

Examining Generational Differences among Diverse Families Regarding Parental School Involvement

Gustava Cooper-Baker

Facilitator, Leadership Academy
Kansas City, MO

Barbara N. Martin

University of Central Missouri
Warrensburg, MO

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to examine parental involvement by viewing generational differences among diverse families through the lens of the overlapping spheres of influence for school-family-community partnerships. The study's population consisted of one African American family, one Hispanic family and one Caucasian family. A grandparent, children, and a grandchild represented each family. Findings suggest that while parental involvement is still as important today as it was decades ago, based on the family's culture it was viewed differently. Another finding was the need for developing partnerships with the home, school, and community to enhance opportunities for all parents regardless of race, culture, or ethnicity to become involve in their children's education. The implications for teacher and principal training are significant.

Keywords: diversity; parental involvement; school-family community partnerships

1.0 Introduction

For years, educational research has demonstrated the importance of parental involvement, but most contacts of parents with the school have been superficial (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Peterson, 2000; McPhee et al., 2013). Parental involvement in schools has become one of the dominant paradigms of family-school relations in the United States (McPhee et al., 2013). This movement toward the call for more parental involvement in school acknowledges a distance between family and school and the need to enhance the relationship (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; De Carvalho, 2001).

Researchers (Hale, 2001; Moles, 2003) have explored parental involvement from the perspective of how racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics might impact the school/home relationship. They found that the least involved in their

children's education are the parents from culturally diverse backgrounds (Hale, 2001; Moles, 2003). There are a myriad of reasons why this has occurred such as cultural differences between home and school, poverty concentration, and minority enrollment in the school (Hale, 2001). Since nearly 40% of children in the United States public schools are members of a racial ethnic minority or of multiple racial minorities (Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005), the challenges of American educators to understand how culturally diverse families engage in parental involvement is essential. Baker and Soden (1998) suggested that the amount of parental involvement to affect a positive impact on children is yet to be determined, but even small amounts of such involvement are needed to ensure all children have academic success. Therefore, examined in this inquiry was parental involvement through the lens of Epstein's (2001) theory of "overlapping spheres of influence", while examining the parental involvement of three generations of an African American family, a Latino family, and a Caucasian family. The following questions were addressed within the context of the study: 1) What is parental involvement, as viewed through the lens of overlapping spheres of influence? 2) How does race culture and ethnicity affect how parents are involved in their children's education generationally?

2.0 Conceptual Underpinnings

2.1 Overlapping Sphere of Influence Theory

According to Epstein, (2002, p. 32), "There is no topic in education on which there is greater agreement than the need for parental involvement". "Everyone wants it, but most educators do not know how to develop productive partnerships" (Family Literacy Center, 2006, p.1). This theoretical framework suggests multiple contexts, internal and external that confronts the family, school, and community (Garcia, 2004). The theory of OSI recognizes that three major areas in which students learn and grow include the family, the school, and the community (Epstein Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Voorhis, 2002). Constantino (2003) and Epstein (1995) both recognized that for parental involvement to take place and for children to learn and grow certain influences must be present. Epstein advocated that with frequent interactions among families and the school, the three spheres in a child's life, the school, family and the community, are influenced. Epstein, et al., (2002) agreed that various practices in the spheres of influence may draw the school, family, and community together or push them further apart in their influence on children's learning and development. These spheres overlap by putting the child at the center of the relationship. When the spheres of the school, family, and the community overlap, a true meaning to "learning communities or caring communities" is born (Epstein, 2001 p.24).

Ultimately, Epstein's (2001) theory of the overlapping spheres of influence is represented by three forces: (a) time; (b) experiences in families; and (c) experiences in schools. Time refers to the child's historical time; the age, grade level, and social conditions during the time span the children are in school. Experience in the family represents the impact the family has on its children to prepare them for school. These forces are pulled together to produce more of an

overlap when parents maintain an increased interest and involvement in their children's education. Experiences in the school occur when teachers make parents a part of regular teaching practices. By involving parents, the overlapping is greater and parent involvement is much stronger. Since this inquiry examined generational parental involvement the use of Epstein's (2001) theory of the overlapping spheres of influence was deemed most appropriate.

