unit or of a bounded system in which many varied components played a role (Merriam, 1988). A key decision made by the researcher was defining the unit of analysis (Hatch, 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher identifies possible sites where the defined unit of analysis might be obtainable. This type of non-probability sampling was appropriate for this study.

Purposeful sampling was used in choosing sites and participants for this study. Sites and participants were selected because they could “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Schumacher and McMillan (1993) stated that purposeful sampling enabled a few cases studied in depth to yield many insights about the topic. According to Creswell (2007), participants for case studies should be limited to no more than four or five per case.

Sites

Sites for this study met the following criteria:

1. housed a PreK or four-year-old program;
2. provided full day child care for students enrolled in the program;
3. allowed for parent participation;
4. included a director who would participate in the study; and
5. were located in an urban setting in central, north Alabama.

The sites for this study were selected because the criteria set forth were met. In addition to meeting the criteria, the sites were selected because of the researcher’s affiliation with the gatekeepers. Careful planning was crucial in gaining access to the needed contexts and participants because initial contact with gatekeepers would set the tone for the remainder of the study (Hatch, 2002). This affiliation provided access to the teachers and family members who would be possible participants. The executive director over two of the centers as well as the president of the non-profit organization submitted a letter of permission for the study to be conducted within two of the centers requested. The owner/director of the third site submitted a letter of permission for the study to be conducted within the privately owned center.

Participants

Following acquisition of the letters of permission to invite participation of centers and IRB approval (see Appendix A), the researcher scheduled appointments with the center directors to ask permission to invite teachers and family members of their PreK classes to participate in this study. Following approval from the center directors, the researcher sent a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) to classroom teachers. The only criterion for teachers was that they teach in a PreK class in the school. A minimum of one teacher per school was needed for this study. Following acceptance of this invitation from classroom teachers, letters of invitation for family members (see Appendix C) were placed in children’s cubbies. The researcher also spent one afternoon at each center meeting family members and talking with them about the study and their possible
participation. These conversations were casual and conducted one-on-one as parents picked up their children at the end of the day. All families from all three PreK classes were invited to participate. Criteria for the family member’s participation included full time employment and enrollment of a child in the PreK class participating in the study. One family member from each class was needed for this study.

After several days, responses to the family member invitations were gathered from the schools and phone calls were made to those families interested in participating in the study. During these phone calls, interviews were scheduled. The informed consent documents (see Appendix D) and interview protocols (see Appendixes E & F) were delivered to the teachers and family members who would be participating in the study, allowing as much time as possible for review prior to the interviews.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers become a part of their research. They are intimately involved with the study. As the main data collector, qualitative researchers rely little on mechanical means of data collection. “Even when mechanical or electronic devices are used to support qualitative work, data take on no significance until they are processed using the human intelligence of the researcher” (Hatch, 2002, p.7).

The case study tradition required multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). According to Bogdan and Bilkin (2007), qualitative data included interview transcripts, anecdotal notes, photographs, videos, personal documents, memos, and other official records. Data in this study consisted of one-on-one interviews with participants, recorded and transcribed verbatim, as well as classroom artifacts.
Adhering to the case study tradition, the researcher collected data from multiple sources including one-on-one interviews with each participant and artifacts from classrooms. Data collected in this study consisted of in-depth interviews and artifacts from the classrooms. (Glesne, 2006) Interviewing was the primary source of data collection. Interviews took place during the summer and fall of 2011 and winter of 2012. Interviewees were given the Interview Protocol (see Appendixes E & F) prior to the interview. The Interview Protocols consisted of 14 open-ended questions with a few sub-questions. Questions from the Interview Protocols were derived from the central research question and sub-questions.

Interviews ranged in duration from 30 minutes to 80 minutes. Interviews, when possible, were conducted in the school. Two of the family members could not schedule a convenient time when the school could be open; therefore, an alternate location was chosen by mutual consent of the researcher and the participant. The interviews were conducted in a casual manner and were digitally recorded. Following the completion of each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim. Five of the participants were asked to complete a second brief interview to clarify statements from the original interview. This second interview was conducted over the phone with notes being taken throughout the interview.

In addition to participant interviews, teachers compiled artifacts consisting of notes and newsletters that were either sent home to parents or posted on a parent bulletin board. These documents included lesson plans, newsletters, invitations to a play, and reminders concerning volunteering and to bring items for a party.
All data collected was confidential. All sites and participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. After collection, all data including recorded interviews, transcripts of interviews and artifacts, was kept in a secure location in order to protect the participants’ identity and was destroyed according to University of Alabama at Birmingham Internal Review Board guidelines.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a methodological search for meaning and can be a messy process. It is a way to organize qualitative data so what is learned may be communicated to others (Hatch, 2002). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) recommended the process begin with a review of the research proposal, which the researcher did. This study sought to hear the voices of both teachers and parents. Therefore, two central questions were asked:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their role in family involvement?
2. How do families describe the ways in which they become engaged in family involvement?

In addition to these central questions, answers were sought to the following sub-questions:

1. How do preschool teachers communicate opportunities for family involvement?
2. How do preschool teachers support family involvement outside of the classroom?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement in preschool?
4. How is family involvement defined? Who defines family involvement?

Though in qualitative research, the investigation may have strayed from the original research questions, the questions were addressed in the final narrative.
Next, the researcher prepared the data. The artifacts collected were closely examined and notes made on each. Interviews were reviewed repeatedly by the researcher listening with a critical ear to achieve a deeper understanding of the participant’s experiences, and then transcribed verbatim. Participants were provided with transcripts as well as the final narrative of the study to add credibility to the study. This member-checking provided the researcher with an accurate picture of the participant’s views (Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The next step in analyzing the data was coding the data or horizontalization of data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher went through the data line-by-line and marked lines or passages that are significant and show understanding of how the participant experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). During the first coding session, the researcher used broad themes to classify data. During the second and third readings, the researcher further categorized the data into smaller and more specific themes and sub-themes. The final reading included only the previously coded data and resulted in codes that the researcher identified as emergent into definitive overarching themes with sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were then used to write a narrative of what each participant experienced within each case (Creswell, 2007). Within this polyvocal text, many voices were heard and stories were told and enriched by participant’s own voiced words (Hatch, 2002).

After individual cases were analyzed for themes, the researcher then looked across the cases, or used cross-case analysis, for themes identified as emergent (Creswell, 2007). In this process the researcher looked for similar themes that emerged from both cases in the study. As a final point, the researcher constructed an essential structure.
This narrative gave meaning to the overall study including all cases within the study (Creswell, 2007).

Establishing Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined how the researcher convinced her audience that the findings of an inquiry were valid as trustworthiness. It was essential that the researcher exercise due diligence throughout the research, paying careful attention to the data and the voices of the participants. The researcher employed the following three techniques to ensure credibility and trustworthiness: member checks, triangulation, and thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Member Checks**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) depicted member checks as the most crucial procedure for establishing credibility. The researcher provided all participants with a copy of the transcript from their interview and final narrative. The researcher allowed the participant to review and provide feedback, ensuring that the researcher heard and interpreted their beliefs and words accurately.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation of the data was one form of verification. The term triangulation “comes from military navigation at sea where sailors triangulated among different distant points to determine their ship’s bearing” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 52). This principle was applied to qualitative data verification as different data came together. Multiple
sources were used so that themes and sub-themes emerged with a clear picture of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Artifacts and interview transcripts were used to build coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation occurred among the data and literature, the artifacts and other data, and the literature.

**Thick, Rich Descriptions**

The last form of verification was the use of thick, rich descriptions. Readers of the study provided verification in their ability to see the situation. Vivid descriptions provided the reader with a clear picture of the phenomenon. These descriptions helped to determine whether findings could be transferred to another setting due to shared circumstances (Geertz, 1973).

Using these three methods of verification, the researcher had views from three separate lenses: the researcher’s through triangulation, the participant’s through member-checking, and the reader’s through rich, thick descriptions. Using three viewpoints enabled the researcher to establish the greatest credibility.

**Ethical Considerations**

Inherent in qualitative research is the need to explore the phenomenon from the “perspective of cultural insiders” (Hatch, 2002, p. 65). The methodology was designed to allow the researcher to be up close and personal with the participants. Participants were encouraged to share intimate details of their lives and in order to do this, they were asked to trust the researcher with information (Hatch, 2002). A lot was asked of participants,
and caught up in the research, the researcher sometimes forgot to give back. Reciprocity is ethically important in any research, but especially in qualitative research where the researcher and the participant found themselves devoting long hours toward building a relationship. It was imperative that the researcher found some means of giving back to the participants.

Researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham underwent rigorous review through the Office of Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB). This review process ensured that researchers were providing the necessary information to participants to both inform them of the research and what it entailed, and also to inform them of any risks that might be associated with the research. Following approval, the office of IRB issued approval for a one-year period for the project. Renewal and amendment applications were submitted. Extensions were granted with the submission of the proper documentation. Any changes in the project were approved through IRB with the submission of an amendment. When IRB issued an approval, it included a dated Informed Consent document that each participant signed. The Informed Consent detailed the project, including any risks and adverse effects to participants, as well as contact information for the Office of IRB and the principle investigator.

Participating in a research project through the University of Alabama at Birmingham was completely voluntary. Individuals who chose to participate could withdraw that participation at any time without penalty. Research studies were not required to compensate participants for their time and participation. However, this project did include a $15.00 gift card as recompense for the time and effort given by participants.
It was imperative that researchers maintained a high level of confidentiality concerning research material. In this study, participants and sites were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. All data collected was treated with care. Physical data was locked in a cabinet until three years following the study when all data was destroyed. Digital data was stored on a password-protected computer that only the principal investigator had access to.

The project was approved by IRB (see Appendix A), the Informed Consent was valid through May 9, 2015 (see Appendix D), and all rules and guidelines set forth by IRB were followed completely.

Role of the Researcher

The investigator’s view of the world affected the entire research process, from beginning to end (Merriam, 1988). As a preschool administrator working with young families, the researcher’s experiences with family involvement played a leading factor in the research. Prior to becoming an administrator, the researcher taught kindergarten. As a preschool administrator, kindergarten teacher, and actively involved mother of four children, these perspectives influenced the nature of the research questions, which drove the research design and finally the conclusions. In addition, the researcher had a strong foundation and belief in constructivism, which led to the naturalistic paradigm. The researcher took heed of the caution put forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that the researcher was aware of the biases she held and how they colored the data and conclusions. It was important that these biases were kept in check in order for the
researcher to listen with an open mind and be receptive to what she was trying to understand (Hatch, 2002).

One important role of the researcher was as the primary instrument in data collection (Glesne 2006; Merriam, 1988). Context is an important element of a qualitative study. The researcher was an instrument and responsive to the context (Merriam, 1988). The participant’s experiences had meaning and were mediated through the researcher’s own perceptions (Merriam, 1988). As an investigative instrument, the researcher was able to provide immediate feedback and verify data as well as explore anomalous responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Throughout the research process, it was imperative that the researcher put the protection of the participants’ identities and research sites high on the agenda. This allowed the researcher to build trust and gain the confidence of the participants. This also allowed the participants to feel more at ease opening up and sharing their experiences of the research study phenomenon.

Summary

This chapter contained a discussion of the qualitative research methods used to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement. The tradition of case study, specifically multiple case studies, was described. Philosophical assumptions were reviewed and the sites and participants were described in detail. Explanation of the data collection and analysis was given as well as steps to ensure trustworthiness. The chapter concluded with a review of ethical considerations, and the researcher’s own bias was explained.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The intention of this study was to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool classrooms in full-day child care centers that served families in urban areas in north Alabama. Additionally, the purpose was to explore how families described the ways in which they viewed family involvement in early childhood education. Within the context of each defined site, this case study research allowed the researcher to glean information inherent to that particular setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study sought to hear the voices of the participants. From those voices the researcher sought the answer to two central questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their roles in family involvement?
2. How do families describe the ways in which they become engaged in family involvement?

