PARENT–TEACHER COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT EARLY LITERACY IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

by

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PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT EARLY LITERACY IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative grounded-theory study was to explore strategies that preschool teachers used to collaborate with parents to support literacy among culturally diverse communities. The study included 15 parent participants and 22 teachers from two separate early-childhood-development centers. Data-collection procedures entailed interviews and focus-group discussions. Participants' responses answered the research questions, determining certain elements that lead toward parent–teacher collaboration to support literacy. The 8 themes revealed through interviews and focus-group discussions were establishing rapport, parental presence, scheduling activities for increased school participation, parent and teacher collaboration, parent and teacher education, school-to-home literacy connections, literacy-rich home environments, and ongoing communication. The use of a grounded-theory methodology led to the generation of a theory indicating that literacy is supported through a process of interactions that lead teachers to share information, materials, and resources to enable parents to extend literacy activities learned at school to their natural home environments.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researchers such as Epstein (1995), Lareau (1987), and Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000) documented the promotion of successful early childhood learning as a joint effort that takes place in a partnership between school staff, the community, and families. Family involvement in education can be a powerful tool to increase collaboration between parents and teachers and to create more equitable and culturally responsive schools (Auerbach, 2009). The intent of this study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in culturally diverse communities. The issue is important because the years between birth and 5 years of age are critical to the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development of children. Hibel (2009) indicated that the early years of schooling could influence an individual's future academic success, saying “Children must not only possess the cognitive scaffolding necessary to support learning but must also be able to interact with teachers and other children in a normative manner” (p. 138).

The content discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation provides information pertaining to the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose, significance, and nature of the study. The research questions support the conjectural framework and the qualitative method of research, also addressed in Chapter 1. Definitions in the chapter provide readers with an understanding of the terms used throughout the dissertation for the purposes of the study. Details appear regarding the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations critical to the investigation in this study.

Background of the Problem

Young children are able to learn valuable skills that can provide them with foundational literacy knowledge at home and in educational settings (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). In the past, few parent–teacher partnerships provided children with the cornerstones necessary for future development of academic achievement (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). Positive outcomes have emerged from literacy-supplemented play programs with adult mediation in which parents and teachers actively engaged students (Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Ginieniewicz, & Madigan, 2008). Teacher–parent collaborations leading to parental engagement in children's learning in the home usually result in positive differences in learning outcomes (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

Meeting the needs of culturally diverse children may be a difficult task when challenges include little or no background knowledge of a student's culture (Compton-Lilly, 2006). In many instances, teachers may experience inadequacy when attempting to communicate with parents who may speak a different language (Keyser, 2007). Language barriers may be a hindrance to building partnerships with parents (Keyser, 2007).

Although research literature supports the collaboration of teachers and parents to increase academic achievement, factors such as low parental self-efficacy, lack of cultural congruence, and cultural relevance may cause communication barriers between teachers and parents as well as between teachers and students. Parent–teacher collaboration could lead to cultural responsiveness, encouraging individuals to honor and respect the cultural differences of others. The focus of the study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in

culturally diverse communities, because learning gaps, especially in literacy, become more difficult for some students to overcome without parental support and exposure to high-quality instruction and learning materials (Joe & Davis, 2009).

Students who demonstrate low reading skills during their early school years may experience low academic success and may be prone to dropping out of school in their later years (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999). In 2002, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted a study on the oral-reading proficiency of fourth-grade students. Researchers of the oral-reading study obtained national measureable performance data regarding the reading accuracy, rate, and fluency of fourth-grade White, Black, and Hispanic students. Students reading accurately scored above 90% by making fewer than 10 errors per 198 words. The number of words read per minute measured the rate, and researchers measured students' fluency based on spoken delivery of coherent, expressive, and correctly phrased words in a passage (NAEP, 2005).

Results of the assessment indicated that 38% of White students, 23% of Black students, and 31% of Hispanic students read the passage with almost 98% accuracy. The results of the assessment also indicated that 45% of White students read an average of 130 words per minute, whereas only 24% of Hispanic students and 18% of Black students were able to read a passage at 130 words per minute at the fourth-grade level (NAEP, 2005). Data representative of this information appears in Figures 1 and 2.

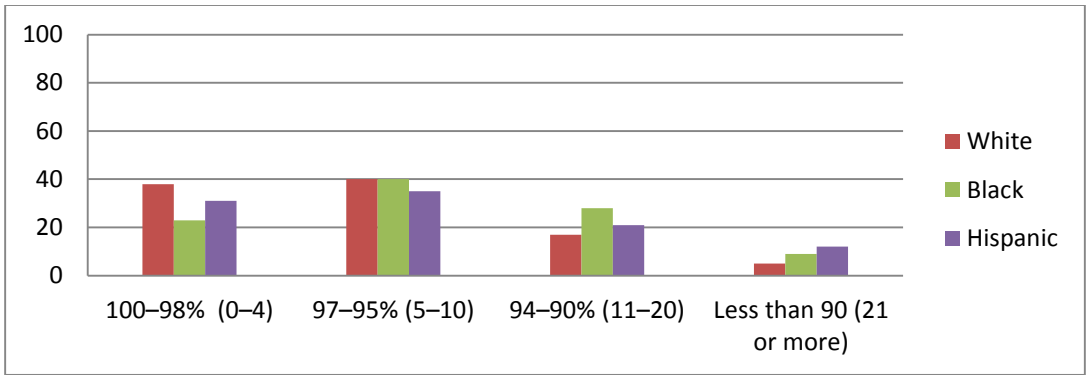

*Figure 1***.** Number of errors and percent of words read accurately. Percentage of students, by race/ethnicity and degree of reading accuracy, Grade 4: 2002. The information in the chart indicates that White students read with a higher percentage of accuracy than did Black and Hispanic students.
From *Nation's Report Card*, by National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

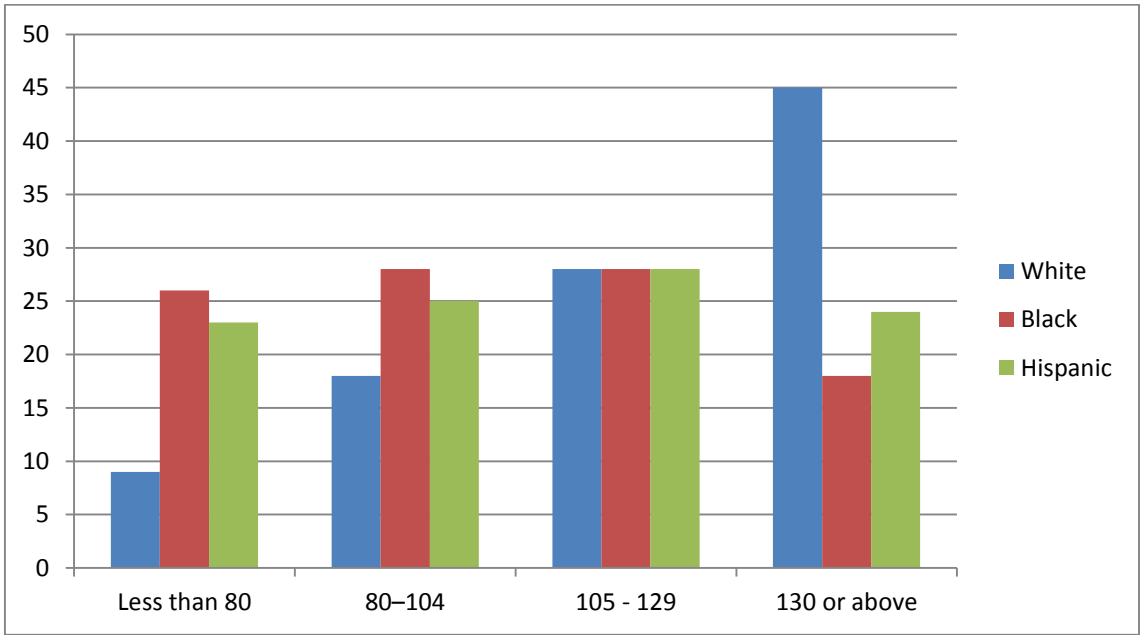

*Figure 2***.** Percentage of students by ethnicity and average number of words read per minute.
From *Nation's Report Card,* by National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

The information from the Oral Reading Proficiency conducted by NAEP indicated a gap between oral-reading proficiency of White fourth-grade students and the proficiency of Black and Hispanic students at the same level.

Researchers Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, and Draper (2002) and Ferguson (2000) confirmed that parental factors had an effect on academic achievement of students. When parents lay the foundation for early education by exposing their children to literacy activities, they increase the potential for future literacy success (Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000). Current research showed underuse of parental involvement at all educational levels, even though documentation by researchers and mandates by the governmental initiative No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 showed the benefits of parental involvement in schools (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act stipulated that schools receiving Title 1 funding must have programs in place to increase parental involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Title 1 schools receive supplementary federal funding based on the number of free and reduced-price lunches, indicating that a school is in a low socioeconomic community.

Economic challenges such as poverty may have an effect on parent self-efficacy, and school leaders advocating strong parent–teacher partnerships can help encourage parents as leaders of their families (Swick, 1991). Perceived self-efficacy may influence parents' choice of activities and affect their coping efforts if they have had previous adverse experiences (Bandura, 1977). One area of Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning indicates self-efficacy could hinder positive parent–school relationships, which could be evidence of a need for school personnel to take the initial steps in establishing positive interactions with parents.

Parent–teacher collaboration to support literacy is an important issue gaining the attention of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which strongly emphasizes support for children's cultures and the promotion of biliteracy

(Bernhard et al., 2008). Promotion of biliteracy includes teachers' demonstration of respect for the child's home language while teaching the language of the school, and further advocates the need to foster a collaborative relationship between parents and teachers to create alignment between school activities and educational practices that extend to the student's home culture. According to Bernhard et al., "Early literacy programs must foster a sense of shared or collaborative power between teachers and children in which the culture and home language of the children is valued and effectively incorporated into early literacy activities in the classroom" (2008, p. 79).