2.2 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement requires parents to participate as partners with the school and to function as advocates for all children (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Epstein, 1995; Moore, 1991). Three major factors that have had an impact on parental involvement are 1) parents' beliefs about what is significant, required, and acceptable for them to do on behalf of their children; 2) the extent to which parents believe that they can be optimistic about their children's education; and 3) parents understanding that their children and the school want them to be involved (Bissinger, 2001, p. 12). Machen et al. (2005) noted that collaboration between parents and schools is important in educating children because of the demands of society and the difficult times. Positively engaging parents and other family members in the education of their children has the effect of being more transformational than any other type of educational reform (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Kyle, McIntyre, Miller & Moore, 2002).

While recognizing that parental involvement is an important factor for student success, effective parental participation is not easily accomplished and has many barriers (Muldrow, Cano, & Kimmel, 1999). Several researchers (Epstein, 2001; Hale, 2001; Moles, 2003) have explored the strengths of parental involvement with various racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics. Moles (2003) argued parents from culturally diverse backgrounds are at risk for becoming the least involved in their children's education due to cultural differences between home and school, poverty concentration, and minority enrollment in the school. Boethel (2003) and Hale (2001) agreed that there is a disparity in parental involvement in children of diverse families but differs on the reasons why. Hale postulated that the reality is the energy that is needed to become involved in their children's education is often lacking because of the demand of work, pressure within the family, and low levels of education often keep minority families from conforming to traditional models of parental involvement.

2.3 Barriers for African American Parents

According to Koonce and Harper (2005), some educators are of the opinion that African American parents have a tendency to be uninvolved in their children's education. Hale (2001) further indicated that many African American children come from homes of single-parent households and feel it is the responsibility of the school to educate the child. Another factor that faces many African American parents is the notion that parent involvement programs are mainly for white-middle class families (Koonce & Harper). Moreover, problems or concerns that cause conflicts between teachers and parents often increase these barriers. Koonce and Harper (2005) further suggested that schools have not made the

most of the assets of engaging African American parents in developing partnerships.

2.4 Barriers for Hispanic Parents

Lee, et al. (2005) postulated several barriers with Hispanic parents: structural racism, school funding, disciplinary actions, language attitudes, and the lack of resources. Golan and Petersen (2002) noted that Hispanic parents find the school system to be unfriendly, insensitive to their needs and situations. In order to increase Hispanic parental involvement, Lee, et al. argued schools need to change how they look at the educational system through the structuring of programs, eliminating racism, and transforming attitudes. Taking into consideration the scheduling of parents to better engage them in school is a need for Hispanic parents as well as other parents (Golan & Petersen, 2002). Chavkin (2005) suggested that educators should design programs for parental involvement that brings diverse families into the classroom to discuss their experiences, thus building educators' understanding regarding Latino parents and their expectations. Similarly, Closson, Wilkins, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2004) studied parents of upper elementary students and identified teacher invitations were particularly strong predictors of involvement among the Latino families in their sample.

2.5 Barriers for Caucasian Parents

Even though research (Batey, 1996) investigating barriers for parental involvement has focused primarily on minorities, low income Caucasian parents have similar barriers that affect the depth of their involvement in their children's education. According to Henderson, et al., (2007) barriers for Caucasian parents might surface when they worry about losing control of their influence in the school's day to day operation to minority families, or are called "racist" or insensitive to minority parents. Still other barriers that affect involvement for Caucasian parents are teachers who are not always receptive to parents volunteering and who sometimes feel negative attitudes and feelings from the school staff because of labels such as "those parents" (Batey, 1996). Batey further argued teachers often felt that Caucasian parents wanted to control the curriculum and instruction in the classroom.

In order to decrease barriers to parental involvement, all parents have to be understood and included in school practices. Effective schools are the schools that accommodate the diversity of families that it serves (Epstein, 2001). Using a qualitative approach, the purpose of this study was to give voice to three generations of diverse families on what is parental involvement as viewed through the lens of the Overlapping Spheres of Influence in an urban metropolitan area in Missouri.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participants

The researchers purposefully selected (Creswell, 2003) three generations of family members in one urban setting. Selection of the participants was based on two criteria. First, each generation of a family was determined to be successful as defined by all three generations of family members having completed either a 2-year associate degree, or earned a bachelor's degree. Second, all family members were well established in their neighborhoods by being actively engaged in social, civic, or religious organizations. The participants were comprised of grandparents, children, and grandchildren from various ethnicities: The African American family consisted of a grandparent, daughter, and grandson; the Hispanic family consisted of a grandparent, daughter, and granddaughter; and the Caucasian family consisted of a grandparent, daughter, and granddaughter (n=9). The ages of the grandparents ranged from 79 to 85 and all were females. The children's ages ranged from 45 to 60 and were all female, and the grandchildren's ages ranged from 21-30 with one male and two females.