Four sub-questions emerged:

1. How do preschool teachers communicate opportunities for family involvement?
2. How do preschool teachers support family involvement outside of the classroom?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement in preschool?
4. How is family involvement defined? Who defines family involvement?
This chapter presents the analysis of the data in each individual case and a cross-case analysis from the interviews, observations, and documents collected. The first three cases’ data was analyzed and then the findings were merged in a cross-case analysis. The chapter ends with a summary.

Themes and Sub-themes

After multiple readings of the data gathered, five overarching themes were identified as emergent with 22 sub-themes. The five themes were identified as: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved? and (e) Should It Be Required? Distinct personalities of each site became known as themes and sub-themes emerged. Individual themes and sub-themes were explored within each case and merged together in the final analysis. The themes and sub-themes are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement Is</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Encompassing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate With Me</td>
<td>How Do You?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Just Talk To Them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posted Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Send a Note?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Involved</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From School to Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They Always Attend
What is Better for You?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why Won’t You Be Involved?</th>
<th>That’s What I Bring Them Here For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hectic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can I Work It Out With Work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Should I? They’re Not Very Nice Anyway!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please Don’t Be Involved!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should It Be Required?</th>
<th>So Families Understand It’s Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So Families Will Be Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So the Child Knows They Care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Site One: A Child’s Place Learning Center

A Child’s Place Learning Center was a privately owned child care center with an enrollment of 100 children. The center had an owner/director who had been in the position since the center opened approximately 12 years ago. Along with an assistant director, the director oversaw a staff of 15. The center served families in the middle to upper-middle income bracket with tuition of $145 per week. The center was open on Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. All families enrolled in this program paid full tuition for their child.

The building was relatively new and was built specifically for the purpose of housing a child care center. It was welcoming and inviting with bright colors and friendly characters decorating the walls. The director or assistant director usually was seated at the front desk and extended a warm greeting. The classrooms were all contained behind a security door, which required a code to enter. Each family was issued an individual code.

A Child’s Place did not offer parent enrichment workshops, but it had a very clear open-door policy welcoming families at any time during the school day. Throughout the year, there were a number of special field trips and parties where families were
encouraged to participate. The kickoff event each year was a field trip to a local pumpkin patch and the culminating event was graduation. These two events averaged greater than 100% participation as parents and/or grandparents and extended family frequently participated. Throughout the year, approximately 25% of the families attended other trips and parties. There were two PreK classes in this center. The participating PreK classroom had 11 children with one teacher. The maximum enrollment for each PreK class was 16. It was the last room down a long central hallway. The hallway was filled with art that children created. The classroom was an open room with lots of space. It was divided into learning centers with tables scattered about the room. The room was inviting and the children’s artwork was displayed on the walls. The foundation for the curriculum is PBS’s Ready to Learn. This curriculum was chosen because it fit the philosophy of the owner/director and was easily accessible as well as low cost. The philosophy was to provide a developmentally appropriate learning environment that was fun and challenging.

\textit{Participant 1: Monica}

Monica was the owner/director. Monica was married with two sons, ages 5 and 11. She had a B.A. degree in psychology with a minor in early childhood education from a university in the state of Texas. She opened the center with financial support from her parents and had been the director since the center first opened.
Participant 2: Angela

Angela was the PreK teacher. She was married with three adult children. She did not have a college degree. She had taught this PreK class for 10 years. Prior to this class, she had an in-home daycare for 20 years.

Participant 3: Patricia

Patricia was the parent of a child in the PreK class. She had two children: a daughter in the third grade and a son who had attended this PreK class since the beginning of the school year. She held a B.A. degree in human resources and finance and was an expeditor for a large electronics company.

Themes

From the data gathered, five overarching themes were inductively identified as emergent. The themes were: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved, and (e). All but the theme, Should It Be Required, were present at A Child’s Place Learning Center. From the four themes, 14 sub-themes tell the story.

Table 4.2

A Child’s Place Learning Center Themes and Sub-themes Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement Is</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Encompassing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate With Me</td>
<td>How Do You?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posted Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Involvement Is

The first theme, Family Involvement Is, described each participant’s beliefs about the definition of family involvement. Every participant had thoughts about the definition of family involvement. Those beliefs ranged from being invested in one another to talking to the teacher or child to discover what was going on. Three sub-themes emerged through the participant’s voices. They were: (a) Caring, (b) Discovering, and (c) All Encompassing.

Caring. The physical environment of the center spoke of the care of the teachers and director for the children. Their art was prominently displayed not just in the classroom, but also in the hallways. Monica explained that there had been an art show. One child had initiated the activity from a shopping trip with his mom when they had purchased a painting. It grew until the children decided they would sell their paintings on display. Families paid 25 cents during the show to take paintings home.

Angela believed that giving time and consideration was an important aspect of family involvement. She said, “When a family cares about one another, they invest time in each other.” Monica echoed this thought in a similar vein when she stated that “What
they’re involved in is important, and because it is important to them, it’s important to me.”

*Discovering*. For all of the participants at this center, discovery was about gathering information by asking questions. Cindy has experienced discipline issues with her PreK-aged son and her focus was talking with the teacher every day. The lead teacher in her son’s class had already left for the day when she picked him up each day so she made the effort to speak with the teacher each morning. She stated, “I make it a point to talk with the teacher in the morning if I have a question about anything. I want to know now; I don’t want to not know later on.” This enabled her to keep a keener eye on her son’s behavior. She went on to say, “I will seek out answers if I need to or feel like they can help me because they see him all day.” Cindy strongly believed that involvement focused on keeping her son’s behavior “in check.”

Angela, the classroom teacher, also thought that verbal communication was an important aspect of family involvement. Her thoughts focused on the family seeking information from the teacher or child. She said, “[Families] are told at the beginning of the year that if they would ever like to sit and have a conference with me, to speak about any concerns or issues that they might have” that she is always available. She further went on to state families should “talk to their teachers, um, question them about it” if there was information that they needed. The researcher thought these statements placed the responsibility of initiating conversations on the family.
All encompassing. All three participants expressed family involvement as being more than classroom engagement. Monica stated, “I think it’s a bigger concept [than just being in the classroom].” Cindy echoed Monica’s thoughts by saying, “That seems like a broad thought.” Angela believed family involvement was more than classroom participation. She summed up her thoughts by saying, “It should be across the board.”

Communicate With Me

Communicate With Me described the methods of and the feelings surrounding how centers communicated with families. In order for families to be involved, communication had to occur. Participants reported that written notes and emails were the primary means of communication. Three sub-themes emerged. They were: (a) How Do You? (b) Posted Notes, and (c) Why Send a Note?

How do you? Monica and Angela both stated that written notes and email were the primary means of communication. Each child has a cubby, and notes are placed in cubbies for families to pick up. Monica said, “Each child has a cubby in their room, to where their individual notes that need to go home.” she continued “when I need to talk to everyone as a whole, we have an email; I have an email database for all the parents.” Angela used emails in a more personalized manner saying, “We do email. Mostly individual when there is a problem like discipline issues.”

Monica said,

There are monthly newsletters that go home. The monthly thing - you know, what to look for this month, what you’ll see in the hall, that kind of stuff. Things to ask, you know, what should you ask your child this month...it’s broken down into weeks, this week we’re going to be doing this, maybe you could ask, you
know, how do you know the difference between an insect and a spider? Just kind of prompting them.

Cindy said she did not receive any kind of communication that wasn’t discipline related. She stated, “No newsletters or anything like that. None, right now.” She did reference the Parent Handbook that she had been given at orientation saying, “It’s in the handbook as far as the rules” on when you can come and participate.

Posted notes. All three participants spoke of notes being posted. Monica said, “There are dry erase boards outside of each classroom” so teachers can communicate daily events or special needs. Angela said that she put up sign-up sheets when they were having a special party or event in the classroom. Cindy confirmed this saying when there was a party, “they have a sign-up sheet” so families know what to bring.

Why send a note? Angela expressed strong emotion about sending written notes home. She believes families simply ignore the notes if they take them home at all. She reasoned, “Why bother to send the note home? They aren’t reading those notes. We find them in the trash or stuffed in the bottom of the backpack.” Monica agreed with Angela saying, “We started noticing that we were seeing a lot in the trash can or they were just left in the cubbies.”

She went on to say,

[The] majority of parents will say to me, what do you mean you’re closed on Monday? Well, let’s see, it’s in our operating policy, you got an email reminder, and it’s been on the dry erase board in the lobby for the last three weeks. So, even the in-your-face neon sign communication [note], I would say 70 to 80 percent...don’t see it...that makes me crazy!
Monica doesn’t believe that families aren’t interested in what is going on, she said, “I think a lot of times, I don’t think it’s anything personal a lot of times. I think it’s just schedule.”

**Be Involved**

Be Involved described the atmosphere for involvement and the opportunities for families to be involved with their child. For families to be involved, the atmosphere of the center must provide a welcoming and flexible element for involvement, which is as important as the actual opportunity for families to be involved. The researcher found it interesting that this was the theme that elicited the fewest responses. Three sub-themes emerged from the theme, Be Involved. They were: (a) From School to Home, (b) Providing Opportunities, and (c) They Always Attend.

**From school to home.** Cindy specified that the teacher sent home projects that were geared towards families working on them together. She and her son enjoyed working together on the family projects. She said, “[What] I really like the most are the family projects.” Monica acknowledged they sent home “little stuff” to support learning when they are memorizing phone numbers or addresses. Other activities the school sent home included “a cute little song that we encourage them, maybe in the, on the car ride home. Just to reinforce what we’re doing here.” Angela didn’t refer to any type of activities that were sent home to involve families at home.
Providing opportunities. All three participants commented on the opportunities for involvement that the center offered. With the exception of an annual field trip to a local farm during the fall, the opportunities were non-specific. Cindy declared that she knew she could eat lunch with her child. Angela confirmed this open invitation for lunch. She went on to include that families were welcome anytime they wanted to help with projects in the classroom. Monica mentioned that families were told “when they enroll [that] there’s an open door policy.” She continued, “They can come in whenever they like and leave whenever they want.”

They always attend. Both Monica and Angela felt that families always attended parties and field trips. Their annual field trip to a local farm and pumpkin patch garners a better than 100% involvement as “it’s usually both parents and a grandparent” participating, according to Monica. Cindy admits that she has not participated in events or volunteered in the classroom, but she said, “We were asked to come for a trip to [farm]...I did that. That was a lot of fun.” The researcher noted the terminology. The specific invitation was accepted and the family participated in the event.

Why Won’t You Be Involved?

Why Won’t You Be Involved? explored the barriers and reasons families were not involved with their children. This theme elicited more responses than any other and was the predominant theme for Happy Times Child Care Center. Work and the busyness of life both created barriers to family involvement, but staff at the center created barriers to involvement as well. Please Don’t Be Involved was tied with Hectic for the most
responses at this center. This theme elicited more responses than any other. Five sub-themes emerged from the theme, Why Won’t You Be Involved? They were: (a) Family Not Responsive, (b) Hectic, (c) Can I Work It Out With Work? (d) Why Should I? (e) They’re Not Very Nice Anyway! and (f) Please Don’t Be Involved!

*That’s what I bring them here for.* Monica told a story about an art show and sale the children initiated. She said that out of the 16 children in the classroom whose art had hung in the hallway, four parents never purchased their child’s art. Her voice hardened with anger when she said:

The kids were saying, “My mom didn’t buy my painting.” They had three notices and they were hung in the hall! I mean they had to walk past it every single day with a big “For Sale” sign that says “For Sale: please pay the artist.”

She concluded this story by saying that after two phone calls to families, with two paintings still hanging on the hall wall, she wrote a note to the child that said, “I’m leaving a quarter on your desk and taking the painting with me. Thank you.” She then took the paintings down and left the note and a quarter in the child’s cubby. Monica said she wanted families to be involved, but she also wanted them to want to be involved. Sometimes she felt it was a fine line to get them into the building to participate and pay attention to what their child was doing during the course of his day, “but how do you do that without making them feel guilty...I think there are some times that guilt is worthy. So, sometimes you have to make that phone call to say, ‘You know, your child is waiting for this to happen; you need to make it happen.’”