In 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted a study to gain information on the percentage of families engaging in literacy activities with their 3- to 5-year-old children. Conclusions from the NCES study indicated a greater number of White parents participated in the home-literacy activity of taking their 3- to 5-year-old children to the library at least once per month: 41%, compared to 25% of Black parents and 27% of Hispanic parents. Of White family members, 91% read stories to their 3- to 5-year-old children, whereas only 78% of Black family members and 68% of Hispanic family members read stories to their 3- to 5-year-old children at least three times a week (NCES, 2007). Further documentation from the *Digest of Education Statistics* to support this research appears in Figure 3.

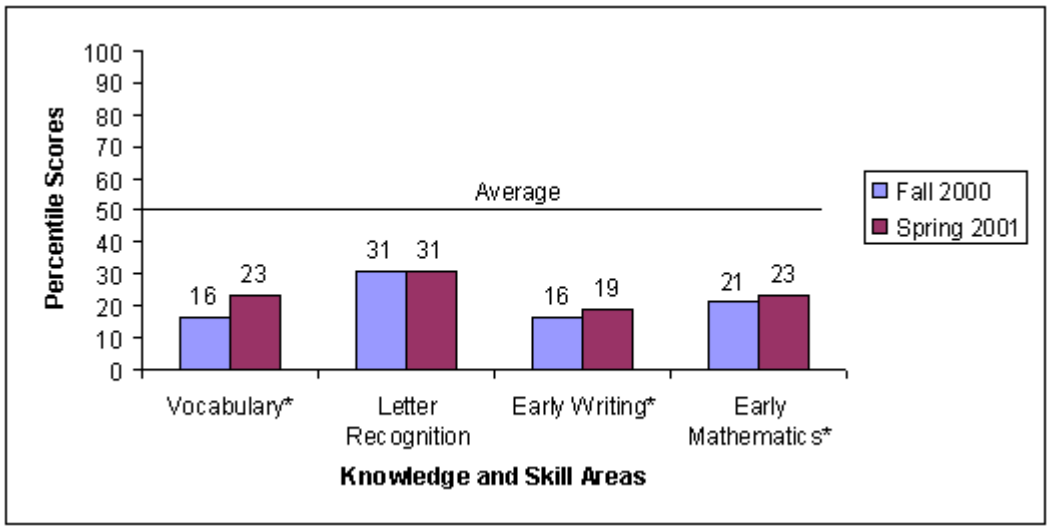

Figure 3. Performance of children who entered Head Start in 2000. Children performed far below average upon entering and upon leaving Head Start.
From *Digest of Education Statistics*, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008022

For years, the U.S. Department of Education sought to put programs in place to close the achievement gap between culturally diverse children living in low socioeconomic homes and their peers with fewer economic issues (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Some researchers noted children from culturally diverse low-income homes had a high risk of developing literacy problems (Dearing et al., 2006). Parents who actively participate in school associations may increase their child's sense of self-efficacy and promote literacy performance. Literacy concerns noted but not attended to during a child's elementary school years may lead to students' continued struggles and eventual high school drop out (Dearing et al., 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Often, students from diverse cultures outside the White mainstream enter schools in the United States experiencing disconnection because of language barriers, values, and differing traditions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Families from diverse cultures who live in

low socioeconomic conditions may experience segregation from the school culture, thereby leading to poor communication between school staff and families. Parents who lack knowledge of school operations and expectations may face problems helping their children become familiar with school routines that lead to student success. In some ethnic communities, parent success in relating with school staff depends on parents' educational experiences and the training school districts provide (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Many teachers have not served as key resources to initiating parent collaboration in early childhood programs, perhaps because teachers' skills, attitudes, and behaviors may hinder their abilities to encourage parent participation (Brent & Pelletier, 2002). A report by Delgado-Gaitan (1991) indicated that a lack of definite cultural familiarity impeded parental participation in educational activities. Parents from diverse ethnic or linguistic backgrounds may participate less in school activities and may harbor feelings of ignored needs (Bartel, 2010).

Although experts Epstein (1995) and Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (1995) concurred that parental involvement was an important factor in educating children, the general problem indicated a need remains for more research on guiding teacher and parent partnerships (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Particularly when working with various ethnic groups, the incorporation of biculturalism would be beneficial to teachers, helping them include strategies catering to the needs of the culture (Darder, 1991). A lack of culturally relevant teaching may limit student participation and cause teachers to assume that students lack school readiness skills (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers should work toward building strong partnerships with parents through collaborations that support and promote early learning literacy.

Gonzalez et al. (1995) supported the need for parental involvement in education for increased academic success. The present qualitative grounded-theory study in early childhood settings was appropriate to explore barriers that might hinder communication among teachers and parents. Conducting a grounded-theory study allowed the generation of a theory based on discovery and acquisition of first-hand information. The current research study, focused on preschool teachers and culturally diverse parents of preschool-age children, was significant because of the importance of addressing literacy issues during a child's initial years of formal education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative grounded-theory study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in culturally diverse communities. The research goal was to expound on the social, cultural, psychosocial, and situated cognitive-learning theories to frame a new theory based on the perceptions of research participants. Learning theories shared a common thread, indicating the development of cognition through interactions. Outcomes of the study led to understanding of the importance of collaborative actions among parents and teachers in culturally diverse communities to support early literacy.

Use of the grounded theory to conduct interviews and focus-group discussions was most favorable in investigating the collaborative nature between teachers and parents. The interviews offered the opportunity to explore teacher–parent partnerships concerning promotion of literacy among preschool students. Investigation of collaborative activities was from the parents' perspectives. The facilitation of focus

groups provided compilation of shared insight and observation of greater interaction among study participants (Creswell, 2008).

Participants in the study completed interviews to determine if parent–teacher collaborations in preschool educational environments had a considerable bearing on how a child progressed toward literacy. Interview results were useful to identify parent and teacher perceptions on the factors that led to positive teacher–parent collaboration. Individual interviews assisted in exploring specific perspectives on the attitudes, comfort levels, and advantages of teacher–parent collaboration. Participating in focus groups led to greater insight into the exploration of how parent–teacher collaboration supported literacy in culturally diverse communities as participants voiced their shared opinions and provided input from the perspectives of others.

Significance of the Study

The goal of the study was to explore how collaboration between parents and teachers may support the literacy of preschool children among culturally diverse communities. Teachers, parents, and preschool students may benefit from the results of this study. Teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their current teaching practices and to discover different means of enhancing and increasing parental engagement in the learning process. Existing difficulties such as lack of understanding and value for family practices may be hindrances to teacher–parent collaboration (Mandell & Murray, 2009).

Parents and teachers can benefit from the increased knowledge necessary to prepare children for school. Lack of awareness can stifle a community, especially when parents do not understand why parental involvement in the early childhood years is critical for development and is significant to student success. Studies revealed that family

involvement in education may improve school outcomes for children (Castro, Bryant, Piesner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004).

The move to increase parent–teacher collaboration continues as an educational and political concern in the United States. The findings from this research study may help school educators gain insight in understanding the importance of the parental role in education (Mandell & Murray, 2009). Directing attention to promoting literacy among preschool-age children may provide fundamental solutions to the challenges of parent–teacher relationships before gaps in achievement begin to appear (Brown, 2009). Parents and teachers may gain useful information to help prevent communication conflicts and to increase understanding that both provide education and contribute to children's educational experiences and academic growth.

Parents can help bridge gaps of cultural barriers while teachers impart knowledge to parents of school practices, beliefs, and pedagogy. Findings from this study contributed to investigations of the research suggesting an educational deficiency among White students and students of Black and Hispanic ethnicities. The goal of this study was to explore how collaboration between parents and teachers could support the literacy of preschool children among culturally diverse communities.

Using grounded theory in the current study allowed building theoretical constructs as the data findings emerged through refinement, coding, and categorization of themes and patterns. In grounded theory, although the researcher may begin formation of a theory from the intended outcomes of the research study, conceptual development most likely emerges from analysis of the data and findings from the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The theoretical sampling often used in grounded-theory studies enables

researchers to learn concepts applicable to the research problem and the participants. From data analysis, the researcher may build theory using cognitive processes, theoretical literature, reflection, and logic (Storberg-Walker, 2007). Data-analysis processes contributed to theory generation and verification of the researcher's supposition.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative grounded-theory study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in culturally diverse communities. The grounded-theory method was suitable to investigate the collaborative activities between teachers and parents by conducting interviews and focus-group discussions. With grounded theory, the researcher can use the data to build theory rather than using data to test theory (Glaser, 1992), which is fundamental to the nature of the study. Implications of grounded-theory methodology compel the researcher to examine the data from multiple perspectives, making inductions and deductions to formulate a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Use of the grounded-theory method allowed the opportunity to conduct research by examining the experiences of participants while collecting, analyzing, and comparing data systematically (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grugs, 2004). Selection of the grounded-theory methodology enabled the data-analysis process to serve as a guide, providing direction and enabling amendment of interview questions throughout the study. Facilitating such processes made grounded theory most suitable to explore teacher–parent partnerships to promote literacy among preschool students and build a theory to contribute to the education profession.

Data-collection procedures were helpful to explore teacher–parent partnerships concerning the promotion of literacy among preschool students. Investigation of collaborative activities took place from the parents' perspectives. Although previous researchers documented the importance of parent–teacher collaboration, some noted that many teachers failed to initiate steps to improve parent–teacher partnerships (Mathis, 2003).

Often, teachers became absorbed in meeting the educational needs of their students and regarded parental collaboration as a time-consuming extra task (Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli, & Slostad, 1999). Although researchers Dearing et al. (2006) noted parent–teacher collaboration could support the development of student literacy, a significant number of educators failed to include parental participation (St. George, 2010). The failure of teachers to connect with parents may be due to lack of professional development offering teachers reasons for collaboration (Mathis, 2003).