3.2 Data Collection and Instrumentation

Using a qualitative approach was necessary since defined research goals included the involvement of parents in the lives of their children and the overlapping partnership of the home, school, and community that centers on the child. "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p.6). The researchers used multiple methods of data collection such as interviews, focus groups, and a short questionnaire (Creswell, 2003) to triangulate the data. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structure protocol. The researchers developed the interview questions and protocol using the literature on the *Overlapping Sphere of Influence* (OSI) theory and cultural differences as a framework. Next, the researchers facilitated three focus groups (grandparents, children, grandchildren) to gather generational data on parental involvement and cultural differences. Finally, the researchers distributed a Likert style questionnaire to all nine participants. The questionnaire asked participants to select the response that best indicated the degree they felt they were involved in their children's lives in school, at home, and in the community. The emphasis given to the "voice" of the participants is important because it provided actual experiences, beliefs, and values, and became a united voice for reform and change (Creswell, 2003). Since the ultimate goal in qualitative research is to effect change, the voice of the participants raises their consciousness about parental involvement and prepares an agenda for change to improve their lives concerning their children.

3.3 Data Analysis

The right approach to analysis of data for a qualitative study according to Merriam (1998) is to do it simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, the researchers gathered and analyzed data concurrently, breaking often to fill in gaps, in order to get the most holistic picture possible. Member

checking was conducted to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and confirmed for each participant that the story was told as intended (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Using the constant comparative method, the transcripts were analyzed and coded for emergent themes. Analysis was ongoing throughout each stage of the data collection process and saturation was determined by the level of redundancy in participants' responses. Findings were organized around the three overlapping spheres-home, school, and community.

4.0 Findings

The parental involvement data from the questionnaire indicated that in reference to Sphere One, the *home*, African American and Hispanic grandparents needed "some learning" in helping their children with homework, but had the perception that they needed "no learning" for encouraging their children to do well in school. The three sets of grandparents selected "some learning" to indicate their level of understanding how to prepare for their children for school. All of the children indicated that "very little" learning was needed as a result of their involvement with their children and that they knew how to help their children with homework and had known how to prepare their children for school. These findings were also reflected in the interviews and focus groups, when the grandparents mentioned that they felt the school had the responsibility to get children ready for school if they were not already prepared. However, the parents gave examples of how they helped their children to be ready for school. One parent mentioned that being a teacher helped her prepare her children; she knew what her children needed to know the first day of kindergarten. While not all of the grandchildren had children of their own, they all noted that they intended to be highly engaged with their children's school experiences.

In reference to Sphere Two, the *school*, the interview, focus groups, and questionnaire data revealed that the minority grandparents thought very "little learning" had taken place in connection to the principals at the school or in assuming leadership roles in the school. Nor did they receive assistance on how to work with school staff to support their children. One minority grandparent said, "No one ever asked me to help in school and I didn't ask [for help] either." The Caucasian grandparent noted that she felt she understood how to get help from the principal and the faculty and was an officer in the parent association. In fact, the Caucasian grandparent stressed, "While there were Black children in the school I don't ever remember any parents being involved in PTA except for attending." The minority parents applied "some learning" to knowledge about leadership roles and how to become a more effective parent while their children were in school. As one parent said, "I could have been anything I wanted in the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) but I was just too busy working." Neither minority grandparents, nor their children took on many leadership roles in the school, mainly because the grandparents volunteered other places and their children were working full time jobs. In fact, the minority parents said they did not put as much pressure on their children (grandchildren in study) as their parents (grandparents in study) had done to them, but allowed them to be

children and to make some choices for themselves. One Hispanic parent even said, "I knew my children would be successful in life and I didn't pressure or force them into making choices or doing things I want them to do. But that wasn't the case with my parents. They were on me for every decision I made or didn't make." However, the Caucasian parent emphasized, "I waited to see what's happening in school and then make sure my kid is doing her best. I want to help her make the very best decisions."