Angela was aggravated by the lack of response from her families. She said parents were told at the beginning of the year that they could visit or volunteer whenever
they wanted, but she hadn’t had anyone to come in to do that unless there was a party or field trip. She said they were told, “Give us a call, let us know, speak to us.” But she continued, “As of yet, I think I’ve had that happen once in 10 years [that she had been in that center].”

Hectic. This sub-theme resonated with Monica and Cindy. Monica experienced it in her personal life with a family, two children involved in many extracurricular activities, and a full-time job that was her livelihood. She reflected, “I see how hard it is for them to be involved because their life is so hectic and busy.” Monica went on to say that she didn’t think it was anything personal, but simply that life is “really hectic with all the schedules, you know, and parents have older siblings, younger siblings, and you know, it’s just, it’s just really, really, hectic, but we just try to make sure that we get, you know, as much parent participation as possible.” Cindy said she had not participated very much in her son’s class. She said, “I make sure they have what they need, what they need for their parties or anything like that...without physically being there.” The researcher thought Cindy sounded defeated when she concluded, “I think I’ve done as much as I can with what I have.”

Angela stated that she had not had a family member volunteer in her classroom in a number of years. She spoke of a parent five or six years prior who would come in and help with bulletin boards or cutting out things, or just generally do whatever she needed her to do, but she said that had not occurred recently. She said, “Parents just don’t have time. I don’t even ask anymore because they are just too busy.”
Can I work it out with work? In this center of mostly median income families, work presented an enormous barrier for many families. Monica expressed that she knew her families “work full time and that they do their best.” She further stated, “Their availability is limited because they work full time. If they didn’t they probably wouldn’t need me.” Angela reiterated her words saying, “My parents are working parents, and I do not have any at the present time that do come in, or offer any kind of visit instances or help. When parents work full time, they don’t have the time to be involved.”

As a mother, Cindy expressed frustration over the timing of events. She would be able to participate more if more thought and planning was given concerning the timing of events. “If it’s the middle of day or early afternoon, I can’t stop what I am doing and go do it,” she said. Not being able to participate is a concern for her and she has a difficult time helping her son understand that she can’t be there. “It’s hard to explain that you can’t ask off work for everything.” Even lunch with an open invitation to come is difficult due to the timing factor. Her lunch hour is fixed and “lunch times are totally different so that is hard.”

Why should I? They’re not very nice anyway! Cindy provided the only responses. She knew she was not able to participate as much as she wanted to and hadn’t attended any parties in her son’s class. She seemed to emit genuine angst over this, but she said on the one occasion she was able to attend she “didn’t feel very involved at all as far as the teacher [was concerned, and the teacher] would get with the parents she already knew and you felt left out.” This behavior did not encourage her to try and work out other times when she might be able to participate.
Please don’t be involved. Monica and Angela both spoke at length concerning families who come to school to volunteer, but have an ulterior motive or agenda of their own. Sometimes, this agenda is unconscious, but sometimes there is clear intention. Monica addressed the parent who needed to be “babysat” and was like another child in the classroom. She went on to clarify that “it hinders the flow of the classroom if you have a parent in there who is not in there every day, and doesn’t know that after X, we do this, and after this, we do this.” There were also those mothers who did not work outside the home who “longed for adult companionship.” Monica asserted that these women are there only to talk with other adults during the course of their day and “they have the tendency to take the attention of the teacher away from the class.”

Monica also shared the teacher’s feelings regarding some volunteers,

You have the teacher who is taking care of and teaching these children, but also babysitting this adult and that’s hard. We’ve tried; we’ve tried to have like volunteers per se that the teacher just comes to me at the end of two weeks and says, “Please, get her out of my room.” You know, just because...she’s trying to conduct her class, and trying to teach this person who really is not invested in the situation.

Angela voiced concern over two types of parents. The first would come into the classroom and disrupt what the children were doing. She mentioned a father a couple of years prior who “when he comes in and he deals with the children, he totally riles them up.” She went on to say, “He is not a good influence to have, you know, with the class and yet he’s a delightful man.” The second “was the parent that comes in and scoops their child into their arms and takes that child from their present five-year-old level to a two-and-a-half-year-old level.” Not only was this disruptive to the class, but it was detrimental to that particular child’s development.
Site Two: Happy Times Child Care Center

Happy Times Child Care Center was an established, non-profit child care center with a total enrollment of 52 children. It operated as part of a three-site program administered by a large non-profit organization. A director, who had been in place for three months, oversaw the center, including a staff of 10 with an executive director supervising her. Due to the non-profit status, the center had resources to assist families with tuition. The center charged a slightly below median tuition of $110 per week and served a population of mostly median to just below median income families according to the assistant teacher. Approximately 30% of the PreK children were provided financial assistance.

The general feeling of the building was not welcoming, in my estimation. There were multiple occasions when the researcher entered the building and no greeting was issued. Most of these occasions were at the beginning of the research. As the researcher spent more and more time in the center, the environment warmed up, but still the director did not greet the researcher unless the researcher issued a greeting first.

The building was older and had a very institutional feel with minimal pictures in the hallways and a variety of equipment cluttering the secondary hallways. There was a definite feeling of neglect. There was a large communication board outside the main office. There were never more than three or four notices on the board, which left a large area of the board blank. They consisted of a lunch menu, calendar, and notices concerning community events.

The PreK classroom was located directly across from the office. It was a grant-funded PreK classroom sponsored by the Alabama State Office of School Readiness
This was the third year this center had been awarded a grant for the PreK classroom. There were 18 four and five year olds in this class. The grant required an early childhood certified teacher with an assistant teacher. The approved curriculum, The Creative Curriculum©, was a child-centered curriculum that encouraged learning through play and exploration based on the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner.

The grant that funded this classroom had a mandatory family participation component. Parents were required to spend six hours each semester volunteering in the classroom or attending parent enrichment workshops organized and sponsored by the school. Workshops were offered during lunchtime when the children were already in the center thus eliminating the need for child care during an evening meeting. The table below listed the workshops offered.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happy Times Child Care Center Parent Enrichment 2011-2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No workshop scheduled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germs and Hand Washing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fun Learning Moments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Readiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both teachers indicated a poor participation response as the table above indicated. There had been some discussion of discontinuing the workshops due to the poor participation of the families. With two weeks until the end to the first semester of school,
only 22% had the required six hours of family volunteer hours and 30% had no volunteer
time recorded.

Entering the classroom, while brighter and more appealing than the halls, there
continued to be somewhat of a feeling of neglect. The classroom was large with many
learning centers scattered in an L shape with four round tables taking up the corner to the
immediate left of the door. Children’s art was displayed on the walls, as well as
classroom projects. The teachers, both the lead teacher and assistant, always greeted the
researcher warmly.

*Participant 4: Kathy*

Kathy was the director of the center. She was married and had one child who was
five. She held B.A. degrees in both elementary education and early childhood education
from a university in the state of Alabama. She had taught grades from preschool through
sixth grade for the last 10 years. She had been in the current position for three months.

*Participant 5: Susan*

Susan was the assistant teacher and assistant director. She was married and had
two teenage sons. She held a B.A. degree in social sciences from a university in India.
She had been employed at Happy Times Child Care Center for six years and prior to the
opening of the OSR PreK classroom, she was the lead PreK teacher for the school. The
required degree in early childhood created the need for her to assume the assistant
teacher’s position. She was quiet, but always welcomed the researcher during visits to
her classroom.
Participant 6: Beth

Beth was a retired grandmother to one of the children in the class. She retired early in order to move to the area to support her daughter who was a single parent. This was her only grandchild. She was currently not working, but after living there for a year and a half, she was beginning to look for part-time employment. She held a B.S. degree from a university within the state and worked during her career in the business field.

Themes

From the data gathered, five overarching themes were inductively identified as emergent. The themes were: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved, and (e) Should It Be Required. All of these themes were present at Happy Times Child Care Center. From the five themes, 16 sub-themes tell the story.

Table 4.4

Happy Times Child Care Center Themes and Sub-themes Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discovering</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engaging</td>
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<td>Communicate With Me</td>
<td>How Do You?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I Just Talk To Them.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posted Notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Why Send a Note?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be Involved</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From School to Home</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing Opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is Better for You?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Won’t You Be Involved?</td>
<td>Can I Work It Out With Work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Should I? They’re Not Very Nice Anyway!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Involvement Is

The first theme was Family Involvement Is, and it described each participant’s beliefs about the definition of family involvement. Every participant had thoughts about the definition of family involvement. Those beliefs ranged from being proud of work brought home and displaying it prominently to engaging in the classroom. Three sub-themes emerged through the participant’s voices. They were: (a) Caring, (b) Discovering, and (c) Engaging.

Caring. The classroom’s physical environment showed the teachers cared about the work the children created. The walls displayed children’s art and projects in a manner that engaged the viewer. There was care and thought clearly depicted in the presentation. Beth spoke at length about the art and projects that her granddaughter brought home. Her granddaughter was excited to have her pictures “covering her whole refrigerator.” Her granddaughter is always eager to share what she is learning at school. Beth and her husband “make a big to-do about” her work and learning, which showed how much they care about her by listening to her.

Discovering. Susan expressed the thought that family involvement was characterized by discovery.

Families are not just engaging with the children, but discovering what the children are doing during the course of the day. The discovery process can take place
through conversation with the teacher or through hands-on discovery within the classroom.

Susan thought many parents did not understand what happens in an early childhood classroom and wanted them to be able to experience that firsthand. For Susan, when families come “into the classroom while the class is in session, especially during the center times, to come and be, just be around, not work with the kids, but just, you know, see what they’re doing, that is an important part of family involvement.”

**Engaging.** Engaging was the strongest component of family involvement for this center. The meaning of engagement for Kathy, Susan, and Beth held a very traditional tone. Engagement occurred at school within the confines of the classroom. Perhaps unconsciously, outside the classroom family involvement held no place in our conversations. Although there was a brief mention by Kathy that family projects were sent home, this activity was not considered to be engagement.

Family engagement within the classroom was encouraged. During the beginning of the year orientation, families were encouraged to volunteer in the classroom. Activities such as scheduling time to read a story to the class, working in centers beside the children, participating in field trips as chaperones, or assisting with parties were listed as possible engagement opportunities. Beth believed these opportunities were to “help the parents feel, ‘I can be a part of this’” and believed that feeling was “important.” Kathy focused on simple tasks such as coming in to “read a book to a small group” during centers. Through this type of engagement she believed families would “realize play is not just play. Play is how [children] learn.” Susan agreed with center time engagement. “I love when parents can come and get involved with the child [in centers],
and not only their own child... everybody else is drawn to them... but because this particular parent or couple of parents is there, they all want to be interactive with that. And that’s amazing.”

Communicate With Me

Communicate With Me described the methods of and the feelings surrounding how centers communicated with families. In order for families to be involved, communication had to occur. Participants reported varied means of communication with notes sent home being the primary method of communication. Four sub-themes emerged. They were: (a) How Do You? (b) I Just Talk To Them, (c) Posted Notes, and (d) Why Send a Note?

How do you? The methods used to share information with families were varied. Regardless of the method used, Beth stated that making “sure the parents are well informed that different activities and enrichment workshops are going on” had to be a priority. Notes sent home, notes posted on doors, clipboards, bulletin boards or whiteboards, and verbal communication were all mentioned as methods used to communicate with families. Susan acknowledged that sometimes “we call them.” Beth shared that there was no form of digital communication used with families. Kathy confirmed that, we use “pretty much everything; they can call me, face to face and the various signs that we post. I have a parent BB [bulletin board] that applies. Because the schedule is so sporadic between 6:30 and 6:00, the notes are our main type of communication.”
Confirming that written notes were the most common form of communicating, Kathy admitted, “I’m also going to send written notes. We’ll send multiple, multiple written notes. One [is] just a basic ‘this is what is coming up,’ then at least two reminders.”