For years, the U.S. Department of Education sought ways to promote learning before formal education begins through programs such as the Head Start program enacted in 1965, the Even Start Family Literacy Program endorsed in 1988, and the Early Reading First program, an initiative of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. At the onset, the Head Start program emphasized school readiness and parent–teacher partnerships. In 1998, the Head Start program began to focus on the promotion of literacy, after seeing few results of literacy attainment by children from low-socioeconomic homes (Powell, Steed, & Diamond, 2010). Other U.S. government initiatives such as the Even Start Family Literacy program targeted literacy by educating adults, whereas the Early Reading First program targeted early language acquisition

without a concentrated focus on parent–teacher collaboration (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

To study the significance of the effectiveness of parent–teacher collaboration on literacy, parents and teachers in the study sample participated in interviews and focus-group discussions. The grounded-theory method was most appropriate for this study because it allowed discovery of information from the expressions of individuals who had direct experience. The acquisition of information from individuals who experienced parent–teacher collaboration despite cultural or language barriers helped form a foundation for future learning and an extension of research spanning from elementary to middle and high school.

Children subject to social risk factors may be in jeopardy of poor school performance (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). Differences in achievement exist between children from homes with different demographics, with factors ranging from socioeconomics to cultural discontinuity (Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010). To address this crisis, the qualitative-research approach helped in the exploration of how teacher and parent collaboration contributed to the support of early learning literacy.

Research Questions

The purpose of the research questions guiding the study was to establish the significance of how parent–teacher collaboration contributed to the support of early learning literacy. When parents lay the foundation for early education by exposing their children to literacy activities, they increase the potential for future literacy success (Faires et al., 2000). Further evaluation of this concept in the qualitative study lay in examination of the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy development?
2. What factors aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments?
3. What perceptions do teachers have concerning the impact of parental involvement during the school day and outside of the school day?
4. What perceptions do parents have concerning their roles as copartners in the educational process?
5. What theoretical model can explain the effects of positive collaborative interactions between teachers and parents?

Intentional interview questions developed for parents and teachers enabled forming conclusions on the effects of collaboration and support for early literacy. The use of theoretical sampling aided in generating a theory as categories emerged from data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theoretical sampling was helpful in discovering distinctions among concepts to analyze the data. The selection of parents and teachers to address the interview questions was appropriate for the research because both sources had a direct impact on children's learning and understanding of prereading. Participation from preschool students was unnecessary because the focus of the research was collaboration between teachers and parents and the cultural barriers causing increased difficulty in collaboration.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations providing a framework for this study were theories addressing human relationships, interactions, and learning. Vygotsky's social-cultural

theory asserted that cognitive growth commenced upon interaction between children and the people with whom they had day-to-day social contact (as cited in White & Coleman, 2000). Vygotsky affirmed that the interactive dialogue between children and more knowledgeable individuals contributed to acquisition of thinking and behavior to guide the children's actions in performing tasks on their own. A recurring motif of Vygotsky's social-cultural theory was that people learn best when engaged with others to resolve problems (as cited in White & Coleman, 2000). Vygotsky proposed intellectual development occurred in cultural contexts of children's experiences and the input they received from others (as cited in Slavin, 2006). This popular premise was prevalent in what Vygotsky called the *zone of proximal development*. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development suggests social learning occurs through conversation and collaboration. Vygotsky's ideas of social learning also suggest individuals who assist others may be able to accomplish feats they might not have accomplished on their own (as cited in Slavin, 2006). Vygotsky's social-cultural theory suggests that the ongoing interactions of individuals support learning, helping provide a framework for the present study.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development also assisted in shaping the current research study on the necessity of parent–teacher collaboration. Erikson's theory maintains that cognitive development occurs simultaneously with social development (as cited in Morrison, 2006). Interactions with parents and teachers may help determine emotional and cognitive development in young children. The roles of parents and teachers are essential in molding children's personalities as well as their cognitive development (Morrison, 2006).

Situated-cognition learning theory served as a third catalyst to support the research study. Situated-cognition learning theory suggests learning and thinking are social activities structured in specific situations and settings where learning takes place (Amstulz, 1999). Situated-cognitive theories assert cognitive abilities occur in elements that include the environment and social settings functioning as influences on cognitive processes (Hoffman, 2007). Theorists promoting the situated-cognition theory proposed such concepts are tools or activities constructed through interaction with the environment (Barab & Roth, 2006). Individual interaction with others as a mutual effort aids in comprehension, as meaning is culturally constructed (Barab & Roth, 2006).

Understanding and applying educational theories to the present study on parent–teacher collaboration to support early literacy served as an important catalyst to further the practice of educators as they continually seek to improve teaching and learning methodologies to close the achievement gap. Findings from a study conducted by Juel (1988) showed a significant probability that students who struggle as first-grade readers may persist to be subpar readers through the fourth grade (Foster & Miller, 2007). The theoretical framework chosen for this study provided insightful information on the need for the extension of research practice to improve the effectiveness of early childhood education. Given the supporting research, addressing the need for increased literacy seemed essential, beginning with preschool children and gaining knowledge of parent–teacher collaboration as well as theories relating to learning, relationships, and human interactions.

Definition of Terms

Nine terms required specified definitions for the purposes of this qualitative research study. Specific definitions assisted in narrowing the scope to practices that most appropriately fit the research. Throughout the course of the dissertation, the following terms bear relevance to the study:

Achievement gap. Educators commonly acknowledge the achievement gap as the academic performance disparity between White students and Black students (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006).

Collaboration. In the current study, collaboration describes the process through which parents and teachers work together to impart beneficial learning possibilities for students (Med, 2010).

Culturally relevant teaching. This term explicates a teaching methodology that inspires students to see themselves as a successful community of learners, capable of making connections among local, cultural, and global identities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally relevant teachers extend knowledge beyond the classroom, encouraging interactions that allow students to build on their cultural experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The culturally responsive teaching pedagogical theory contends culture undergirds all areas of education, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Billings, 2015).

Cultural responsiveness. This term refers to the acceptance of diverse school populations by individualizing instruction to encourage the support of student diversity by holding high expectations of students while making learning culturally relevant (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009).

Early literacy. Early literacy occurs when children have exposure to environments that encourage oral and written language, such as knowledge of letters, phonological awareness, nursery rhymes, stories, and books (Faires et al., 2000).

Parental involvement. Often referred to as the participation in behaviors and attitudes, parents involvement includes parental support of education and communication with school to add to their child's success (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000).

Parent liaisons. These individuals are staff persons commissioned to promote parent engagement in student learning by making connections between the school and families (Sanders, 2008).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy pertains to people's belief in themselves to accomplish actions that produce fulfillment (Bandura, 1977).

School social activities. These are informal and formal school events designed to encourage parental participation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Assumptions

Based on the foundation of the study, the first assumption was that strong collaboration among parents and teachers helps promote literacy in preschool children. The second assumption was that participants' responses would be truthful, and data results would apply to other populations. Another assumption was that parents would assume the role of copartners in the educational process. Teachers may have lacked training or professional development that hindered them from initiating positive interactions with parents. The research of DeGaetano (2007) suggested many school leaders do not recognize the need for policy changes to consider ethnic diversity, thereby limiting parental involvement and collaboration with teachers.

A collection of methodological techniques provided grounding for further assumptions. Good researchers use detailed methodological approaches to ensure rigor of the investigative study, and applying strategies appropriately may prevent researcher bias, analytic mistakes, and misinterpretation of data (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Adherence to methodological procedures assists in congruency among the research questions and the grounded-theory research method. Research methods should complement the data and investigative procedures. Research data may determine modifications in interview or focus-group questions (Morse et al., 2002).

Application of the following procedures in this study helped ensure academic rigor: assessment of the population, familiarity with the population, needs assessment, and data triangulation. Steps 1–4 in Figure 1 indicate the actions taken to deter researcher bias. The steps included assessment of demographics, gaining familiarity of the cultures represented by participants in the study, determining the study aids necessary for accuracy of interview information, and using multiple sources of data such as interviewing and focus-group discussions. Further discussion and a detailed description of the procedures appear in Chapter 3.

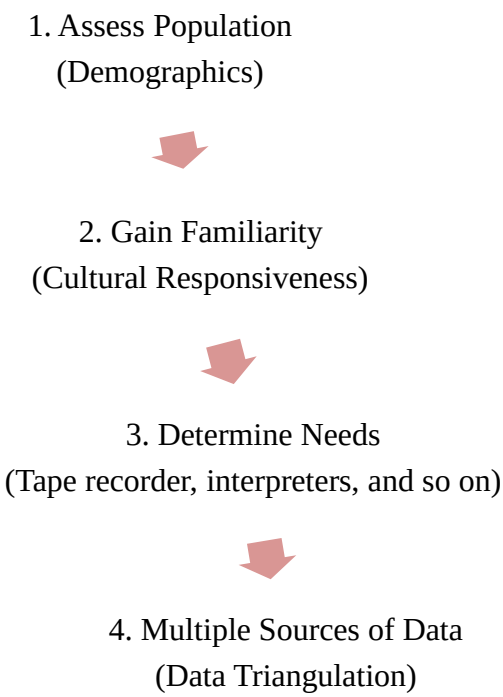

Figure 1. Strategies to ensure rigor and deter researcher bias.

Scope and Limitations

Local child-development centers and schools receiving government funding for prekindergarten classes located in the greater metropolitan area of a large city in the southeastern United States were the sites for this grounded-theory study. Participants consisted of parents who volunteered to participate and who had children enrolled in prekindergarten classes. Prekindergarten teachers and parents participated in interviews and focus-group discussions to determine the methods used to collaborate with parents. Data collection consisted of recording and coding anecdotal records from the interviews and focus-group discussions.

The population choice emerged based on characteristics significant to the study. As indicated in the research topic, a need to gain perspectives from parents of preschool children and teachers who instructed children in early literacy was evident. Researchers can generalize populations by defining the target population and constructing a sampling frame (Greenstein, 2006).