Regarding the lens of Sphere three, the *community*, revealed both minority grandparents and minority children indicated that "very little learning" was needed as the home, school, and community interacted frequently. The minority grandparents, parents and the grandchildren understood that the home, school, and community must be a partnership. The minority grandparents and parents stressed that they expected their children, and were expected by their parents, to be actively involved in the community especially the church. As one minority parent noted, "What happened at school often was discussed at church and support was suggested to get parents involved and to provide opportunities for their children". The Caucasian grandparent noted "The neighborhood was always involved in everyone's child, what they were doing and who they were doing it with". The Caucasian parent did not mention neighborhood nor community groups. However, all of the children mentioned a sense of community whether it was from civic or religious organizations or from talking to their friends on Facebook about their children. As one grandchild said, "Yeah I am involved in church activities and we talk about school and stuff." Another grandchild noted, "I share a lot about my kid's behavior on Facebook, pictures, and things."

The two emergent themes from the data were: 1) *Rallying the Community* (or Whole Village) with the subthemes of a) Building Successful Partnerships, and b) Collaborating with the Community; 2) *Consciousness Raising of Self Assurance* with the subthemes of a) Parental Involvement, b) Giving Voice, and c) Culture Differences. The two themes reflect the actions of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren regarding how they were involved in the education of their children. Each generation viewed parental involvement as building a strong relationship between the home, school, and community. Moreover, each generation had something to share that afforded the opportunities to learn about each other and a respect of different cultures. Depicted in Figure 1 are the themes that emerged from the findings.

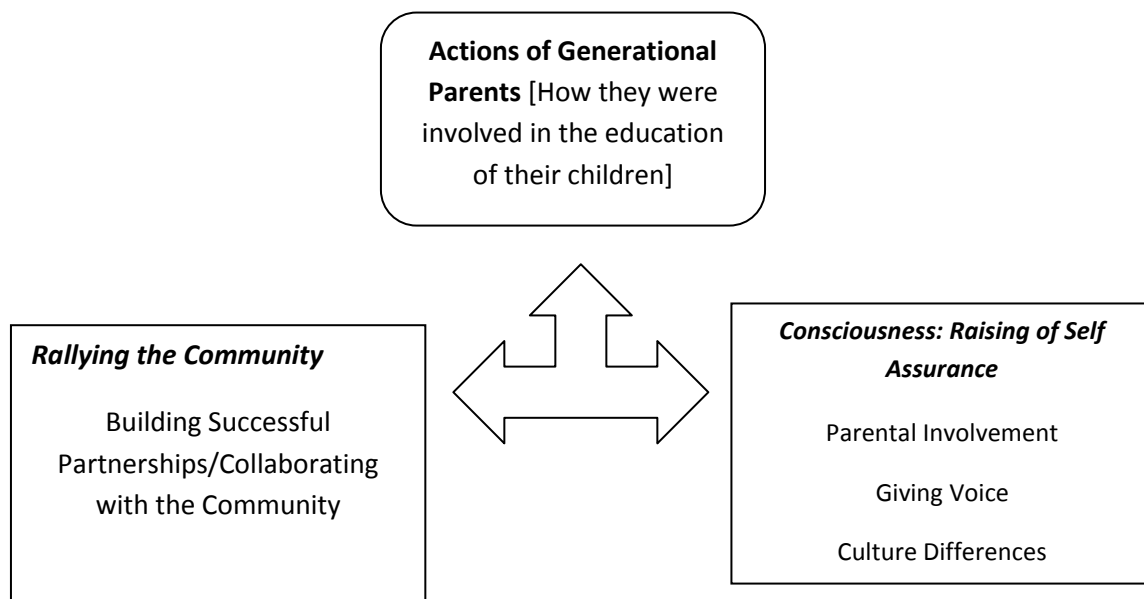


Figure 1: Emergence of Two Main Themes: Impact of parent involvement for generations of diverse backgrounds

4.1 Rallying the Whole Village

The data supported the concept that next to the family, the school has the most significant impact on children's growth and development. This finding supported what Comer, Hayes, Joyner, and Ben-Avie (1996) had identified over a decade ago when they identified that the notion of the African Proverb, "It takes a whole village or Community to raise a child" allows parents, school staff, and individuals within the community to work together and understand the role of parental involvement. Two of the parents noted how the whole community helped in raising the neighborhood children. When noting:

There was someone in the neighborhood that knew all of the children and kept the families informed of any wrong doing by any child in the neighborhood. All parents in the neighborhood were considered to be the parents of all of the children.