In addition to the multiple notes sent, Kathy also acknowledged that, “We try to make sure it is going to stand out whether it has a picture on it or a different color [paper].” She further said, “We try to put it in their hand and tell them what it is; go ahead and verbally tell them what is in the note, then the note becomes the reminder and not the main form of communication.” Susan echoed this statement by saying, “Of course when we see them...they pick up their kids, we verbally tell them.”

*I just talk to them.* Susan voiced the strongest thoughts about face-to-face communication. She conceded, “And I think the one which has really helped, at least me personally, has been: we talk face to face, verbally, rather than phone calls. I think that we then feel very important, that we are interacting, that we are interested in their child. And that’s why they want us, they want...us to have them in the center.” While Susan and Kathy both commented on face-to-face communication, Beth did not mention this as a form of communication she has experienced.

*Posted notes.* Kathy, Susan and Beth all mentioned notes being posted. On the bulletin board within the classroom, “on the clipboard or sign-in sheet,” “on the table,” or even on the “parent bulletin board” located in the hall outside the office. During my visits and observations at the center, I observed notes posted on the table and clipboard or
sign-in sheet, but I never observed any notices about upcoming center events posted on the bulletin boards. The parent board outside the office was large and looked neglected. There was a menu and a regular calendar on it every time I visited the center, but mostly open space. A couple of times, there was a notice concerning an upcoming community event.

*Why send a note?* Sending notes home was the most common form of communication. Beth, a grandmother, stated, “They have a cubby hole. They’ll put notes in there.” Both she and her daughter read the notes that are sent home. “Yes, I definitely do make the effort to read them,” she said. Then, further stated in regards to her daughter, “Oh yeah, [she] will read the entire thing. She, in fact, she will point things out to me—mom, you missed this.” Beth was involved and helped her daughter, who was a single parent, had a full time job, and was a full time college student, to be involved by passing on notes and other information from the class. But as involved as Beth was, she expressed concern over the lack of and forms of communication. She emphasized that, “things get going and you may forget to get the note and you miss out on something,” and concerning one of those missed things, she said, “They got all their stuff they got to take home on Friday. To me those are crazy days; that was bad timing sending notes home.”

Kathy professed, “From the teacher’s stand point, most of the time [families] don’t read the notes.” Susan confirmed this by stating that “a 50/50 percentage” does and doesn’t read the notes sent home. Susan too established it was obvious many parents aren’t reading the notes because “when we talk to them...they’re not sure because they haven’t read it.” When talking about this lack of response to notes sent home, she
grimaced and said, “So at times we had to literally, it’s not, not called a bribe; [gave] an
award to them if their parents took their newsletters.” She expressed further frustration
that this was the only way to get some parents to take notes from their child’s cubby.
However, there was no guarantee that the note was actually read, just that it was taken out
of the classroom.

*Be Involved*

*Be Involved* described the atmosphere for involvement and the opportunities for
families to be involved with their child. For families to be involved, the atmosphere of
the center must provide a welcoming and flexible element for involvement, which is as
important as the actual opportunity for families to be involved. Four sub-themes emerged
from the theme *Be Involved*. They were: (a) Welcome, (b) From School to Home, (c)
Providing Opportunities, and (d) Workshops.

*Welcome*. There was a definite feeling to this center. On several occasions, the
researcher walked in to an empty office and front hall. Typically, the wait was a few
minutes, but on one occasion, the wait stretched to more than 10 minutes. When the
office was occupied, unless the researcher spoke first, there was no response from the
person in the office regardless of the person’s position. From director to someone
answering the phone, unless a greeting was voiced first from the researcher, there was
nothing but silence from the office. Beth confirmed the cold environment when she
declared, “I think a friendly smile, and an open ‘Good morning, how are you doing?’ like
when you walk in Wal-Mart” would go a long way to making the center a warmer place
for families to be. Susan also had concerns about the mood emanating from the office. Hesitant to express her thoughts, she too stressed, “It’s very important as the director to show to the parents that, he or she cares for every child that comes and goes out from here.”

*From school to home.* There was evidence that activities that originated from school were being completed in the home. There were family projects displayed in the classroom. Beth spoke of Tip Cards that go home sporadically. She described them as “little laminated cards...spread around four areas of development, and each card has different activities that you can do, you know, divided among each of the different areas of development.” Neither Kathy nor Susan mentioned the Tip Cards. Kathy discussed a couple of the “home projects” to be completed together at home, but did not include this as an involvement piece.

*Providing opportunities.* Opportunities for involvement were specifically geared to classroom involvement. Phrases such as “come in” were repeated over and over during the conversations with participants. It left a clear imprint on the researcher that family involvement for this center took place inside the classroom. Kathy expressed frustration over a recent conversation with a father. He had lost his job and she was asking him to volunteer in the classroom. She ended her story with, “They kind of look at you funny, that’s what I bring them here for, but you’re trying to get them into the door.”
Beth spoke at length about her involvement in the classroom. She initiated the involvement following the orientation. Beth described this scenario, “When we went to the orientation they had said that any of the parents that would like to come in and read to the kids, or participate in anything that they do, please do so.” So I went to the teacher and said, “I’d like to come in and read.” So Beth did. She said, “[the teacher] asked me to do that again, so I’m going to do that today with them.”

Workshops. Workshops to support the necessary family enrichment hours that are required by OSR are offered monthly. “We offer workshops that they can attend to get those parent enrichment hours. We just did one on getting ready for kindergarten,” Kathy said. Attendance as shown by Table 4.3 is poor. Confirming this attendance, Beth stated, “I love that they offer workshops for the parents and it’s too bad that a lot of them don’t participate.” Kathy also confirmed the poor attendance and was considering not conducting any further workshops. She had begun making “articles available that parents can read” in order to get their parent enrichment hours.

Susan recognized the value of providing workshops for families and spoke of ways to increase attendance. Her comments confirmed this by saying, “I’ve seen where they first serve them lunch or a snack during their lunch break.” She also said the times offered were not always conducive to families being able to attend. Beth expressed concern over the lack of advertisement for the workshops. She stated that she believed that “planning it out, notices, you know, talking about it...again, the visual, the hearing, the seeing” would increase attendance.
Why Won’t You Be Involved?

Why Won’t You Be Involved explored the barriers and reasons families are not involved with their children. This theme elicited more responses than any other and was the predominant theme for Happy Times Child Care Center. Barriers were created by work and the busyness of life, but the staff at the center also created barriers. Five sub-themes emerged from the theme, Why Won’t You Be Involved? They were (a) Family Not Responsive, (b) Hectic, (c) Can I Work It Out With Work? (d) Why Should I? They’re Not Very Nice Anyway! and (e) Please Don’t Be Involved!

That’s what I bring them here for. Susan was the most vocal about non-responsive families. She experienced families who couldn’t even give 30 minutes to walk “to the library, which is hardly worth five, ten minutes walk. And even for that they say they are busy and so we don’t see them wanting to participate.” She spoke of “literally requesting and pleading” for families to meet the goal of mandatory enrichment and volunteer hours set by OSR. Susan maintained, “It’s the most challenging thing for a teacher to get parents involved.” Her frustration was evident in the tone of her voice as well as her words. Not only did she value the opportunities for developmental progress for children, but also the benefits families experience when they are actively engaged with their child.

Hectic. Beth was very cognizant of how busy life can be. She moved to the area specifically to support her single daughter. “She was going to school full time, working full time, and she is a single parent,” Beth said. There were just no more hours in the day
for her to engage at school and yet she recognized the value of being engaged. Now with Beth’s support “she can enjoy having Lanie more, and spending more quality time with her.” Beth stated, “She was very frustrated and stressed.” Some of that has been removed now because her mom is helping with some of the necessities of life. Unfortunately, not everyone has that support system.

Can I work it out with work? Families with children in full-day child care typically work full time jobs. In this center of mostly median to just below median income families, both parents worked, and frequently in jobs that were not very flexible about time off. Susan and Beth both felt that job stress created huge barriers for families to be able to participate in the classroom. Beth stated, “It is very difficult for working parents to participate.”

Why should I? They’re not very nice anyway! Teachers and administrators created boundaries for families. Some of those boundaries were intentional and some were not. The researcher experienced a disinterested feel from the administrative staff and Beth confirmed that impression. She worried, “There’s not as many opening arms of welcome, recognition, oh, hey how ya doin,” when folks come in to drop off or pick up their children. Beth stated that she understood why some families felt “‘I don’t want to come here; I don’t want to do that’. They don’t feel welcome or they feel like, ‘Well, why should I? You know, they’re not very nice anyway,’ you know.” Beth also felt that there needed to be more communication between teachers and administrators because too many times information didn’t make it to the families. She confirmed that, “There’s not
a lot of verbal communication and reminders.” Since the primary method of communication was a written note, administrators didn’t always have all of the details and by the time some families picked up their child after working all day the teacher had left for the day. It was frustrating to be told by the administrator that they didn’t know what was going on. Susan also expressed concern about involvement from the director. In the interview with the researcher, she affirmed, “When you see the head of the center not being involved, I think that was one of the things why parents really were not participating.”

*Please don’t be involved!* Kathy believed a number of her teachers felt threatened when families were in the classroom volunteering. “They look at parents coming in as I’ve got to be perfect for that hour,” she said. Then some parents “just stand there” and have no idea what to do. Susan declared, “When the children are in the classroom, then the parents are in the classroom, then the children act out.” These three thoughts come together to create an unintentional boundary for families. A teacher who is uncertain of how to handle the previous two situations and already feels threatened by families being in the classroom spells disaster for encouraging families to participate.

*Should It Be Required?*

Should It Be Required? explored whether making family involvement a requirement increased that involvement. Although this was the least discussed theme, all three participants agreed that family involvement should be a required component for families of preschoolers. Their rationales for this, however, were all different. Three
sub-themes emerged from the theme, Should It Be Required? They were: (a) So Families Understand It’s Important, (b) So Families Will Be Involved, and (c) So the Child Knows They Care.

So families understand it’s important. Kathy expressed that families need to understand their involvement is important during these preschool years. It is not just about a party. She said, “Oh they’re gonna have a party, I’ll go visit and do that!” Involvement is more than going to a party twice a year. Furthermore, she responded that, “these are the most important years. This is when they learn the majority of their social skills, when they learn to interact with other people. This is when they get the impression of you as a parent.” These things all come together during the preschool years. Not just the impression children develop of their family, but also the expectation of how their families function in regard to school and education.

So families will be involved. Beth expressed that classrooms were difficult. She believed that there were so many needs to be met that it required support from families in order for a teacher to meet all of the needs of the children in her class. Without a requirement for involvement, Beth affirmed that, “I think there’s a lot of parents that send their kids to school…it’s a dumping ground.” She believes sometimes families are just looking for a place for their kids so they won’t have to be responsible for them and without a requirement, many families won’t bother.
So the child knows they care. Susan sees the value of requiring families to be involved because it lets the child know they care about what they are learning and doing at school. She stated, “It’s important because it makes the child feel very important.” When a family member spends time in the classroom, it says to the child, what you do is important.

Site Three: Sunny Day Child Development Center

Sunny Day Child Development Center was an established, non-profit childcare center with a total enrollment of 61 children. It operated as part of a three-site program administered by a large non-profit organization. A director, who had been in place for two years, oversaw the center including a staff of 10 with an executive director supervising her. Due to the non-profit status, the center had access to resources to assist families with tuition. The center charged a nominal rate of $10 per week tuition for 89% of the PreK families and a rate of $25 for the remaining 11%. The center served a population of low-income families and often provided basic needs for families. The entire class of PreK children was provided with some financial assistance.

The general feeling of the building was welcoming. The researcher was always greeted warmly and had been asked by other staff if assistance was needed. The classroom teacher, who always appeared very busy, was always willing to take a moment to talk even for just a greeting.