Configuration of the sampling frame for the targeted population identified elements such as early learning facilities, parental interactions, and a population of cultural diversity. The use of stratified sampling supported application to a generalizable study by ensuring profile equivalence of two common factors between the sample and the broader population (Berg, 2009). Theoretic findings based on the common threads of the elements added a basis for comparisons among a more generalized population.

The purpose of the study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early literacy in culturally diverse communities. Limitations of the study were participant availability for the sample and researcher bias in the selection of research questions. Interviews and focus-group discussions conducted with a small sample of parents and teachers, discerned the view of those from two early learning facilities in the greater metropolitan area of a large southeastern city, based on participant availability. Applying the grounded-theory research method to teachers from two different preschools in the city was necessary because the local preschools had a limited number of classes in their centers. Some targeted study participants chose not to participate in the research study, which affected data-collection procedures and the results of the study.

Teacher and parent interviews at different early childhood developmental center locations assisted in gaining better equity of unbiased opinions. The use of triangulation by collecting multiple data from interviews and focus-group discussions was purposeful in enhancing the credibility of the research. Triangulation is a common method for assuring trustworthiness from researcher bias (Shank, 2006).

Delimitations

The delimitations placed on the study included a small sample of parents and teachers associated with preschools in a limited geographic area. Specifically, the study included mostly Black, White, and Hispanic parents from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The impact of parent–teacher collaboration to support literacy warranted further investigation.

Summary

Children should possess cognitive and social proficiencies sufficient to progress aligned with classroom learning activities (Hibel, 2009). Teachers working in partnerships with parents may help prepare preschool children with the literacy skills necessary for formal schooling. Scholars, researchers, and practitioners seem to agree such young children need the support of their parents and teachers to help them develop literacy. The information provided in this chapter led to a growing concern about the need to provide preschool children with meaningful and culturally relevant literacy experiences (Bernard et al., 2008). Students who do not grasp literacy skills in the early school years may be at risk for learning difficulties during later school years.

Learning theories used to support the research included social-cultural theory, the theory of psychosocial development, and situated-cognition theory. The learning theories

chosen helped provide understanding of child development and the importance of social situations to support learning. The research questions helped establish the impact and outcome of parent–teacher collaboration on early literacy. Collaboration among parents and teachers helps provide a link between school learning activities and at-home learning activities (Loughran, 2008). Promoting parent–teacher collaboration in early childhood education may serve as a resource to close the achievement gap and increase literacy for young children.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Developing collaborative relationships with parents is a positive step toward understanding the culture of a community. Preschool students from diverse cultural backgrounds may learn and experience educational practices different from those they experienced in their homes; therefore, today's educators should express a willingness to increase understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). This chapter contains rationale for the research methodology in this study, a historical overview of the initiation of parent–teacher partnerships in schools, successful commencements of positive parent–teacher collaboration, promotion of literacy skills at home through language development of daily parental interactions, and current research information on school programs promoting collaboration through cultural diversity.

Several scholars and practitioners have designed theories and models to explore superlative ways of creating successful parent–teacher partnerships. Practitioners have designed quantitative, qualitative, and action research studies based on models such as the family-empowerment model, social-capital theory, family–school partnerships framework, cultural responsiveness, and a school-development program. To gain insight into historical and current research findings addressing parent–teacher collaboration, examining the various frameworks offered a foundation for the research in this study.

Rationale for the Methodology

Grounded theory was most suitable for this research because of the recurrent premise of parent–teacher partnerships to increase the development of literacy among preschool children. Glaser and Strauss introduced grounded theory as they engaged in

scrutiny of social and interpersonal dynamics in medical practices (Shank, 2006). Glaser and Strauss continued to apply scientific tenets by considering what happens in social situations and making sense of meaning by moving from recognizable knowledge to the unknown (as cited in Shank, 2006). Applying the grounded-theory methodology to the study allowed the exploration and discovery of strategies that work best to create and maintain parent–teacher collaboration in social situations.

Other possible designs in the consideration of this study were phenomenology and ethnography. From a phenomenological aspect, the focus of the research would have been on the experiences and insights about collaboration from the perspectives of parents and teachers (Shank, 2006). Phenomenological research studies focus on the lived experiences in an individual's life, such as an illness or form of mistreatment (Osborne, 1994). The focus of the grounded-theory study was instead on understanding interactions of individuals to determine how positive relationships between parents and teachers might affect student achievement. Because ethnographic design concerns patterns of thought and behavior (Osborne, 1994), such research methods might have limited the study to the significance of how culture influenced collaborations between parents and teachers.

Literature Review

Historical Initiatives of School–Family Partnerships

During the early 1960s, concern for the number of families experiencing economic crisis led to President Johnson's establishment of the War on Poverty and national leaders began to focus on poverty and care for American children (Kalifeh, Cohen-Vogel, & Grass, 2011). Addressing issues of poverty led to the passage of the

Economic Opportunity Act, which provided funds for the early childhood program Head Start (Kalifeh et al., 2011). The U.S. government recognized the importance of integrating family partnerships as a vital part of the establishment of the Head Start program (Barbour & Barbour, 1997). The purpose of the Head Start program was to provide 4-year-old economically disadvantaged children and their families with supportive services addressing preventive healthcare, greater parental engagement in education, and better developmental outcomes (Henry, Gordon, & Rickman, 2006).

Still a viable early childhood program, the goal of the Head Start program is to attend to the needs of children by boosting growth and development and providing children with educational, health, and nutritional services (Henry et al., 2006). Making parents partners in decision making while recognizing them as the primary nurturers of the family was a key objective. Families who participate in Head Start programs also receive referrals for needed community services (Henry et al., 2006).

The early 1990s led to a shift in focus, extending greater attention to academics and school readiness (Henry et al., 2006). In 1994, the U.S. established the Early Head Start program for children ranging from birth to 3 years (Henry et al., 2006). Research substantiated that parents involved in Early Head Start programs contributed greater assistance in language and learning by reading to their children at home (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). Changes in instructional programming and the establishment of performance measures were essential to prepare students for school, along with employing better teachers (Henry et al., 2006).

Beyond federal-government responses to address parent involvement in early learning, many states also responded to the need through the initiation of state

prekindergarten programs. Specifically, the State of Georgia initiated its Bright from the Start prekindergarten program in 1993 (Georgia Department of Early Childhood and Learning [DECAL], 2011). A core objective of the Georgia prekindergarten program was to improve student achievement while promoting safe learning environments and meeting the social needs of families so children thrive (DECAL, 2011). State administrators in Georgia provided funding for prekindergarten programs to employ resource organizers to encourage family interaction (PEW Center on the States [PEW], 2010). Other states and cities such as Chicago, North Carolina, Nebraska, Michigan, and Delaware offer distinctive prekindergarten family services to promote collaboration between families and school personnel (PEW, 2010).

Like the Head Start program, many state prekindergarten programs recognize the value of family and school-educator partnerships. Engagement with prekindergarten programs allows parents to develop the concept of collaboration, with the possibility of lasting throughout a child's life (PEW, 2010). PEW defined family engagement as "a partnership between parents or caregivers and [prekindergarten] personnel reflecting a shared responsibility to foster the development and learning of young children" (2010, p. 2). Elements of family engagement include welcoming and supporting parent participation, engagement of two-way communication, integrating family knowledge into learning experiences, helping families foster home environments to augment learning, and creating a system of ongoing promotion of family engagement.

North Carolina standards for prekindergarten teacher candidates require the ability to cultivate relationships with families in support of child learning and development (North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education,

2011). Teachers have the responsibility to inform parents of their rights and the available resources, while collaborating with them to make decisions to promote the development of their children. The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education endorsed partnerships of parents and teachers exchanging information and cooperatively implementing and evaluating educational plans for children.

Elements of Family Engagement in State Prekindergarten Programs

Several researchers noted the importance of welcoming and supporting parent participation in educational decision making as essential in early childhood programs. Epstein, Director for the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships (as cited in Grant & Ray, 2010), emphasized family participation in school programming through decision making and advocacy as key to successful family and school personnel partnerships. Parents in positions to serve as advocates for other families can help voice parental concerns, gather recommendations, and relay critical information back to families (Grant & Ray, 2010). Epstein's (1995, as cited in Grant & Ray, 2010) research described models of influence for creating school, family, and school partnerships.

The external model emphasizes practices of partnerships that take place separately and jointly as a means of influencing a child's development and learning (Epstein, 1995). The internal model applies when occasions or events arise and create a need for interpersonal relationships among parents, the community, and school staff. Examples might include a parent–teacher conference in person or by telephone. The School, Family, and Community Partnership program operates on the premise that children who feel cared for and who receive encouragement to succeed in academics by working hard are more likely to demonstrate successful outcomes (Epstein, 1995).

Ongoing engagement of communication in a reciprocal manner is also a key element noted in the engagement of parent and teacher partnerships (Grant & Ray, 2010; McKinley, 2010). Two-way communication, or reciprocal communication, denotes a shared dialogue between the parent and the teacher. Teachers seek parental advice and listen to their ideas by making supportive comments, asking focused questions, and reiterating key points of the conversation (Grant & Ray, 2010).

The Family-Empowerment Model

Dunst, a leading researcher of family empowerment, discovered interventions with the intention of strengthening and supporting families to positively affect child development (as cited in Grant & Ray, 2010). The family-empowerment model is an integrated framework consisting of four family practices. The first family-centered practice advocates parents as active participants in their children's education (Grant & Ray, 2010).

Parents collaborate with teachers to determine academic goals and spend time helping teachers and children work toward achieving goals (Dunst, 2005). The family-empowerment model encourages opportunities for children and their parents to work together, building on their strengths and interests. The parenting-support element of the family-empowerment model advocates parent participation in parenting-education classes, family resource centers, and informal interactions with other parents (Grant & Ray, 2010).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement occurs in schools in categories such as school choice, decision making, councils, teaching and learning, equipment, materials, and

communication (Feuerstein, 2000). School districts and governmental influences have enforced practices allowing parents to choose educational institutions for their children. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) enforced school choice when a school had no consistency in making adequate yearly progress.