And another parent said, "The families in the neighborhood always looked out for all of the children in the neighborhood". Moreover, a grandchild noted,

All my mother's friends were teachers and they took care of each other's children, you could not get away with anything; if you did anything wrong, my mother's friends would take care of the problem and then call my mother, and of course, I had to suffer the consequences from my mother too.

Another grandchild supported this, "We felt comfortable visiting each other's houses and getting together for neighborhood gatherings, and we knew our parents would get a report on how well we behaved." Thus, the extended family played a major part in all communities and in the involvement of all children. This data set further noted that building a nurturing environment at the school level, while tapping the energy of the community resources helped involve parents. However, the village that was once small, simple, and nurturing is now

very large, complex and sometimes insensitive to the needs of the families. Agencies that supported parents and served families have evolved and changed becoming fragmented and often unable to address the needs of how children learn and perform in school. As one grandparent noted:

It was very difficult dealing with a child with a hearing problem because the school did not have the resources to help with the problem. The community resources were limited to income and whether or not you were receiving welfare. I did not think it was fair, but what could you do. That is when we had to make the decision to take my oldest son out of Catholic school, and put him into a public school because of resources and we needed the help.

Ultimately, neither schools nor parents can provide all sustenance, such as services and support, which children need to thrive and develop well in this increasingly complex society. The entire community of significant others and services must work together to strengthen and prepare children for the present and future. As highlighted by one minority parent:

We have many outstanding resources in the community and people to help families, but sometimes families don't know all the places to look for the resources. If community groups would help the schools, they too would benefit. When my son was old enough to work in our community, he sacked groceries at the neighborhood store. The grocery store manager would often check to see how well he was doing in school. This type of networking provided a service and a support of his learning and to help me as a parent.

4.2 Building Successful Partnerships

In developing a partnership, parents, teachers, and community members will have to create more family-like schools, and more schools that serve the needs of all families (Epstein, 2001). This data set noted that the focus of partnerships should be on the children because the children are influenced by all three contexts- the home, school, and community. Within the theme of partnership, all generations shared that the partnership is vitally important to the children's education and parental involvement. Noted were the needs for partnerships such as after school programs and community based social centers. All generations pointed out that after school, children need places to go for family friendly programs. In speaking on partnerships of the church and school, the Hispanic grandmother said:

Because my children attended Catholic Schools, the families had to have a partnership with the church and school. My family had a very close bond with church and school. We supported the church through fund raisers, being a cub scouts mother and, cooking for the children at times. The family was involved in all aspects of the church. My husband and sons cleaned the church and the school on many occasions. Therefore, they were known around the church as well as the school. By attending a Catholic School, my children attended Mass every day also. It was without a doubt, because we choose this educational system for our children we knew we would have a close and committed partnership

with the school and church. I am sure by us having an interest in the school it helped my children to do better in school.

The Black grandparent noted:

I recalled there was some partnership with the home and school, but very little within the community. As a parent, I attended all of the PTA meetings at school and other events. The school knew if they needed me for anything, all that they had to do was call. The church was the largest community service that we use when my children were in school. If my children were not in school, they were in church. The church was the place where they got the second dose of parenting. The church members provided other activities that involved reading, writing, speaking, leadership skills, and helping people in the community.

A Black grandchild said:

Growing up I was expected to be in church as much as school it seemed. And every night after school I went to the Big Brothers and Sisters community center until I was picked up. I guess I learned a lot at the center and church just like at school. Playing games at the center helped me learn to like everyone; I guess and made me stronger in a lot of ways.

4.3 Collaborating with the Community

One grandparent had spent a life time in one location and has seen many changes in the city. The changes were mainly in the school and the communities demographics. The grandparents noted that in the past, the neighborhoods had more stores, schools and churches in them and certain people lived in a neighborhood and were not allowed to live in other neighborhoods. As noted by the Hispanic grandparent:

My parents lived in the neighborhood I live in now. The neighborhood was during the riots in the 1960's, [but]we were never afraid, because the rioters would come and knock on our door before anything happen and let us know what was going on in the neighborhood. Today, things are a little different; my children often worry about us. The neighborhood has changed, but I don't plan on moving anywhere. My husband and I try to be very careful in the way we live. We are not as friendly and concern about children and people in the neighborhood as when our children were in school.