The center was housed in a building approximately 12 years old. The entrance of the building had large pictures of cartoonish animals saying welcome. Immediately to the left of the building entrance was a hallway and the office was placed in the corner of
the two main hallways of the building. Down the hallways, there were pictures of encouragement as well as more animal pictures. The center always looked clean and had an inviting feel to it.

The PreK classroom was located directly down the hallway at the back of the building. It was a grant-funded PreK classroom sponsored by the Alabama State Office of School Readiness (OSR). This was the third year this center had been awarded a grant for the PreK classroom. There were 18 four and five year olds in this class. The grant required an early childhood certified teacher with an assistant teacher. The approved curriculum, The Creative Curriculum, was a child-centered curriculum, which encourages learning through play and exploration based on the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner.

The grant that funded this classroom had a mandatory family participation component. Parents were required to spend six hours each semester volunteering in the classroom or attending parent enrichment workshops organized and sponsored by the school. The workshops were offered immediately following closing and child care was provided for the families who attended. Table 4.5 lists the workshops offered.

Table 4.5

*Workshops for Family Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunny Day CDC Parent Enrichment 2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun Learning Moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Potato Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading is Fun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher indicated that, on average, 10-12 of the families participated in the workshops each month, but no total attendance numbers were available.

Participant 7: Laura

Laura was the director of the center. She had been in the position for the past two years. She was completing her degree in early childhood education. She was single with one daughter who was 13.

Participant 8: Donna

Donna was married and had seven children and 20 grandchildren. She had taught in childcare centers for more than 30 years. The mandate for OSR PreK classroom’s lead teachers to hold a B.A. in early childhood prompted her to return to school and earn that degree which she in May of 2011. She always takes a moment to speak to me when I visit her classroom.

Participant 9: Jessica

Jessica is mother to one of the children in the PreK class. She is a single parent and lives with her father and younger sister. She is employed in the scheduling department of a local medical facility. She has a B.A. from a local university in foreign language and international trade.
Themes

From the data gathered, five overarching themes were inductively identified as emergent. The themes were: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved, and (e) Should It Be Required. All of these themes were present at Sunny Day CDC. From the five themes, 20 sub-themes tell the story.

Table 4.6

Sunny Day CDC Themes and Sub-themes Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family Involvement Is</td>
<td>Discovering</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate With Me</td>
<td>How Do You?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Just Talk To Them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posted Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Send a Note?</td>
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<td>Welcome</td>
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<td>Workshops</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What Is Better For You?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Won’t You Be Involved?</td>
<td>Can I Work It Out With Work?</td>
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<td>Why Should I? They’re Not Very Nice Anyway!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should It Be Required?</td>
<td>So Families Understand It’s Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So Families Will Be Involved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So the Child Knows They Care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Involvement Is

The first theme, Family Involvement Is, described each participant’s beliefs about the definition of family involvement. Every participant had thoughts about the definition of family involvement: being an involved parent, knowing what’s going on, being
available for the teacher, for available for your child. Two sub-themes emerged through the participant’s voices. They were (a) Discovering and (b) Engaging.

**Discovering.** All three participants thought it was important for families to get to know both their teacher and their child. In addition, all three believed it was necessary for family members to know the child’s classroom and the activities that were happening there. Donna expressed, “It means getting to know your children. It means getting to know their teachers, getting to know what they do.” Jessica said, “[Parents should be] involved all the way through because the more parents are involved, the more parents at going to know what’s going on.” Jessica, who struggled with finding time to engage with her son in the classroom proclaimed that, “I’d love to be able to go up there and spend like an hour, an hour a week or every couple weeks, just kind of seeing what goes on in the classroom so I could see where he’s at.” Donna agreed with the need for families to know what is going on. She expressed,

> Parents need to know what their kids are doing because I can only do so much with them, and if the parent’s not doing their part for school, they’re lost; but as long as the parent is involved, and we’re working together, then that child has a much better chance at school.

**Engaging.** All three participants saw families engaging as an essential aspect to family involvement. Donna summed up classroom engagement.

Some parents come and they think they’re gonna sit. I be like, don’t you want to go up there and play. So I tell them if you want to get volunteer time, you can’t sit on your bottom, I want them to interact with the children or your child whichever you’re comfortable with, but this is what has to be done. That’s volunteer time; volunteer time is not coming in here and sitting and watching me teach.
Laura stated, “Urging your child to be a part of different things in school
[because] if you are not active in the school, your child is not going to want to be there.”
Thereby, the assumption is that the child’s participation will mirror the family’s
participation so without that family engagement, the child will “check out” of school.

*Communicate With Me*

The theme Communicate With Me described the methods of and the feelings
surrounding how centers communicated with families. In order for families to be
involved, communication had to occur. Participants reported varied means of
communication with the primary communication being face to face. Four sub-themes
emerged. They were: (a) How Do You? (b) I Just Talk to Them, (c) Posted Notes, and
(d) Why Send a Note?

*How do you?* Donna affirmed that they use a variety of communication methods,
but the primary method is talking. She said, “I just try to get into my parents. I want to
know them. I talk to them every day so that I make it that we’re comfortable with each
[other] so that I can say [anything] to them.” Laura confirmed this, saying, “Verbal is
number one.” Jessica said they try to use a variety of communication methods. She
continued,

Ms. D will always remind you, usually when you are picking up, don’t forget we
have this. Like with the tip cards, don’t forget your tip card, or if there is a
workshop, don’t forget the workshop - Thursday at 5:30. Something like that, so
not only is it written, but is also verbal as well.
Using a variety of communication methods is important. It supports the school’s priority of helping families engage with their child. So while “good communication” is important, developing a relationship where “open communication” is a must.

*I just talk to them.* Donna sees great value in face-to-face communication. She makes an effort every day to talk with each of her families. She believes that this form of communication will best support building relationships with her families. She said, “I just talk to them.” She went on further to state that she talks to them about everything, not just their child. “I just try to get into my parents. I want to know them. I talk to them every day so that I make it that we’re comfortable with each [other] so that I can say [anything] to them.” Laura said that Donna exhibited a relaxed, easy body language and spoke to her families in a “mother-hen” manner with verbal nudges and encouragement. She further stated, “Basically we just have an open communication between myself and the parents as well as the PreK teachers and the parents.”

*Posted notes.* Posting notes in the classroom on a central board or clipboard is an efficient way to notify families of activities, events, and needs. Donna used this form of communication to inform families of the events for the day or the week. Jessica affirmed, “[Ms. Donna] normally has whatever they’re doing that week posted on the chalk board so any parent can read over that whenever they pick-up or drop off in the morning.” Jessica also acknowledged, “School closings and stuff, they’ll post a flyer on the front door.” Donna said, “If I really want something for them, I’ll put it on the clipboard and I tape it to the [classroom] door.”
Why send a note? While they do send notes home as reminders, both Laura and Donna recognize that there must be another form of communication in addition to the note that goes home. Jessica looks upon those notes more as “a reminder” for an upcoming event than the only communication for that event. Whether intentional or not, Donna hears from families firsthand about notes, and she reminds families, “Did you see...because a lot of times parents say, paperwork, expletive garbage!” Laura has experienced that same response. She stated, “Sometimes they don’t even read that. It’s just I’m rushing in to get my child and I’m rushing out. They move the paper, they never see it!” It’s important to Laura and Donna that notes are not the primary form of communication. In order for families to be involved, they must know what is going on, and written notes are not the best way to accomplish this goal. In addition to families simply not reading the notes, Laura said, “We have a lot of different folks who might be picking up the same child so we don’t even know if it’s getting to the person who needs to see it—the mom or dad or whoever.”

Be Involved

Be Involved described the atmosphere for involvement and the opportunities for families to be involved with their child. For families to be involved the atmosphere of the center must provide a welcoming and flexible element for involvement, which is as important as the actual opportunity for families to be involved. The theme Be Involved elicited the most responses for Sunny Day CDC. Four sub-themes emerged from the theme, Be Involved. They were (a) Welcome, (b) From School to Home, (c) Providing Opportunities, (d) Workshops, and (e) What Is Better for You?
Welcome. Jessica spoke of multiple instances when Ms. Donna had invited her to join the class. Some of the invitations were for parties and such, but frequently the invitation was “Can you come today?” Jessica communicated these thoughts, “Mrs. D’s always really inviting as far as parents coming up and spending time with the kids.” She had always felt encouraged to participate. “I guess you could say she is really encouraging as far as getting parents involved in the classroom and not just at home.” Laura confirmed this sentiment saying Donna was always ready to greet families with an encouraging word and welcoming smile.

From school to home. Jessica excitedly talked about “tip cards” that Ms. Donna sent home each week. The cards were Fun Learning Moments that supported family engagement. Each card described an activity. Donna said, “On the front is the very easy thing to do and on the back is something more challenging.” Jessica said that she and her son look forward to the tip cards coming home. They always do the activity together, often doing it more than once. Jessica stated,

Not only does it have stuff for kids, but it also has tips like on the back for the parents like ways or what you can do to revamp or redo the situation so they don’t feel like they are doing the same thing over and over again so they have a thirst for it, to want to learn more.

Donna not only sent the tip cards home diligently, but she also asked children and parents about the activities on the tip card. She “talks up” the activity with the children so they were excited and encouraged someone at home to do the activity with them. This one small piece of paper helps families’ work together, thereby tightening the family bond. Jessica said that one thing she loved about the tip cards was that it was “right there for you.” You didn’t have to think about what, but simply pick up the cards.
Donna also sends home simple homework once a week, which consists of simple activities reinforcing what is happening in the classroom. “I may send home a letter and say find something with that letter. It may be a picture of it or it may be an actual object that begins with that particular letter. That’s the kind of homework we do.” Donna said these types of activities support family development.

*Providing opportunities.* Donna stated that she has a number of activities that family members can do with the children if they come in to volunteer. They can work with their child in centers or they can go and work with another child in centers. They don’t necessarily have to be with their own child because this is how they are learning how our centers work and teach them so they may go over to home living and work with them and then they may go over to blocks and see how they are building or they may go math or they may go to writing.

She tries to always have something on hand just in case someone finds a moment and drops by. She stated, “We usually have certain things for them to do. They may do small reading groups, they may do art projects,” as well as a list of other items she has available. Then Donna has some parents who have volunteered for a very specific task to complete each day. “I have one parent who comes in right when the kids are getting up and her volunteer time is to help me put the beds up and get the kids to the bathroom and get them washed up.” Donna’s goal is to provide as many and varied opportunities as possible.

*Workshops.* Laura listens to her families. She tries to plan workshops that will be beneficial for her families. She also is planning for next year as she is living out this year’s plan. Laura detailed,
We’ll do the car seat safety, community resources, but we have a resource finder. We make sure everyone is aware of the different resources in the community. We’ll do one of the new ones we’ve added this year is extreme couponing. So it’s sometimes things that our parents are interested in. There will be a kindergarten teacher that comes in and definitely things on child appropriate activities.

Laura and Donna plan the timing for their families as well. Scheduled for immediately following school, providing childcare, and frequently feeding both adults and children, their goal was to provide the best possible atmosphere for family involvement. They were successful as well. Laura reported they had an attendance of approximately 80%.

_What is better for you?_ Donna and Laura worked hard getting to know the children and their families. They planned family involvement within the classroom and for workshops around their schedule as much as possible. Laura acknowledged,

We say, “What time is better for you? Maybe we can plan something around these hours right here.” And there may be several parents, because sometimes we’ll do 5:00 trainings because they want to get in and get out because they have to pick up a child by 6:00.

Laura tried to eliminate as many barriers as possible. They provided child care for their workshops so families “don’t have to pick their child up and try to get them anywhere. We do offer our babies snacks because that is a long day for them to be here without anything.” In addition to the free babysitting, sometimes a free meal was provided as well.