A second category of parental involvement consists of decision making. Parents participate in education by sitting on school councils or serving as officers in parent–teacher groups. The expected role of the parent through such governing groups is collaborative administration of school activities (Feuerstein, 2000). The third type of parental involvement is teaching and learning, which entails parents volunteering in and outside of the classroom, conferencing with teachers, and assisting with homework (Feuerstein, 2000). The fourth category was the effect on school climate (Feuerstein, 2000). Parents get involved in hopes of assuring a safe and contented school environment for their children. Last was a tendency for parents to seek communication with teachers to receive updates on student progress and behavior.

Parental involvement in the life of a student contributes to increased academic achievement (Becher, 1984; Benson, Buckley, & Medrich, 1980; Comer, Haynes, & Hamilton-Lee, 1988), improvement in school attendance (Comer et al., 1988), and positive student attitude and behavior (Becher, 1984; A. Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). Too often, educators have criticized the lack of parental involvement in the education process without considering that parents may be waiting for teachers to initiate the process. Teachers' preconceptions of how parents should participate in the classroom may hinder parents' desire and confidence for involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). A teacher's assumptions regarding the values, attitudes, and abilities of

parents from diverse cultures may impede efforts to involve families, resulting in parents sensing negative attitudes and choosing to remain distant from the school setting (Caspe, 2003).

Educators and scholars perceive parental involvement in education as multifaceted (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Parental involvement may include direct interaction with school educators and their children through acts of volunteering and attending conferences. Parental involvement extends beyond school visits to supporting and facilitating education in the home (Epstein & Sanders. 2000). Parents may choose to engage themselves in their children's education through engagement in learning-stimulation activities, discussions of day-to-day school activities, assisting with homework, and conveying educational expectations (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007).

Suizzo and Stapleton (2007) conducted a study to examine the value of various factors leading to greater home-based parental involvement in young children's educational development. The researchers hypothesized several factors such as maternal education, family background, and household income might influence parental involvement in education. Suizzo and Stapleton based their study on an ecological theoretical approach suggesting dynamics such as sex, age, and environment influence children's development.

A sample of 9,864 families from various cultural backgrounds participated in the study (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007). This sample was appropriate because of its representative quality of various ethnicities and listing of maternal education level. The researchers investigated the influence on children's educational attainment and

behavioral adjustment, based on the aspects of parental beliefs, children's activities, and family traditions.

A questionnaire using computer-assisted telephone interviews helped collect the bulk of the data for the research; however, in some cases, the researcher conducted personal interviewing (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007). Results from the study indicated home-based parental involvement differed according to ethnic background. Results confirmed the researchers' assumptions, suggesting children whose parents had higher levels of education participated more in home-based and outside-the-home educational activities. The use of the research instrument limited the study because no direct observations of parent–child interactions occurred. One implication from the study showed favorable outcomes of maternal education as a factor in the influence of children's home-based educational development (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007).

School-Development Program

The School-Development Program, developed and launched by Comer in 1968, led to needed improvement of elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut (Grant & Ray, 2010). The School-Development Program continued to be an effective program, resulting in positive collaboration between parents and school personnel based on three principles. The primary principle asserted that decision making should be through consensus, based on what is good for the children. The second principle outlines the importance of collaboration among teachers, staff, administrators, students, and families.

Third, the School-Development Program centers on problem solving rather than blaming others for existing and arising problems (Grant & Ray, 2010). One theme of the program asserts those most influenced by problems should be a part of the decision-

making process (Squires & Kranyik, 1996). Benefits of implementing the School-Development Program include increased decision making among stakeholders, a boost in employee morale and motivation, strengthening of planning processes, improvement of instruction, and greater student achievement. A supportive component such as delegation of authority to participants to fulfill school-improvement plans and organizational structure supporting inclusiveness and collaboration helped garner program success (Squires & Kranyik, 1996).

Stakeholders working together to assure success of the program are members of teams with oversight of the parents' program, mental health, school planning, and school management (Squires & Kranyik, 1996). Team members working with the parenting program seek to make the school environment welcoming for parents. The goal is to provide a warm atmosphere to increase communication between parents and teachers so parents become involved in planning to help meet the needs of the children.

The mental health team focuses on preventive measures to improve school climate and build positive relationships among students and families. Team members work with individual students or families, determining the root of problems and making proper referrals to outside agencies, in addition to proper placements and classifications. The school-planning-and-management team works to develop a comprehensive school plan by selecting goals for academic achievement, social climate, and school relations (Squires & Kranyik, 1996).

Central to the concept of the School-Development Program is child and adolescent development. Comer (2005), founder of the program, suggested many school-reform efforts failed to regard critical pathways of physical, social, emotional, ethical,

linguistic, and cognitive development. Comer believed adults could help promote good growth of children by creating a culture recognizing the developmental challenges children may encounter. Often, children form emotional attachments with those to whom they can relate and they internalize the values of the adults in their social networks, like school and home. School staff members should provide students with a school culture that encourages confidence, comfort, and motivation to learn in order to help promote academic learning (Comer, 2005).

In 1968, the School-Development Program began with implementation of the model in two schools, but eventually broadened to 1,000 schools throughout the United States. A 5-year study conducted at a local elementary school in North Carolina showed significantly improved academic outcomes during the period of 1999 through 2004 (Comer, 2005). Before adopting the School-Development Program, standardized testing data showed only 42% of the students were at or above grade level. Students continued to demonstrate increases in academic achievement yearly, and by the fifth year of the program, 98% were proficient on the North Carolina State Test.

Teacher and Parent Partnerships

Current governmental aims focus on reducing the achievement gap of low-income families by improving family involvement in schools (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). As professionals, early childhood teachers should initiate steps to engage families in school activities (Daniel, 2009). Building meaningful teacher–parent partnerships begins with two-way conversations in which teachers and parents listen and speak while recognizing one another's good intentions (Keyser, 2007). Establishing and building strong partnerships occurs when the focus is on the common

interest for educating the child (Keyes, 1995). Sharing information is a key component of successful teacher–parent partnerships (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004). Communicating with parents to affirm the importance of their role as the child's first teachers is important in a child's learning (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004).

A case study consisting of interviews with parents on the factors helping to establish flourishing educational collaborations between school staff and families reported parents needed to feel welcome, connected to the school community, and honored for their contributions to cultivate and maintain meaningful partnerships (Mapp, 2003). Teachers furthered the process of building relationships with parents when they reached out to them by telephoning, seeking face-to-face visits, and supplying supplemental materials to aid in student home studies (Caspe, 2003). Extending outreach efforts to gain understanding of cultures may lead to integration of knowledge into curriculum lessons (Caspe, 2003).

To establish the importance of parent and teacher partnerships further, Mendez and Fogle (2002) developed an intervention study and program named the Companion Curriculum Program to encourage parental involvement of ethnic families attending Head Start programs. The researchers tested the hypothesis that parental involvement in education enhances the connection across home and school settings (Mendez, 2010). The Companion Curriculum Program consisted of four components: staff development, classroom family–child interaction, extended learning, and parent monthly workshops. The researchers recruited 288 families from three different Head Start centers to participate in the study. Staff development, the first component of the program, raised the

awareness of teachers by providing strategies for effective communication when working with parents.

The second goal of the program was to create a classroom environment reflecting cultural diversity in which parents were welcomed into the classroom to interact with their children (Mendez, 2010). Teachers sectioned off a portion of their classroom to include a family corner stocked with learning materials to encourage family interaction while promoting preparation and school readiness for young learners. Providing families with educational materials to work with their children through playful interactions served as the fourth program component. The last component of the Companion Curriculum provided opportunities for parents to participate in a series of workshops. Informative workshops demonstrated and informed parents of educational themes and strategies for implementation and encouraged increased communication between teachers and parents.

A family-involvement questionnaire assessed parental participation across school and home locations (Mendez, 2010). The assessment consisted of 42 items that assessed behaviors such as parents' use of learning materials and classroom participation. Results from the assessment revealed high levels of parent satisfaction toward curriculum materials and parent workshops. Evidence from the study showed support for the hypothesis that Black parents were interested in participating in their child's preschool program and were favorable to receiving curriculum support materials from teachers.

Teaming for Culturally Responsive Classrooms, a model designed in an effort to reduce the achievement gap, contained two important factors: professional development and improved instructional practices (McKinley, 2010). Professional-development-supported individual reflection and group inquiry allowed educators to share, discuss, and

determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies. The second factor, instruction, centered on learning through culturally responsive teaching methods.

The Teaming for Culturally Responsive Classrooms model stressed six essential collaborative activities to promote the success of parent–teacher partnerships. Parents and teachers should work together to establish a purposeful, clear, and frequent two-way communication arrangement (McKinley, 2010). Collaborative activities should include valuing the cultures and languages of the students' families and community. Teachers should become familiar with knowing students' traits and needs and should respect what parents can contribute to their child's learning as important.

Some teachers form rapport with parents early in the school year to increase parental support in developing educational plans (McKinley, 2010). A welcoming school climate helps promote positive parent–teacher collaboration (Comer, 2005; McKinley, 2010). Shared responsibility for learning outside the home is also an essential collaborative activity (McKinley, 2010).

Instead of giving students aimless homework too difficult for students and parents to solve, teachers can conduct formal and informal meetings and workshops to prepare parents for upcoming assignments. The final collaborative parent–teacher activity suggests the need to create additional occasions for parents and community members to participate in learning activities in the classroom. Teachers may want parents to assist them by working with individuals or small groups (McKinley, 2010).

Promoting Early Literacy in the Home

Families play a significant role in promoting early literacy because they are usually the first ones to expose their children to language development. Formal training is

not necessary to promote literacy in homes; children can learn literacy skills through day-to-day parental interactions of talking, playing, and reading to them (Rief, 2001). A national study conducted in 1993 to investigate factors influencing cognitive school readiness of 1,700 four-year old children suggested parental involvement as well as culture-related activities in preschool programs as likely to enhance cognitive development of preschool children (Beasley, 2002).