Other participants discussed how important it was for the community to help in providing services to parents for the benefit of raising their children. All generations noted that the community should be working and planning with community businesses, cultural, civic and religious organizations, senior citizen groups, and colleges and universities, in order to strengthen schools and to keep the grandchildren off of the streets. As one Grandparent said:

In my community, the mayor and the city council members are trying to close the one community center because of budget cuts. It is the only place where adults and children can go to have fun. There is a town

meeting soon and I plan to attend to voice my opinion. The people in the community need a place for relaxing and to have fun. Just last week they had the neighborhood lit up for some big game, it was nice to see the lights and stop signs to welcome the basketball teams and people into the neighborhood and to show them where the games were played. I feel that the community belongs to the children and the adults that live in the community.

The children and grandchildren alluded that the school should be working and planning with community businesses when a parent highlighted:

I had to learn what resources would help my children while they were in school. My children spent a lot of time at church, going to Sunday school and other youth activities. Back then, things were a little safer. I also recall taking car loads of children to school functions with my children. I would pick the children up from their house and then drop them off when the game was over, many times their own parents would be at home, and two or three cars would be sitting in their driveways. Why they were not involved in their children's education, I did not understand. Maybe it is the issue of safety.

4.4 Consciousness Rising to Self-Assurance

This consciousness rising to self-assurance had developed over the years as noted by the participants through parents being involved with their children's education and providing them opportunities to develop their own voice. The evidence of consistently being positive and have high self confidence had an influence on the families in this study. All of the participants believed that because of their involvement in the school their children were successful in life. The grandparents noted that they worked together to support the schools, by volunteering when they could and by encouraging their children. The grandchildren noted that they were joining forces with the schools to build better partnerships for all children. The parents and the children both noted that collaborating with the schools was a necessity in today's world.

4.5 Parental Involvement

Epstein (2001) noted that "when parents are involved in their children's education, children go farther in school, and they go to better schools" (p. 314). Within the theme of parental involvement, the grandparents, children, and grandchildren recalled what parental involvement is and how it is different now. As one grandparent said:

Parental involvement is when parents support their children in school by helping them to make the right decisions in life. It is having an understanding that schools are different now than when we were in school. I didn't go to work until my last child was in 5th grade, and I worked at the school they attended, so I was able to attend all of the meetings and be involved in all events at their school. I hear stories of parents today taking the side of their children instead of believing the teachers. I hear of parents not having time to go to the school to see about their children. I think a lot of this is because parents today are not as

involved as I was. I took care of my children and other people children in the neighborhood as well. I recall when I would walk my children to school I would end up with all the girls walking with us to school. Many parents today are raising their children by themselves today and do not have the communities we had when my children were in school. Many of them have to work, and some work just to have stuff. (I have a niece with three children, who should be attending PTA and helping at school) but instead I think she works just to buy stuff. I worry about the parental involvement my great grandchildren will receive, will their parents have to work two or three jobs just to survive? I worry about the education system. Will my great grandchildren be able to compete in this global world? I wonder how involved their parents will be.

4.6 Giving Voice

The children and grandchildren extended their voices on parental involvement. As one said:

Parental involvement is when you show your children you care about what they do at school as well as when they are away from school. It is letting your children know that no matter what the problem or situation is parents are there for you. I trusted my children to make the right decisions in life. Of course, they stumbled along the way, but they had to make do with whatever decisions they made in life.

Another noted:

Parental involvement is the caring, love, freedom you give your children. That support helps them find their voice. Since I was the baby of the family, I couldn't go anywhere by myself. Things have certainly changed now for children.

As a grandson pointed out:

Parent involvement is when you know that your parents really care about you. It is the support and trust parents give their children in talking to them about everyday life situations. I know my mother is here for me, she is my hero and I am there for her. I am a mother's boy. When parents are involved in the lives of their children there is a partnership that is shared between the home, school and opportunity for each family to explore and connect.