There were still some families that simply could not attend workshops. Laura or Donna would try to schedule one-on-one time with those families in order for them to gain the information presented. Their goal was to support families in gaining knowledge
to have a better life for them and for their children. If that meant doing a bit extra, they were both willing.

*Why Won’t You Be Involved?*

Why Won’t You Be Involved? explored the barriers and reasons families are not involved with their children. Some barriers were created by work, but some barriers had foundations in their own schooling. Two sub-themes emerged from the theme, Why Won’t You Be Involved? They were (a) *Can I Work It Out With Work?* and (b) *Why Should I? They’re Not Very Nice Anyway!*

*Can I work it out with work?* Many of the families at Sunny Day CDC work in hourly positions that schedule workers in non-regular shifts such as fast food restaurants. Laura tried to provide ample notice so those families could ask their employer to alter their work schedule in order to participate in certain activities. Jessica experienced a different problem in her job. She could have more flexibility in her job, but her “coworker isn’t the most dependable and so I’m usually left alone a lot so being able to leave and go up to his school for an hour is kinda hard.”

*Why should I? They’re not very nice anyway!* Laura expressed concern over barriers that families faced that had nothing to do with their child’s school experience, but their own. She had a number of family members who did not complete high school for a variety of reasons. Their schooling was fraught with unpleasant memories and those memories were impacting how the family member perceived their child’s school.
She said, “If that wasn’t a pleasant experience for you growing up, then it’s not going to be a pleasant experience for you now.” Some families looked upon school as an unwelcome task that must be completed. School for them was a list of negatives with a few positives thrown in randomly. These barriers were created long before the family came to her school and she struggled with changing their perception about school in general. She believed that until their perception of school could be altered, it would be impossible for them to involve themselves with any part of school.

**Should It Be Required?**

The theme Should It Be Required? explored whether making family involvement a requirement increased that involvement. Although this was the least discussed theme, all three participants agreed that family involvement should be a required component for families of preschoolers. Their rationales for this, however, were all different. Three sub-themes emerged from Should It Be Required? They were (a) So Families Understand It’s Important, (b) So Families Will Be Involved, and (c) So the Child Knows They Care.

*So families understand it’s important.* Jessica spoke of her frustration over not being able to participate as much as she wanted due to her job. She makes the effort to do as much as she can at home because she can’t be involved in her son’s class during the day. She contended,

I’m pretty sure every parent wants to be involved with their child, but maybe if it was kind of shown as a requirement and shown how much it will help your child as far as development goes that it would be so much more important [to families].
She expressed concern that “if it wasn’t a requirement, maybe parents wouldn’t think it mattered as much.”

So families will be involved. All three participants from this center voiced the thought that if families were not required to be involved then they simply would not. With the many barriers and difficulties families face to engage with their children, Jessica fears that if schools “didn’t even present the idea of participation, it could very well be that some parents wouldn’t [participate].” Laura’s thoughts paralleled Jessica’s and she went on to state, “I think if it is required, they will do it.”

So the child knows they care. Donna focused on the child and the emotions that grew from having family members in the classroom participating in what the child is doing. In order to provide children with the best possible chance for a happy and successful life, they must have a healthy school experience. When families engaged in what is happening at school, when “parents want to see them; see how they learn and grow in the classroom, it makes the child feel very important.”

Cross Case Analysis

A cross case analysis was completed to compare the similarities and differences between the three centers. According to Yin (2009), multiple cases may be preferable over single case designs given that the researcher’s analytic conclusions may be more powerful in a multi-case study than in a single case study. In general, the three cases shared common themes. The emergent themes were: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b)
Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved? and (e) Should It Be Required? Within these five themes, 22 sub-themes were identified though not all sub-themes emerged within every case.

Table 4.7

*Themes and Sub-themes for All Sites*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Family Involvement Is</th>
<th>Communicate With Me</th>
<th>Be Involved</th>
<th>Why Won’t You Be Involved?</th>
<th>Should It Be Required?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring (1)</td>
<td>How Do You? (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Welcome (2, 3)</td>
<td>That’s what I bring them here for (1, 2)</td>
<td>So Families Understand It’s Important (2, 3)</td>
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<td>Discovering (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>I Just Talk to Them (2, 3)</td>
<td>From School to Home (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Hectic (1)</td>
<td>So Families Will Be Involved (2, 3)</td>
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<td>Engaging (2, 3)</td>
<td>Posted Notes (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Providing Opportunities (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Can I work it out with work? (1, 3)</td>
<td>So the Child Knows They Care (2, 3)</td>
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<td>All Encompassing (1)</td>
<td>Why Send a Note? (1, 2, 3)</td>
<td>Workshops (2, 3)</td>
<td>Why Should I; They’re Not Very Nice Anyway! (1, 2, 3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They Always Attend (1)</td>
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<td>Please Don’t Be Involved (1)</td>
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</table>
Family Involvement Is described each participant’s beliefs about the definition and scope of family involvement. This theme emerged from all three sites with varying sub-themes. The four sub-themes were: (a) Caring, (b) Discovering, (c) Engaging, and (d) All Encompassing. Discovering was the only common sub-theme amongst the three centers, yet the focus veered in different directions.

For the majority of the participants, family involvement was about being there. Discovering what the children were doing within the classroom environment through observation and engagement was a valued element for the participants of sites 2 and 3. Both classroom teachers from these sites expressed a desire for families to “just come and be, just be around” was precisely how one teacher phrased it. Schector and Sherri (2009) found that when families were present in the classroom, they gained strategies to be applied at home to support their child’s learning. In addition to discovering, Site Two and Site Three wanted families engaged in the classroom. Donna said it was important for children to be successful saying “as long as the parents is involved, and we’re working together, then that child has a much better chance at school.” Her director concurred with this thought. Laura revealed, “If you are not active in school, your child is not going to want to be there.” NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice outlines multiple opportunities for family involvement and shared knowledge. In addition, it stresses a reciprocal relationship with families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

While participants at Site Two and Site Three expressed the desire for families to be engaged, their concepts of engagement were different. Site Two participants clearly
delineated family involvement as an activity that took place within the classroom or school. While there were activities the teacher sent home to encourage families to engage at home, these were never mentioned in the framework of family involvement.

Site One had almost no engagement within the classroom and while family activities were sent home, neither the director nor the teacher spoke of these as being a component of family involvement. Bridge (2001) found that through the observation of children’s play, teachers discovered that rich home experiences contributed to children’s learning. In fact, in terms of the definition of family involvement, engagement did not emerge as a sub-theme. All three participants’ voices resonated the belief that discovery occurred through conversations with teacher and the child.

All encompassing was a sub-theme isolated to this center. Phrases such as “bigger concept” and “broad thought” expressed a need for a new definition of family involvement and match conclusions by, Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, and Skinner (2004) who found that it would be necessary to accept a “broader definition” of family involvement (p.427). Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel (2011), found that family involvement must be defined by the community and population served.

**Communicate With Me**

Communicate With Me described the methods of and the feelings surrounding how centers communicated with families. In order for families to be involved, communication had to occur. Participants reported varied means of communication with the primary communication being face to face. Four sub-themes were identified as
emergent from the data, but were not all shared throughout the three sites. They are (a) How Do You? (b) I Just Talk to Them, (c) Posted Notes, and (d) Why Send A Note?

A variety of communication methods were reported by centers. The chart below reflects the communication methods used. All methods were used at some point with the exception of email, but the chart reflects the methods reported as most consistent or primary. Site One and Site Two reported their primary method of communication was notes, while Site Three reported face-to-face conversations as their primary method of communicating with families.

Table 4.8

*Methods of Communication*

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<td>A Child’s Place Learning Center</td>
<td><strong>X</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Times Child Care Center</td>
<td>X</td>
<td><strong>X</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunny Day CDC</td>
<td><strong>X</strong></td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>

* new method
** primary method

At Site One, Monica said they primarily used written notes because their day was so long and it was not possible to see or speak to everyone. She not only sends an individual note, but also posts what is coming up on white boards outside the classroom. Both she and the classroom teacher used email. Monica reported having a database with email addresses that she used for mass emails, but she and Angela both utilized individual email. Angela said she used email primarily for discipline issues in the
classroom. Both Monica and Angela expressed frustration over the fact that written notes were not being read. Still the primary form of communication with families was a written note. Angela added this, “Why bother to send the note home?” Cindy, the parent participant, refuted this information saying that she did not receive notes or any other form of individual communication unless it concerned discipline issues. It is crucial to find the method of communication that works best for both families and teachers (Hughes & McNaughton, 2000).

Kathy and Susan reported using notes as well. They said it was their primary method of communicating. They also posted notes on bulletin boards. There was no use of email communication for the center. Kathy spoke about sending multiple notes for each event and encouraging teachers to tell them what the note is about. In this manner, the note served as a reminder about the event. Kathy also indicated written notes were used primarily because certain times of the day were “crazy.” Kathy and Susan reported similar circumstances at Site Two. Kathy reported sending home two and three notes for a single event as well as communicating details verbally when the notes were picked up. But Susan reported families not knowing about events when they were asked face to face about them. Beth reported that sometimes the notes were not sent home at the most opportune time and if you missed the note, you missed the event indicating that the verbal communication was not happening.

Donna at Site Three declared, “I just talk to them.” She talked with families every day recognizing the importance of building relationships. Developing a strong relationship with families greatly influences the amount of family involvement (Hilado Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel, 2011; Sumison, 1999). She did post notes on the
bulletin board or on her sign-in/sign out sheets, but rarely did they send notes home. Jessica echoed this statement. Ms. Donna talked to everyone who walked in. She told you everything that was going on and invited you to come. Laura reported that they have recently started communicating with email. She said the major difficulty with email was that constant flux of phone numbers and email addresses from her families. “It’s just so hard to keep up with that,” she expressed.

All three centers cited using posted notes. A posted note was 1 note posted on a white board or bulletin board. It was unclear if these notes were always read. Donna at Site Three reported that when she had something that all parents must see, she taped it on the door or put it on the clipboard. Monica at Site One and Laura at Site Three indicated that there were times when they knew the posted notes were being ignored.

*Be Involved*

Be Involved described the atmosphere for involvement and the opportunities for families to be involved with their child. For families to be involved the atmosphere of the center must convey a welcoming and flexible impression for involvement to occur which is as important as the actual opportunity for families to be involved. *Be involved* elicited the most responses of all of the themes. Six sub-themes emerged from Be Involved. They were (a) Welcome, (b) From School to Home, (c) Providing Opportunities, (d) Workshops, (e) They Always Attend, and (f) What Is Better for You?

Site One had a very vague open-ended invitation to engage. Comments like “open-door policy” and “they are welcome any time” were so general as to be ineffective. There were few specific instances when families were invited to participate. Sub-themes
that did not emerge for this center were Welcome and Workshops. There was not an
overseeing agency that provided funding and mandated family workshops. Unlike the
other two centers, Site One had a more traditional view of family involvement where the
intent was to support the teacher by cutting out items, putting up bulletins boards, and
other miscellaneous tasks. Their family involvement was almost non-existent.

Site Two did have a mandated family involvement plan. Families were invited to
participate in the classroom as well as attend workshops planned by the center. Family
involvement was only slightly better in this center than at Site One. Beth and Susan
expressed concern about how welcoming the administrative staff was. Beth affirmed
that, “I think a friendly smile, and an open good morning” would go a long way to create
a more inviting atmosphere. The researcher experienced this feeling as well. There were
many occasions when the researcher had to wait for someone to come into the front hall.
She wondered different times if someone was even in the office; many visits no greeting
was issued. Another issue for Site Two was communication. The terminology gave the
clear impression that an invitation was issued at the beginning of the year and families
could then approach the teacher to be involved. There were opportunities for
involvement at home. Activities were planned and sent home for family engagement, but
were not included in any discussion that these activities were considered to be family
involvement.