Various perspectives exist on the need for preparedness of children for school. Teachers of students in low socioeconomic areas have reported a need for some skill development prior to preschool entry (Beasley, 2002). A consensus among educators indicated early learning activities are prognostic of later academic performance (L. W. Henderson & Meisels, 1994).

How Teacher and Parent Collaboration Promotes Early Learning Literacy

Conventionally, many scholars have linked home–school collaboration as the same as teacher and parent partnerships; however, collaboration denotes reciprocation of information (Cox, 2005). Parent–teacher collaborations extend beyond parents attending meetings and conferences. In parent–teacher collaboration, both parties work together to plan effectively for positive student academic outcomes. Collaboration takes place when the efforts of parents and teachers are cooperative and share a common goal (Cox, 2005).

Working with students from diverse backgrounds may require teachers to express genuine concern for student well-being (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). A safe environment coupled with compassion from the teacher may change unengaged students into active classroom participants (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). Durkin's (1966)

research on early literacy established positive literacy development among young children whose families read to them (as cited in Dail & Payne, 2010).

Researchers often refer to the expression *early literacy* as the understanding of skills such as book appreciation, early writing, print, phonology, and letter awareness (Hawken, Johnston, & McDonnell, 2005). Building early literacy skills among preschool children throughout the United States has been a focal point of the American government since initiation of the Head Start program in the early 1960s. Exposing young children to literacy skills serves as a measure of prevention for later reading failure during the formative years of schooling (Hawken et al., 2005).

A deficiency in early literacy may create an increasing disparity between children with exposure to literacy skills and those without such exposure (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008). Teachers can promote literacy in the home by providing students and parents with materials for home use as a resource for creating connections to classroom activities (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). By providing parents with resources to use in the home, teachers also help create home environments to support the academic success of students (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The current research study drew on the pedagogical theory of culturally responsive teaching, emphasizing the cultural basis of learning (Billings, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching pedagogical theory contends culture undergirds all areas of education, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Culturally responsive teaching addresses growing concerns of low-performance scores from culturally diverse students and further addresses the achievement gap by amending the focus from

perceived student deficiencies to responding to students' needs by changing teaching strategies. Whereas teachers might spend time concentrating on perceived shortcomings of students due to low socioeconomic conditions, cultural responsiveness compels school personnel to address issues of school inadequacy to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. Culturally responsive pedagogical theory positions the importance of recognizing cultural differences in guiding students toward successful achievement (Billings, 2015).

A key element of incorporating culture into classrooms is ensuring learning is relevant to students' experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Students understand and engage in knowledge building through culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally relevant teaching posits knowledge as a continual process and students demonstrate recreatable shared learning. Culturally relevant teaching helps students view knowledge critically. Teachers challenge students' knowledge through questioning and positioning them to draw on their personal and classroom experiences to solve problems (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Culturally responsive practices in the classroom help negate beliefs suggesting young children from differing cultures are poor learners (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) conducted an action-research project to develop an awareness of the significance of culturally relevant teaching in early childhood. Methods of collecting data included journaling, note taking, and observations. To increase parental involvement, researchers initiated funds of knowledge that consisted of cultural artifacts and reliance on parents sharing cultural practices in the classroom. Findings from the action research suggested recognizing and valuing cultural differences

in preschool classrooms allowed teachers to focus attention on the strengths and experiences of the students, thereby providing a more accommodating and inclusive classroom setting for all (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Standards Blending

School personnel in an inner-city urban neighborhood initiated a method called standards blending in an attempt to close the achievement gap among Black males in third-grade classes (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). Standards blending integrated school-counseling standards with academic standards, incorporating culturally responsive practices. During the course of the study, researchers indicated a tie between low self-esteem and poor student performance and sought to improve the self-esteem of six third-grade, low-achieving Black male students. Results indicated the students participating in a standards-blended group exhibited increased knowledge in language arts and a rise in self-esteem of 72% from initial to final program participation (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009).

Early Literacy

Parents and teachers can participate in the development of book appreciation by exposing children to a variety of works of literature and allowing interaction and engagement to take place (Hawken et al., 2005). Even at a young age, students can begin to show understanding of texts by making predictions, drawing pictures, and acting out story characters (Hawken et al., 2005). Parents and teachers should expose children to natural settings where reading and writing take place and where they can participate (Tompkins, 2006).

Sharing collaborative discussions about students' exposure to literacy prior to preschool may help teachers increase cultural responsiveness by building on the experiences of students and encouraging parents to continue early literacy practices in their homes (Wallace & Zeece, 2009). Collaborative discussions allow teachers to capitalize on the literacy experiences of children taught by parents in their homes, neighborhoods, or communities. Although parents may perceive they play only a small role in building emerging literacy skills, previous studies indicated even modest literacy involvement could improve a child's literacy environment.

To understand the link between home literacy practices and language and reading development, J. Roberts, Jurgens and Burchinal (2005) studied the practices of 72 Black families with low income. The researchers observed the frequency of book reading, child interest, book-reading strategies, maternal sensitivity, and the home environment. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals measurements determined child language and literacy outcomes (J. Roberts et al., 2005). The results of the two tests showed only a few associations between in-home literacy practices and language development. To gain a follow-up analysis, J. Roberts et al. (2005) created a model called Home Observation for hte Measurement of the Environmental Invetory for specific information on reading strategies. The results of the study indicated moderate to high correlations between frequency of reading, enjoyment, maternal sensitivity, and book reading.

In an effort to promote reading proficiency among low-income culturally diverse children, researchers Gettinger and Stoiber (2008) developed the Exemplary Model of Early Reading Growth and Excellence (EMERGE) program. The U.S. Department of

Education adopted and funded the EMERGE program in 2005 as an Early Reading First project. The foundation of the program was research-based evidence indicating children who acquired basic literacy competence such as phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, oral language, and print awareness profited more than did those without basic learning skills (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008). Founders of the EMERGE program asserted children need interactive, continuous, and structured exposure to oral, written, and printed language. Unlike other early literacy-based programs, the EMERGE program incorporated the use of a curriculum tiered to provide increasing levels of intensity as students accomplished set skills tracked through progress monitoring and assessments (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008).

The first tier exposed all students to a literacy-rich environment allowing them to participate in instructional practices to promote literacy development (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008). Students received daily small-group instruction in the second tier. Small-group instruction allowed students to receive greater practice and exposure to language and print. Tier 3 provided intensive individualized tutoring to students considered at risk, based on early literacy screening measures.

Parental involvement is a critical component of the EMERGE program. To encourage families to read together at home, a literacy center is available for parents to borrow books. Literacy specialists make themselves available to parents and provide suggestions on home-based activities. A monthly newsletter describing curriculum themes and in-home activities helps encourage in-home literacy activities (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008).

Evaluation of the EMERGE program took place in 2006, following a 1-year implementation. Researchers measured academic growth by comparing attainment of literacy skills of students participating in the EMERGE program to nonparticipating students. Results from the study indicated the students participating in the program performed higher on multiple literacy and language tests than did those in regular Head Start classrooms (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008).

Parental beliefs, lack of information, and underexposure to programs regarding their importance to school readiness skills may be hindrances to early literacy. Parental beliefs may affect the choices of activities and materials they provide their children in and outside the home (Barbarin et al., 2008). Parent perceptions may influence the practices and levels of interaction to develop school-readiness skills between children and their parents. An awareness of readiness skills may spur parents to begin to expose their children to skills such as alphabet and number recognition to help prepare them for kindergarten.

Shifting From Social/Emotional Development to a Push for Academic Development

Originally, the idea of preschool was to prepare children for school by developing social and emotional readiness; however, researchers addressing the achievement gap indicated that reform remained imminent, despite the many programs currently available (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Some scholars and practitioners proposed expanded preschool and prekindergarten programs as the answer, whereas others lobbied for better curricula and instruction in the early grades. Researchers supported targeted interventions in the early years as offering the best possibility of reducing and eliminating the achievement gap (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007).

Most often, gaps in achievement emerge during the early childhood years, and intervention during this period is essential so teachers can address learning difficulties early (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Addressing learning issues later can be financially costly as well more difficult as time passes. Brain development investigations established the pertinence of early experiences and potential learning (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007).

Endeavors to Close the Achievement Gap

The responsibility of promoting literacy among culturally diverse students is an important task for educators. No longer should teachers implement only a few lessons during the year addressing multiculturalism, but by accepting a diverse student population, teachers must consider addressing the academic needs of such students regularly (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009). However, the burden of responsibility should not lie solely on teachers: colleges and universities must better prepare preservice teachers (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was a driving force in tracking the reading and mathematics academic progress of students in Grades 3–8 (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008). Although state departments of education have produced evidence of documented reductions through adequate yearly progress reports, achievement gaps still persist among White students and Black, and Hispanic students (Chatterji, 2006). Chatterji indicated teacher quality and commitment, rigorous curriculums, learning environments, student expectations, class size, and parental involvement affected student achievement. The research results of Barton and Coley (2007) also indicated increases in student

achievement when parents took an active part in reading to their children and assured the children attended school regularly.

In the early 2000s, Central Elementary School, a culturally diverse school in a large suburban district, received a label of failing school (Beecher & Sweeney, 2008). Student standardized-test scores indicated performance in the 30th percentile in reading and mathematics. Many students exhibited issues with expressive language and written language, with roughly 30% of learners spoke English as their second language. Through a process of enrichment and differentiated instruction, Central Elementary School became a turnaround school. After 8 years, a paradigm shift of a rigorous curricula, and schoolwide enrichment including teaching and learning, Central Elementary School reduced the achievement gap.

School administrators at Central Elementary School sought to develop a shared vision among stakeholders, considering factors influencing student achievement such as the school setting and goals for academic progress (Beecher & Sweeney, 2008). Through team endeavors of parents, staff, and community members, the school enacted a multiyear plan to bring about school improvement, with a mission to turn around underachievement among culturally diverse students. Results from the school-improvement plan showed narrowing gaps in achievement, with all ethnic groups making gains ranging from 5% to 60%.