4.7 Culture Differences

While all generations of participants, no matter what their culture or ethnicity, thought parental involvement was very important, there were some differences based on generation. All of the grandparents, regardless of race, felt that their children were in the best of hands when they were in school. However, the

parents and grandchildren did worry about what was happening at school. Within the theme of cultural differences, one minority grandparent said:

My children went to their neighborhood schools, and the majority of the children were “Black” and there were no problems or differences at school; the school Tadd, was once only for Caucasian children. When more Blacks moved further south, the school became a school for the Black children. I saw no change in parental involvement as the school changed or any change in the school.

The Caucasian grandparent followed with:

My children went to Catholic Schools and the Nuns were so strict, that differences were not shown within the school. There were more Caucasian children that attended the Catholic School than Hispanic children or African Americans. The same requirements were made for all families. I didn’t see families doing any more than we did. Even though we didn’t have much we wanted the best for our children. I didn’t notice any cultural differences.

However, the parents of the children felt some cultural differences as they were involved in the education of their children. As noted by one minority parent:

If I hadn’t had high self-esteem about myself and not paid a lot attention to the stares from teachers when I entered my children’s school I would have noticed more of a difference. Being in the field of education offered some support to understanding the school and the environment of the school. Because of the roles of school practices in trying to encourage parent involvement, I felt that the parents and home must work together as partners.

Consequently, for the grandchildren, it was also very different because all schools were integrated by the time they entered school. As one stressed:

Joy said I saw some cultural differences in that the Caucasian parents attended more school events than the African American or Hispanic parents did. I had friends of both races at the Catholic School so I was able to learn about various people. I enjoyed learning about all cultures and differences in my friends.

In addition, the Caucasian grandchild pointed out, “While the kids didn’t seem to have many issues in school, the parents at ballgames and other places sat in separate places and didn’t seem to talk to each other much.” As the Black grandchild noted, “I saw some cultural differences in that the Caucasian parents attended more school events than the African American or Hispanic parents. Perhaps they felt more welcomed” The Hispanic grandchild noted, “When we had volunteers they seem to always be White, maybe because the teachers were mostly White, I don’t know”.

The participants, regardless of ethnicity or culture, all thought parental involvement was very important. While all the minority grandparents and

children felt that their children were in the best of hands when they were in school, the minority grandchildren did not perceived that they were always valued at school, some noting perhaps because all schools were integrated by the time they entered school.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 It takes a village

This study revealed that parents, regardless of generation, viewed parental involvement not only as necessity but vital for children to be successful in school. Each generation valued the strength that came from a neighborhood, civic organizations and religious organizations working together to help raise the children. Regardless of ethnicity or race, the participants tended to default to the status quo of churches and community resources when it came to changing schools and neighborhoods. While the type of parental involvement might have altered over time, due to the complexities of society such as both parents needing to work, etc., the need for being involving all spheres of influence (Epstein, 2001) to create an effective parental involvement program is essential in schools today. The building of partnerships that emphasized collaboration between the spheres of influence is indispensable when creating a program for parental involvement in schools.

5.2 Consciousness Rising to Self-Assurance

Repeatedly, the theme of parental involvement making a difference not only in the children's school work but also in how successful they were in life was present in this data set. From each generation, regardless of ethnicity or culture, the voices of the parents noted that being involved with their children's education was a valued endeavor that made a difference in their lives and the lives of their children. This engagement in their children's education gave rise to the children finding themselves and their voice not only in school but also in the community at large. The findings of this inquiry articulated the importance of educators being deliberate and purposeful in understanding the impact that ethnicity and diversity have on parental involvement. These findings also supported Epstein's (2001) spheres of influence that directly affect student learning and development. The model of school, family, and community partnerships places the student at the center, and clearly argues that when families are involved, students' achievement increases, attendance and attitude toward school increases, classroom behavior improves, and levels of aspiration increase.