Unlike Site One and Site Two, Site Three offered an abundance of flexible
opportunities for involvement. The teacher and director wanted families to be in their
building engaged in workshop time as well as time in the classroom. Donna encouraged
home involvement as well. Intentional planning for family involvement facilitated a
higher frequency of engagement by families (Mendez, 2010; Bridge, 2001; Gallimore and Goldenberg, 2001). Activities were provided for home engagement and “talked up” in the classroom with the children. Creating excitement about the activities with the children aided in those activities being completed at home. Donna and Laura both took extra time to ensure that families were welcome. Personal, verbal invitations were inviting and made families feel welcome at any time.

*Why Won’t You Be Involved?*

Why Won’t You Be Involved? explored the barriers and reasons families are not involved with the children. This theme elicited more responses than any other and was the predominant theme for Happy Times Child Care Center. Work and the busyness of life both created barriers to family involvement. But staff at the center created barriers to involvement as well. Five sub-themes emerged from Why Won’t You Be Involved? They were (a) That’s What I Bring Them Here For, (b) Hectic, (c) Can I Work It Out With Work?, (d) Why Should I; (e) They’re Not Very Nice Anyway! and (f) Please Don’t Be Involved!

Families today lead hectic, busy lives. Families are busy working, running errands, getting children to extra-curricular activities, and keeping up with all of the busyness of life. This means teachers and staff must go the extra mile to plan for family involvement and then make certain a warm and welcoming invitation is issued.

Both Site One and Site Two experienced barriers created by the busyness of life, but also barriers created by the center and its staff. Barriers that the staff created were often unintentional. A teacher who was not confident may feel pressured about having
family members volunteering was a thought from Kathy. Swick (2004) stated that when teachers and parents connected, both were empowered. Also, the concern of children not following the rules when family members were there was a concern staff at both of these centers.

Site Three worked to overcome barriers such as work and the busyness of life by keeping involvement flexible. They also recognized that some barriers were founded in the past with school experiences that family members may have lived through themselves. By providing a warm and welcoming environment, Donna and Laura were trying to help change those beliefs that families brought into their center. Donna and Laura also kept an open mind and through their actions it was clear they understood that family involvement was not confined within the classroom walls.

**Should It Be Required?**

This theme described participants’ thoughts on whether or not family involvement should be a requirement in preschool. Three sub-themes emerged from the data: (a) So Families Understand It’s Important, (b) So Families Will Be Involved, and (c) So the Child Knows They Care. Site Two and Site Three shared this theme with the same sub-themes emerging from the voices of the participants. It should be noted that both Site Two and Site Three had a family involvement component mandated by one of their funding sources the Office of School Readiness.

All participants believed family involvement should be required, but each had a slightly different basis for this belief. Both of the classroom teachers, Donna and Susan’s, beliefs stemmed from the child’s perspective. Their words were practically
identical saying, “it makes the child feel very important.” They thought it brought value and validation to the child’s actions to have families participating in the classroom.

Family members agreed that a mandate for family involvement stressed the importance of involvement to families and without the mandate, many families would not even consider the possibility of being involved. Jessica stated, “If it wasn’t a requirement, maybe parents wouldn’t think it mattered as much.”

Summary

This chapter included findings from nine participants at three different sites. Five themes were identified across all three cases with a total of 22 sub-themes some shared and some not. The five themes were: (a) Family Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved? and (e) Should It Be Required? The chapter began with a brief introduction to the study and research method. Each case was analyzed then the chapter concluded with a cross case analysis.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Overview

Family involvement has been a relevant topic for early childhood educators for many years (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). When families are involved in their children’s school experience, it has added a positive benefit to the child’s development (Chavkin, 2005; Swick, 2004; Marcon, 1999). Regardless of this widely held belief, many families face barriers that prevent involvement from occurring (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001). Through broadening the definition (Smith, 2006) and teacher’s intentional planning (Bridge, 2001; Smith, 2006), family involvement can play a more active role in each child’s development.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the teacher’s role in family involvement in preschool classrooms in full-day child care centers that served families in urban areas in north Alabama. Furthermore, it was to investigate how families described the ways in which they viewed family involvement in early childhood education. The multiple case approach was selected so that the contextual conditions inherent in individual classroom communities remained authentic. This study was bounded by individual classrooms, which enable the researcher to better hear the individual voices within each context. Within the course of this study as the data was
interpreted, it made more sense to the researcher to analyze the data as a cross case study. However, due to the constraints placed by the Office of Institutional Review Board, the title of the study cannot change. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and artifacts from the classrooms then analyzed by individual cases followed by cross case analysis to look for similarities and differences.

Findings

This study sought to hear the authentic voices of the study participants. Two central questions and four sub-questions were asked to enable the researcher to hear clearly.

Central questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their role in family involvement?
2. How do families describe the ways in which they become engaged in family involvement?

Sub-questions:

1. How do preschool teachers communicate opportunities for family involvement?
2. How do preschool teachers support family involvement outside of the classroom?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement in preschool?
4. How is family involvement defined? Who defines family involvement?

Through careful review of the data, five themes were identified as emergent. These themes coalesced to allow the reader to hear the lived experiences of the participants within the contexts of family involvement. These themes were: (a) Family
Involvement Is, (b) Communicate With Me, (c) Be Involved, (d) Why Won’t You Be Involved? and (e) Should It Be Required?

Family Involvement Is

For the participants, family involvement was comprised of three basic components: caring about each other, engaging with each other, and knowing about each other. When these three components work together, it supports an involvement plan that is strong and authentic. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice outlines multiple opportunities for family involvement and shared knowledge. In addition, it stresses a reciprocal relationship with families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

A component shared by some participants was a broadening of the definition of family involvement. The more traditional view of family involvement is contained in the classroom. Today’s definition defines involvement as a bigger picture and not contained to any one space. Indeed, it is essential that family involvement remain defined by the community and population served (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel, 2011). “It would be necessary to assume a broader definition of parent involvement to include not only parents’ activities to support the program, but also activities parents conduct at home to support their children’s development and education” (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004, p. 427). Intentional planning by teachers and administrators to include involvement not only in the classroom but also at home is necessary. Including connections between the school and community supports further involvement. To this end, Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews, and Keinhaus (2010) studied a program of
family sessions on community resources, family involvement, and child development. These workshop-styled sessions resulted in an increase in family’s involvement with their children.

Communicate With Me

In order for a family involvement plan to be effective, communication between teachers and families have to occur. While a variety of communication methods are used, finding the method that works best for both parties is essential (Hughes & McNaughton, 2000). Furthermore, it was found that the focus on more formal, written communication was a barrier to involving families. Site One and Site Two centers communicated primarily through written notes and showed a distinct lack of family involvement. Donna’s daily personal face-to-face conversations with her families were an example of the importance of relationship building when encouraging involvement. Hilado et al. (2011) found that parental involvement was influenced greatly by the strength of these relationships between parents and staff. Donna’s attitude of “getting to know” her families was a clear factor in the success of her center’s family involvement program. Sumison (1999) discovered these same factors as key to building a successful family involvement program.

Be Involved

Centers whose family involvement plan centered around an open-door policy in which families could “come in at any time and participate” did not show the same degree of family involvement as centers who developed an intentional plan with specific...
activities. In addition to the intentional planning, intentional communication occurred so that families knew what those activities and possibilities for involvement were. This behavior was confirmed when Bridge (2001) explored a strategy of intentional planning for involvement. Mendez (2010) found that families engaged at a higher level of incidence when they participated in a program focused on family involvement.

The atmosphere one encounters is equally as important as the possibilities for involvement. It is essential for centers to recognize the contextual needs of the families as well as the individual opportunity for involvement. Providing flexible opportunities for involvement both in and out of the classroom, as Donna and Laura did, facilitate a higher response in family involvement. Gallimore and Goldenberg (2001) learned that with families in lower socio-economic circumstances, this intentional planning for involvement appeared to support involvement outside of the classroom.

Donna, who encouraged families to be involved in whatever function they could, had more involvement than either of the other two classes. Shiver, Howes, and Wishard (2004) similarly realized the contextual and protective approach was a more successful tool for encouraging family involvement. Donna utilized this tool as she sought to educate parents to make changes in their lives for the benefit of the child.

*Why Won’t You Be Involved?*

There are multiple barriers to family involvement. Some of the barriers are created by family circumstance, some are created by teachers and administrators, and still others are founded in past experiences. Work schedules created a tremendous barrier for family involvement. Families rely on working income and do not have the flexibility to
leave during the day to participate in an activity at school. The two most frequent barriers reported from the surveys were scheduling conflicts and having a younger child at home (Arnold, Doctoroff, Ortiz, & Zeljo 2008; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar Clark, & Peay, 2001).

Teachers and directors created barriers to involvement. Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) realized that the parent-teacher connection created a block to family involvement. Perhaps the barrier was intentional, but sometimes it was unintentional.

Should It Be Required?

All of the participants believed that involvement should be required in some form; yet, there were different perspectives on why family involvement should be required. For teachers, it provided affirmation to the child and validation that she or he was important. Family members believed many families would not volunteer with it being mandatory. There was also a strong belief that it helped families understand the importance of being involved.

Insights

Through the investigation of the teacher’s role in family involvement, two of my beliefs concerning family involvement deepened and broadened significantly. These insights are related to where family involvement occurs and the interaction between teachers and families.

Family involvement has long been termed volunteering by teachers and schools. This narrow look places barriers on families who cannot be present in the school or
classroom. In today’s society, parents, grandparents, and guardians of children all work. Many with inflexible schedules that do not allow for an hour away in which to participate in classroom activities or school events. In addition, younger siblings, language and cultural differences are just a few roadblocks to families being involved in the school environment. Despite this knowledge and theory which states that families are at the center of the child’s life and the child is immersed within the family (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, 1974), many schools, classrooms, and teachers allow family involvement only within their walls. Site 1 was an example of this. Their narrow definition of family involvement created a barrier in itself and limited the amount of family involvement.

Site 3 had a broad, multi-layer definition of family involvement (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004) that included conversation with families to meet their needs and schedules which in turn increased involvement (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel, 2011). Therefore, as the early childhood community looks at family involvement, we must maintain that it happens not only within the classroom, but outside of those walls as well.

Teachers and families came into contact frequently. However, the frequency of this contact was not the determining factor in whether or not families were involved. Donna from Site 3, placed a priority on developing a relationship with her families. She said, “I just try to get into my parents. I want to know them. I talk to them every day so that I make it that we’re comfortable with each [other]...” This relational approach is an important aspect of early childhood agencies and organizations foundational beliefs. (NAEYC, 2011, PFCE, 2011, & Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Building a strong relationship with families is an essential factor in developing a strong program of family...
involvement (Hilado Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy & Israel, 2011; Sumison, 1999). Consequently, it is vital that we recognize that quality of contact with families is more significant than the quantity of that contact. Early childhood teachers must strive to make those connections with families recognizing that each family has value and deserves respect. This reciprocal relationship will empower both the family and the teacher (Swick, 2004).

Implications for Practice

First and foremost, this multiple case study explored the teachers’ role in family involvement in preschool classrooms, but it also sought to hear how families described the ways in which they viewed family involvement in early childhood education in context. It is vital for preschool teachers and preschool administrators to listen carefully to the voices of the families of preschool-aged children. The first implication was the importance of a redefining family involvement. The brush strokes of the new definition must be broad with multiple layers.

The second implication includes the school’s ability to provide meaningful opportunities for families to be involved. These opportunities have to be intentional and flexible. Schools must consider that opportunities for involvement cannot be confined within the school’s walls. Intentional planning for family involvement activities that occurred at home increased the overall involvement of the family. Within the context of these opportunities, it is essential that schools consider the particular family itself. Just as early childhood educators are aware of the cultural and societal differences of the
children in their classrooms, so must they be cognizant of the families of the children when planning for family involvement.