Stakeholder Influence

Historically, educational institutions existed as extensions of local communities, often placed in communities (Gordon & Louis, 2009). In the past, society did not consider parental and community partnerships with educators as valuable influences in

nationwide educational institutions. Many school districts kept valuable stakeholders in the dark about day-to-day operations of school planning and activities.

Only recent education reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind (2001) led to the nationwide inclusion of parents and community partners to participate in educational planning (Gordon & Louis, 2009). School leaders can aid in increasing parental and community involvement in schools by creating participatory structures, observing the values and customs of the community, and allowing the community to have a voice in decision making. Although educators may meet participatory structures with resistance, community partners, parents, and school leaders can bridge the gap by developing collaborative methods leading toward shared decision making, thereby constructing social capital (Gordon & Louis, 2009).

Social Capital

The theory of social capital may explain why some school systems experience greater parental involvement than others. Social capital references the availability of networks to which parents have access to enhance their child's ability to benefit from educational opportunities (Feuerstein 2000; Haghighat, 2005). Theorists contend the stronger connectedness between parents and school personnel yields higher social capital, thereby promoting higher student achievement (Haghighat, 2005). Social capital could improve in school settings by asking school staff to create and encourage opportunities for parental involvement, regardless of varying cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic states. In education settings where school staff members reached out to parents with regular communication through notes and phone calls, parental involvement increased (Haghighat, 2005).

Innovative thinking by educational leaders may be the missing link to overcome obstacles leading to strong parent and school-personnel partnerships (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Educational leaders must be willing to view partnerships with parents as opportunities to garner resources beneficial to children's learning and development (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Building a community of mutual trust and respect may be the foundation needed to construct social capital in schools (Dodd & Konzal, 2002).

Greater prospects for productive outcomes emerge as families and school leaders interconnect to value student success (Price-Mitchell, 2009). When trust is mutual between teachers and parents, the likelihood of initiating contact is greater (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Researchers contended that social capital and trustworthiness between families and teachers connect strongly to academic success (Goddard, 2003). Collaborative processes leading to positive change and improvement in the academic success of children may be the innovation necessary to creating positive parent–teacher school communities (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Teachers and parents must be willing to work together to enhance learning and development by bringing inspiring solutions to support literacy.

Influence of Technology on Literacy Development

Literacy changes occur as cultures in society begin to change (Kucer, 2005). Educators as well as parents use the Internet as a tool to reinforce basic skills to enhance literacy instruction, and many children learn and reinforce reading competency through web-based opportunities (Baker, 2007). Teachers and parents may use technological sources to test children on skill proficiency, identifying areas of strengths and deficiencies and matching users with practice exercises offering remediation to help

students increase their skills. Using the search features of the Internet allows teachers, parents, and children to find literature suitable to interests and reading levels for the specific child.

Given the usefulness of technology to literacy development, the Internet may provide a source to increase collaboration between teachers and parents. Use of the Internet can serve as a tool to communicate homework, enhance reading skills, and reinforce specific learning skills (Baker, 2007). Teachers may also use the Internet to share instructional approaches used in the classroom. One way of exchanging goals and successes is to use e-mail service, which can be a way of communicating classroom issues, accomplishments, and parental concerns.

Home–School Collaboration

Traditionally, many scholars have described home–school collaboration as the same as teacher and parent partnerships; however, collaboration denotes exchanging knowledge from one person to another (Cox, 2005). Parent–teacher collaboration extends beyond parents attending meetings and conferences. In parent–teacher collaboration, both parties work together to plan effectively for positive academic student outcomes. Collaboration takes place when the efforts of parents and teachers are cooperative and share a common goal.

In some schools with large Hispanic populations, home–school collaborations may be difficult due to teachers' assumptions regarding students' knowledge, understanding, and comfort levels (Olivos, 2009). Educators responding to misconceptions regarding Hispanic families may be responsible for explicitly or implicitly discouraging families from active parent participation (Olivos, 2009). Some

school districts with large populations of Black students may be responsible for drawing inaccurate conclusions regarding parental participation (Williams & Baber, 2007). In many instances, parental involvement, as perceived by schools, fails to regard the culture of families or to consult families regarding ways for parents to show their support and value of education.

Researchers Harry, Kalyanpur, and Day (1999) addressed such concerns through an approach they termed *cultural reciprocity*. Cultural reciprocity necessitates conversations with families of varying cultural practices and values (Williams & Baber, 2007). The purpose of cultural reciprocity is to commence reflective practices gained from discussions revealing the emerged knowledge from parents, teachers, and other school personnel (Williams & Baber, 2007).

In 1999, four Black parents participated in a study conducted by researchers of Wallace County Schools in North Carolina to gain insight into parent perspectives of parental involvement and collaboration between members of home and school (Williams & Baber, 2007). Participants participated in individual interviews and group discussions. Data-collection procedures also included reviews from Civil Rights records, newspaper articles, and other documents relevant to the specific study. Findings from the study specified Black parents desired to give input into how schools operated, the curriculum, and instructional strategies.

The attempt to establish productive home–school relationships with parents has been an ongoing saga (Wanat, 2010), despite research documented by Epstein (2001), Auerbach (2009), and Harris and Goodall (2007) suggesting parental involvement in a child's education could be critical to the child's success. To further address the

importance of home–school collaboration, a research study composed of 20 parent participants in a public school system in the United States took place to gain perspective on the types of involvement parents found meaningful (Wanat, 2010). Results indicated participants showed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with collaboration between parents and school staff.

Epstein's (2001) theory of six types of parental participation cited earlier in the chapter provided a framework for understanding the distinctive experiences parents classified as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Wanat, 2010). Data-collection procedures included dialogue with parents and observations of interactions and activities exemplifying parent involvement. Results from the study denoted parent desires to take part in decisions affecting the curriculum, student learning, and policies regarding classroom visits.

Research from home–school collaboration strongly suggested parents desired participation greater than the traditional parental involvement of teacher conferences, phone calls, and attendance at parent–teacher group programs (Wanat, 2010; Williams & Baber, 2007). Home–school collaboration should entail parental participation in the decision making on topics taught as well as teaching methods. Parental participation including decision making could aid in establishing trusting relationships between schools and homes (Wanat, 2010).

Conclusion

Federal, state, and local organizations have recognized the importance of parent–teacher collaboration for years. In the early 1960s, the federal government launched the Head Start program, emphasizing greater parental engagement for families considered

economically disadvantaged (Henry et al., 2006). State governments initiated programs such as Bright from the Start to increase academic achievement while offering services to address many social needs of families (DECAL, 2011). Local early childhood-development programs also began to acknowledge the need to understand cultural values and experiences as social supports for uniting families and educational staff members (Giovacco-Johnson, 2009). The information in Chapter 2 included several theories, models, and frameworks scholars and practitioners deemed critical for the creation and continuance of successful parent–teacher collaborations.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The current research required the use of a qualitative grounded-theory method to gain perceptions on how teachers and parents collaborate to support early learning literacy to prepare children for kindergarten. Gathering information through interviews and focus groups helped determine how parents and teachers formed partnerships to promote student literacy. Data gathered from interviews and focus-group discussions helped determine what, if any, bearing parent–teacher collaborations had on promoting literacy.

Focus-group sessions allowed parents and teachers to communicate their perceptions on factors leading to positive teacher collaboration. The information in Chapter 3 includes details on the rationale for the grounded theory research method and design and its appropriateness for the study. Readers can gain insight to the population, protection of participants, sampling, and data-collection procedures used in the study, as well as information on validity and the techniques chosen for analyzing data.

Research Method

A qualitative study was most appropriate for this study because it provided the opportunity to examine social interactions as they occur in natural settings (Neuman, 2009). Qualitative studies allow researchers to gain insight by receiving firsthand knowledge from participants in the study. In contrast, many quantitative researchers gather information from questionnaires or surveys and wait until the data collection is complete before beginning analysis (Neuman, 2009). For the present study, learning teacher perceptions concerning parental involvement and parent perceptions concerning

the extent of parental involvement in early childhood school activities through data collection were key factors determining the use of qualitative methodology. A qualitative research methodology led to learning of the details of occurrences through exploration.

Use of the grounded theory methodology suggests the examiner can investigate data and draw conclusions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), thereby enabling the development of a theory through interviews, focus-group responses, and social interaction events (T. Roberts, 2008). Grounded-theory researchers begin data collection with basic precepts but later rely on the information obtained during data collection to formulate conclusions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Researchers who employ grounded-theory methods conduct research by examining the experiences of participants while collecting, analyzing, and comparing data (Piantanida et al., 2004). Using a grounded-theory methodology involves several stages of coding. Open coding consists of reviewing words and phrases from each research participant. Codes are further refined through focused coding and merging of data. Axial coding, the final stage of the coding process, includes data interpretation (Creswell, 2008). Grounded theorists refine themes and categories, cross checking data for similarities and data saturation. Additional interviews are often necessary for grounded-theory research studies. The process of theoretical sampling through more data collection, note taking, and coding may be necessary to develop an emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). In the detailed research, interviews with teachers and parents provided an exploratory inquiry of partnerships. Focus-group discussions shed insight into the collaborative activities of parents and teachers.

For this study, the chosen organizations were two preschool programs from the metropolitan area of a large southeastern city. Choosing different preschool programs in

different low-socioeconomic-income areas allowed a better representation of the roles of culturally diverse participants on school decision-making processes and other school activities. Selecting various preschool facilities resulted in the opportunity for multiple perspectives from teachers, eliminating the need for formation of group consensus. Data collection involved obtaining information from varied sources, such as interviews and focus-group discussions.

The method used to gain parent participants included sending a letter home through center directors to inform parents of the upcoming study. Theoretical sampling was used to select teacher participants. Theoretical sampling consisted of teacher participants having direct contact with parents and first-hand knowledge, based on their experiences of collaborative parent–teacher efforts.