6.0 Implications for Practice

Creating school, family and community partnerships are essential if families, regardless of race and ethnicity, are to actively participate in the education of their children. As leadership and teacher, preparatory programs work with aspiring teachers and principals, it is essential that they have a deeper understanding of community partnerships with schools. It is imperative that leadership and teacher preparatory programs provide hands on experience for aspiring principals and teachers in how to mobilize the community resources

and how to work effectively with diverse student populations. Educators should focus on consciously awakening parents to a higher level of self-assurance by having a keen understanding of the needs of parents, building inclusive partnerships, and creating significant collaborating experiences for all parents. Those types of activities that focused on in-depth leadership roles that parents can assume might prove to be particularly positive in association with meaningful parental involvement. Furthermore, since the parents perceived they could not raise the children by themselves, leaders should have the understanding that the home, school, and community working together are needed to provide the social, emotional, and academic growth and success of all children. Rallying the village is particularly essential for families from diverse backgrounds and changing neighborhoods. The educator who can involve the entire community will give the family voice, thus providing a “bridge” to successful and effective school-home partnerships.

References

- Baker, A. & Soden, L. (1998). *The challenges of parent involvement research*. ERIC Digest. Retrieved from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-3/parent.html>
- Batey, C. (1996). *Parents are lifesavers: A handbook for parent involvement in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bisinger, S. (2001). Connecting with families. *Teacher today, Publication, Inc.* 17(1), 1-4.
- Boethel, M. (2003). *Diversity: School, family & community connections*. Austin, TX. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Chavkin, N. (2005). Strategies for preparing educators to enhance the involvement of diverse families in their children’s education. *Multicultural Education*, 13(2), 16-20.
- Closson, K. E., Wilkins, A. S., Sandler, H. M., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2004, April). *Crossing cultural boundaries: Latino parents’ involvement in their children’s education*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Comer, J. P., Haynes N., Joyner, E, and Ben-Avie, M. (1996). *Rally the whole village: The comer process for reforming education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Constantino, S. (2003). *Engaging all families: Creating a positive school culture by putting research into practice*. Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Education.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- De Carvalho, M. (2001). *Rethinking family-school relations*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(1), 701-712.
- Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Epstein, J., Sanders, M. Simon, B., Salinas, C., Jansorn, N, & Van Voorhis, F. (2002). *School and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Family Literacy Center, Inc. (2006). Kansas City, MO., *Parent involvement*. 3(2). 10-15.
- Fraenkel, J. & Wallen, N. (2003) *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Garcia, D. (2004). Exploring connections between the construct of teacher efficacy and Family involvement practices: Implications for urban teacher preparation. *Urban Education*, 39(1), 290-315.

- Golan, S. & Peterson, D. (2002). *Promoting involvement of recent immigrant families in their children's education*. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu>
- Goodall, J & Montgomery, C. (2013) Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum *Educational Review* 33(2) p. 22-34. DOI:10.1080/00131911.2013.781576
- Hale, J. (2001). *Learning while Black: Creating educational excellence for African American children*. Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press.
- Henderson, A., Mapp, K, Johnson, V. & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Koonce, D. & Harper, W. (2005). Engaging African American parents in the school: A community-Based consultation model. *Journal of Education and Psychological Consultation*, 16(2), 55-74.
- Kyle, D., McIntyre, E., Miller, K. & Moore, G. (2002). *Reaching out: A K-8 resource for connecting families and schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Lee, C., Zambrana, R., Zoppi, I., Lorenzo, O. & Tsado, T.(2005) *Colloquium of the Maryland institute for minority achievement and urban education. Session III Latino student success K-20: Family and school*. Retrieved from <http://www.ducation.umd.edu/mimaue/Colloquia/spo5/new0503ColloqSummay0330.html>
- Lopez, M., Kreider H., & Coffman, J. (2005). Intermediary organizations as capacity builders in family educational involvement. *Urban Education*. 40 (2), 78-105.
- Machen, S., Wilson J. & Notar, C. (2005). Parental involvement in the classroom. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*. 32(2), 13-16.
- McPhee, C., Bielick, S., Masterton, M., Flores, L., Parmer, R., Amchin, S., Stern, S., and McGowan, H. (August, 2013). *National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012: Data File User's Manual*, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moles, O. (2003). *School-family relations and learning. Federal education initiatives*. Philadelphia, PA., The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, 20-21.
- Moore, E. K. (1991). Improving schools through parental involvement. *Principal*, 71(2), 17-20.
- Muldrow, D., Cano, R. & Kimmel, H. (1999). *Where have all the parents gone?* Retrieved from <http://www.csun.edu/cod/conf/1999/proceedings/sessions0233html>
- Peterson, D. (2000). *Parent involvement in the educational process*. Washington, DC. Office of Educational Research and Improvement.