The third implication is to provide an atmosphere within the center of welcome and encouragement. This includes all aspects of the environment. Families who do not feel welcome tend not to be involved. It is requisite for early childhood professionals to address their own bias and recognize that families come in all shapes and sizes and that all have value and can contribute. Of course, this is easier said than accomplished. Communication is key and has to be continuous, varied, and meet the needs of the staff and families. Face-to-face interactions should occur daily or as often as possible between family members and teachers and/or administrators. Relationships have to be cultivated with each family so they recognize they have value as a participant in the classroom community and within the center community.

Lastly, the importance of involvement should be addressed. Families may not be aware of the importance of involvement. It is up to the preschool establishment to educate families on how their involvement can change the life of their child. Through this education, explanations and acceptance of the varied definitions of involvement should be thoroughly explored and shared.

Implications for Future Research

The implications from the research exposed that further study is indeed needed in the area of family involvement in the early childhood preschool years. Multiple studies exist outside of the U.S, but research in this area conducted in the United States is very
limited. This multi-case study is small in size; however, it is coherent with the minimal available literature. That is sound persuasion alone for further research.

Socio-economic status was not addressed in this study. In two of the centers, due to the income of approximately 75% of the families enrolled, tuition was either greatly reduced or somewhat reduced. Were the participants employed in positions that were less flexible and accommodating toward family involvement due to the type of employment? If sites were involved in the study where the families had a more upper-median to upper income, would the results emerge differently?

Race and ethnicity were not considered in this study. In one center, 90% of the children were African American with an African American teacher. In the other center, 80% of the children were Caucasian with an African American teacher. In the third center, 90% of the children were Caucasian with a Caucasian teacher. Does it have an impact on family involvement if the teacher’s race and culture are different from the majority of children in the class? If purposeful sampling were used to match race and ethnicity, would the findings emerge differently?

Contextual influences were not considered in this multi-case study; however, it was mentioned as a tangential area that mattered in Site Three. Perhaps this is another area that would add to the research in conjunction with the two areas addressed above.

As stated previously, the research available in the area of family involvement in preschool is limited. Our children are being left in the care and education of others at high proportion in today’s society. As early childhood educators seek to provide young children and their families’ environments that are developmentally appropriate, safe, and secure, it is imperative that the best methods are researched to discover and reach lofty
objectives. Perhaps, more study in the area of redefining family involvement and intentional planning for family involvement will facilitate early childhood educators in their support of engaging families with preschool children.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 began with an overview of this study. Findings that corresponded to the analyzed data presented in chapter 4 were presented next. Implications for future research and practice were presented based on these findings. This chapter closed with a conclusion.

All participants, indeed the vast majority of the early childhood community, agree that family involvement is an essential component of a preschool child’s life. It is imperative that early childhood professionals seek out families in order to redefine family involvement and widen the scope and possibilities therein. Working together, early childhood educators will be capable of finding the answers. This will enable us as a team to best support not only the development of the young child but also strengthen and stabilize families who are knowledgeable and provide a nurturing home in which each young child grows, learns, and develops. Truly, then the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011) will be enacted throughout early education centers in the U.S., and children and their families will be recognized and understood in the context of the culture and community. Families and young children will be respected, extended dignity well deserved, as every individual is viewed as uniquely rich in diversity.
References


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: GARRISON, TERRI
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X100322012
Protocol Title: The Role of the Teacher in Family Involvement in Pre-School: A Multiple Case Study

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 5-9-14. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.
IRB Approval Date: 5-9-14
Date IRB Approval Issued: 5-9-14
IRB Approval No Longer Valid On: 5-9-15

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INVITATION TO TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS
Dear Administrator or PreK teacher,

My name is Terri Garrison. I am inviting you to participate in a dissertation study that I am investigating as a doctoral student in the field of early childhood education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The study, “The role of the teacher in family involvement in preschool: A multiple case study”, will seek to understand more about the teacher’s role in creating an engaging environment for family involvement in preschool.

During the course of this study you will be asked to participate in one interview (60 minutes) and one follow-up interview lasting no longer than 45 minutes. Each interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, verified by you, the participant, after transcription, and destroyed after the completion of the study. In addition, you will be asked to maintain a journal of events and correspondence surrounding family involvement (5-15 minutes two-four times weekly for 3 weeks). As part of this journal, I will collect any notes, newsletters, etc. that occur during this time concerning family involvement. The total time commitment will not exceed four hours over the course of three months.

I assure you that all data collected will be kept confidential and your privacy will be respected. After all of the data is collected, you will be compensated for your time with a $15.00 gift card. Thank you for your willingness to consider taking part in this study.

Please complete the form below and place in the white envelope in the center director’s office no later than April 22, 2011.

Sincerely,

Terri Garrison

Name __________________________ Contact Phone Number __________________________

_______ I am interested in participating in this study.
_______ I am interested in hearing more about participating in this study.
_______ I am not interested in participating in this study.
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INVITATION TO FAMILIES
February 6, 2012

Dear Adult family member of a PreK child,

My name is Terri Garrison. I am inviting you to participate in a dissertation study that I am investigating as a doctoral student in the field of early childhood education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The study, “The role of the teacher in family involvement in preschool: A multiple case study”, will seek to understand more about the teacher’s role in creating an engaging environment for family involvement in preschool.

During the course of this study you will be asked to participate in one interview (60 minutes) and one follow-up interview lasting no longer than 45 minutes. Each interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, verified by you, the participant, after transcription, and destroyed after the completion of the study. In addition, you will be asked to maintain a journal of events and correspondence surrounding family involvement (5-15 minutes two-four times weekly for 3 weeks). As part of this journal, I will collect any notes, newsletters, etc. that occur during this time concerning family involvement. The total time commitment will not exceed four hours over the course of three months.

I assure you that all data collected will be kept confidential and your privacy will be respected. After all of the data is collected, you will be compensated for your time with a $15.00 gift card. Thank you for your willingness to consider taking part in this study.

Please complete the form below and place in the white envelope in the center director’s office no later than February 8, 2012.

Sincerely,

Terri Garrison

Name ____________________________  Contact Phone Number ____________________________

_______ I am interested in participating in this study.
I am interested in hearing more about participating in this study.

I am not interested in participating in this study.
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT
TITLE OF RESEARCH: The role of the teacher in family involvement: A multiple case study

IRB PROTOCOL: X100322012

INVESTIGATOR: Terri Garrison

SPONSOR: The University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Explanation of Procedures

You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research study. There will be a maximum of nine participants including teachers, administrators and family members. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore family involvement in preschool. You will be asked to take part in one (45-60 minute) face-to-face audio-recorded interview. You will also be asked to keep a journal documenting your experiences with family involvement (5-15 minutes two-four times weekly for 3 weeks). Notes, newsletters and other documents concerning family involvement will be collected as well. You may be asked to clarify statements made in the initial interview. The follow-up questions or second interview (no longer than 45 minutes) may be by phone, by email, or in person. The time frame for this project is March 2010 through September 2011.

After this consent form has been signed, I will provide you with an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout these interviews you might also be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. These audiotaped interviews will be transcribed and then you, the participant, will be asked to verify the transcription. After the completion of the study, the audio-tape(s) will be destroyed. I will take all precautions to ensure your confidentiality. You will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of the Investigator’s doctoral program.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks and discomforts involved in this study are no greater than the risks and discomforts of day-to-day living.

Benefits

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this study may help us better understand the role of teachers in family involvement in preschool.

Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. Electronic data will be stored electronically on computers that are
encrypted and password protected. The Investigator will have sole access to these passwords. Physical data will be stored in a locked metal file cabinet during the duration of the study and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of the principle investigators doctoral program. Data and results gathered will be presented orally in at least one forum. You should, however, be aware that we might choose to publish the findings of this study at a later date. The Investigator will take precautions to ensure confidentiality, using a pseudonym. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

**Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty**

Your participation in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

**Cost of Participation**

There will be no cost to you for taking part in this study.

**Payment for Participation in Research**

Your participation in this study is on a volunteer basis. However, because it will require you to keep a reflective journal I am offering you a $15.00 gift card from a local retailer in appreciation for your time.

**Alternatives**

Your alternative is to not participate in this study.

**Questions**

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Terri Garrison. She will be glad to answer any of your questions. Her number is 256-428-9453. She may also be reached after hours by calling her at 256-509-6607.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore. Ms. Moore is the Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Ms. Moore may be reached at 205-934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all other calls” or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.
Legal Rights
You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant        Date

Signature of Investigator        Date

Signature of Witness        Date
APPENDIX E

TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
The role of the teacher in family involvement in preschool:

A multiple case study

Teacher/Administrator Interview Protocol

Name ________________________________________ Date _______________________________
School _______________________________________ Location ____________________________

Introduction: Thank you for taking time to reflect and talk with me about your experiences with family involvement with your child in his/her PreK classroom. I will be recording and transcribing what we say today. I will be asking you to review the transcription with some of the notes I make regarding my interpretations of what you say. It is important that my notes reflect your true meaning so I want to make certain my interpretation is correct. The transcript will be verbatim so it will include any “umm”s and “ahh”s. If I use quotes in the final paper I will edit those.

What I am interested is discovering is your thoughts on and how you feel about family involvement in preschool. You’ve had a chance to review the questions and give them some thought. I truly want to know your feelings about these experiences so please feel free to answer questions honestly. There are no wrong answers. I may ask additional questions as we progress in order to clarify your meaning. Are you ready to start?

1. Tell me about you and your immediate family.
   - family members
   - occupations
   - education

2. Tell me about your parents/guardians involvement in your schooling.
<p>| | |</p>
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Describe your feelings about family involvement in early childhood (ages 3-5 years).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>What opportunities do you offer for family involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>What is your comfort level in having families participating in your classroom? Can you explain this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Which events are you more comfortable in having families in the classroom? Why?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8. In what ways do you encourage families to participate?

9. How do your PreK children react when their families are participating in class?

10. Describe the types of communication that you use with families?

11. Do you believe that your families read the notes, newsletters, and other information that you send home? Why or why not?
12. Do you believe that family involvement in school supports or hinders a PreK child’s development?

13. Do you believe that families should be required to participate in school events?

14. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me regarding family involvement in preschool?
APPENDIX F

FAMILY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
The role of the teacher in family involvement in preschool:

A multiple case study

Family Interview Protocol

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</table>

**Introduction:** Thank you for taking time to reflect and talk with me about your experiences with family involvement with your child in his/her PreK classroom. I will be recording and transcribing what we say today. I will be asking you to review the transcription with some of the notes I make regarding my interpretations of what you say. It is important that my notes reflect your true meaning so I want to make certain my interpretation is correct. The transcript will be verbatim so it will include any “umm”s and “ahh”s. If I use quotes in the final paper I will edit those.

What I am interested is discovering is your thoughts on and how you feel about family involvement in preschool. You’ve had a chance to review the questions and give them some thought. I truly want to know your feelings about these experiences so please feel free to answer questions honestly. There are no wrong answers. I may ask additional questions as we progress in order to clarify your meaning. Are you ready to start?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Tell me about you and your immediate family.</th>
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<td>• family members</td>
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<td>• occupations</td>
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<td>• education</td>
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<th>2. Tell me about your parents/guardians involvement in your schooling.</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Describe your feelings about family involvement in early childhood (ages 3-5 years).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about your involvement with your child enrolled in this PreK class. What types of activities do you participate in at home with your child?</td>
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<td>5. If you have other children, tell me about your involvement in their schooling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. What opportunities for your involvement in your PreK child’s class do you see?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
7. How are you encouraged to participate in your PreK child’s class?  
   Probe: Do you feel welcome? Why or why not?  
   Do you feel pressured? Why or why not?  

8. What activity in your child’s PreK class do you enjoy being involved in the most? Why?  

9. How does your PreK react when you participate in his/her class?  

10. Describe the types of communication that your PreK child’s teacher uses?
11. Do you read the notes, newsletters, and other information that your child’s PreK teacher sends home? Why or why not?

12. How do you think your participation in school supports your PreK child’s development?

13. Do you believe that you should be required to participate in school events? Why and why not?

14. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me regarding family involvement in preschool?