Parent participants learned of the research study from a flyer inviting every parent from the center to attend an information session on the research study. The information session housed approximately 20 parents. I introduced myself as a student, explained the purpose of the study, and encouraged participation. Six parents from Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) 1 agreed to meet with me, received the informed consent, and listened to the explanation of their role in the study, their right to privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix A), and their right to withdraw from the study. On a separate date, I informed and invited 22 teachers to participant in the study. Of 22 teachers, 15 agreed to participate. Those 15 teachers from ECDC 1 participated in interviews. Interviews for both groups and the parent focus-group discussion took place in a private conference room at the site of the ECDC.

Parents from ECDC 2 also received prior notice about the research study from a researcher-developed flyer. Parents received the informed-consent form and listened attentively as I read and explained the form. Nine parents agreed to contribute to interviews and participate in a focus-group discussion. Parent interviews and the focus-group discussion took place in a private conference room at the center. Selected parent responses from the focus group appear in Appendix B. Later that same day, interviews with seven teacher participants from ECDC 2 took place individually in their classrooms. Originally, observations of parent–teacher interaction were to take place, but availability of consenting parent participants prevented observations.

To reduce researcher bias, analytic mistakes, and misinterpretation of data, the process of assessing the population and that of developing awareness of and familiarity with family structures, cultural differences, and language backgrounds, facilitated appropriate interpretation as well as determination of researcher needs, participant needs, and data triangulation. Assessing the population produced useful information regarding the characteristics of participants in the study. Knowing participant characteristics helped ensure inclusion of all participants in the study, regardless of language barriers.

Dillard (2000) emphasized that the use of culturally responsive methods builds connectedness between a researcher and participants. Researchers instigating cultural responsiveness considered the depth of their own cultural understanding even when the researcher shared the same ethnicity as study participants (Tillman, 2002). Reliance on participant perceptions and cultural knowledge of the research topic helps establish connections between theory and reality. Initiating conversations to allow participants to

rely on their cultural backgrounds may establish a foundation for vibrant interaction and discussion during interview and focus-group discussions.

Determining needs of participants before and during data collection is essential to reduce researcher bias. Taking steps to provide accommodations for the specific needs of the participants, including tape-recorded focus-group sessions, was essential to ensure accuracy of interview information. Retaining the services of other professionals in education provided objective viewpoints to assist in correctly interpreting the data, thereby minimizing researcher bias. In educational situations, cultural sensitivity includes attending to the needs of students by accommodating learning needs to ensure a lack of interference from language abilities or other special needs do not impede a student's demonstration of competency (McKinley, 2010).

Throughout the research process of approximately 8 weeks, I spent time becoming familiar with the study sample through a literature review, engagement, and culturally grounded self-reflexive questions, thereby increasing awareness and sensitivity to the perspectives of others. Milner (2007) emphasized the importance of engaged representation in which researchers and participants work together to voice viewpoints and interpretations. An approach of engaged representation was essential in this culturally diverse study to prevent my voice from overshadowing participant responses.

Researchers achieve cultural awareness through diverse encounters (Ortiz, Sherwood, & Sosulski, 2012). Reducing the possibility of researcher bias may also lead to proactive steps of attending presentations or workshops as a means of becoming familiar with a culturally diverse study population. The development of a network of

collaborators may assist in contributing to increased familiarity and awareness of cultural diversity.

Data triangulation, also known as the use of multiple sources of data in the study, was useful during the collection and analysis process. Individual interviews took place with teachers and parents, followed by parent focus-group sessions. Researchers often use multiple sources of data as a means of reflecting a more accurate distribution of facts (Jackman & Boyd, 1979). Additional data sources may assist in clarifying ambiguous information, from one source. Data triangulation was necessary to gain a more complete understanding of how parents and teachers collaborated to support literacy in culturally diverse communities. Triangulation is a method researchers use to provide unbiased data and ensure rigor in the study (Shank, 2006).

Use of data triangulation helped strengthen the credibility of the study and deter researcher biases. Data triangulation included data collection from parents and teachers at two different ECDC sites. Focus-group discussions from parent participants at both site locations and individual interviews assisted with validation of the data. I served as a primary data source as the interviewer and facilitator of each focus-group discussion. As a primary data source, I also used data from participant responses to interpret findings. I carefully reviewed each participant response and compared responses with each other as well as the field notes. I then grouped participant responses using tables, and coded for verification of similarity and differentiation.

Analysis of the data also included comparison with the literature. I referred back to the literature review for confirmation of the development of each theme. Triangulation through the literature review served as a basis to provide explanations of concepts related

to the research findings. Examination of several data sources helped substantiate data analysis and uphold the truthfulness of the data interpretations.

Design Appropriateness

The choice of grounded theory best met the objective of the study because of the potential research findings. A phenomenological approach to this study might have been appropriate, given the similar data-collection procedure of interviewing (Moustakas, 1994). However, the grounded theory allowed for a more reflective problem-solving approach that could lead to new models of parent–teacher collaborations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The phenomenological researcher focuses more on the experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994), whereas the grounded-study researcher seeks to explain as well as describe research outcomes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded-theory researchers generate theory from data collection through interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the grounded-theory method entails a rigorous set of practices to produce substantive theories of social inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Depending on the data findings, initial assumptions may cause a need for further elaboration or modification (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Due to the nature of the study and its emphasis on culture, I considered ethnographic research, but based on further investigation of the research method, the ethnographic research method may limit the focus of the study because of its emphasis on the behaviors of specific cultures (Creswell, 2008). The study on parent–teacher collaboration to support early literacy denoted cultural diversity among participants. The demographics of the inner-city ECDCs and preschools targeted for this study consisted of

students and parents from various ethnicities. Ethnographic research studies may attend to one particular school or group, leading to a focus on cultural themes (Creswell, 2008) rather than on collaboration to support literacy. Focusing on one particular group might have seemed biased and could have altered the main objective of the research, which was to gain insight into how parents and teachers collaborated to promote literacy. Conducting a case study might have been reasonable for this study; however, many case studies are bounded and pertain to activities of a specific individual or a specific case (Creswell, 2008).

The aim of the study was to collect data from two early childhood settings. Like grounded-theory researchers, ethnographic researchers collect data through observations and interviews; in contrast, ethnographic studies tend to take place over an extended period so the researcher has time to build a detailed record of the behaviors and beliefs of a particular group (Creswell, 2008). A focus on ethnography may cause the researcher to concentrate on cultural trends and patterns of behaviors, thereby overshadowing the purpose of obtaining information on how teachers and parents collaborate to support literacy.

Grounded theory is distinct from other research methodologies because of its detailed procedures for data compilation and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During the course of grounded-research studies, analysis takes place concurrently with data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded-theory researchers recognize that the analysis from data collection may help drive the next interview or observation, and they use the first portions of data for cues, followed by including all relevant information during the next interview or observation session (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Applying

grounded theory in a procedural sequential manner enables the researcher to encapsulate all impending applicable aspects of the research topic (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

A quantitative research methodology could have been an option in this study; however, a quantitative study would have created a boundary for the data-collection process through the questions established in a survey or questionnaire (Creswell, 2008), thereby limiting acquisition of any additional information from interview participants. The use of quantitative methodology also reflects the desire to test a hypothesis; in contrast, in qualitative grounded theory, the research data function to guide and explain findings from the study (T. Roberts, 2008). Although quantitative research methods are useful in comparing groups or scores (Creswell, 2008), a qualitative grounded-research study best met the needs of the present study because the data-collection process permitted study participants to reveal consistent patterns through interviews, focus groups, or observations, which might not have been available from analyzing specific questionnaire data (T. Roberts, 2008).

Given the disposition of the grounded-research methodology discussed above, this research method best met the objectives of the current study on parent–teacher collaboration. The grounded-theory methodology encouraged the sampling of happenings that occurred rather than the specific people involved (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The research on parent–teacher collaboration was an examination of the interactions of culturally diverse parents and teachers to gain insight into how those interactions supported early learning literacy.

The purpose of the development of the research questions was to investigate the collaborative nature of parents and teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds. I chose

a qualitative grounded theory to explore the five prevalent research questions in the study. The first research question was, “How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early learning literacy?” The first research question arose from a desire to inspect how preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early learning literacy. Findings in previous studies by Auerbach (2009), Baker (2007), and Caspe (2003) maintained the importance of parental involvement as a key ingredient of educational success.

The second research question was, “What factors aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments?” The question involved exploring common factors promoting positive teacher–parent relationships from the perspectives of parent and teacher participants. Although Epstein (2001), Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2004), and Keyser (2007) suggested key elements for improving parent–teacher collaborations, the findings from the present qualitative grounded-theory study led to the emergence of previously unidentified factors to increase parent–teacher collaborations and early literacy.

The third research question was, “What perceptions do teachers have concerning the impact of parental involvement during the school day and outside of the school day?” The intent of the third question was to probe the perceptions of teachers concerning the impact of parental engagement. Information obtained from this question provided details on reasons some teachers did not initiate collaborative partnerships.

The fourth research question was, “What perceptions do parents have concerning their roles as copartners in the educational process?” The reason for the fourth research

question was to investigate parental awareness of their roles as copartners in the didactic process. Specific to the grounded-theory methodology is a focus on social processes, actions, and inquiry about how people interact (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011).

The fifth research question was, "What theoretical model can explain the effects of positive collaborative interactions between teachers and parents?" The fifth research question was helpful for explaining relationships among concepts. Theoretical questions are useful for focusing on how the structural issues play a part in what the interviewer sees and hears (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Population

The population for this research consisted of parents and teachers from local ECDCs in the greater metropolitan area of a large southeastern U.S. city. Choosing two locations for this research project was necessary because many ECDCs in the city had few preschool classes. Conducting research at more than one school helped eliminate bias and camaraderie among teachers in their responses to the research questions.

Parent participants were culturally diverse individuals whose children attended the learning centers. The Head Start program provided funding for both ECDCs; however, each center had specific foci based on community needs and families served. To maintain confidentiality of the ECDCs, I assigned codes in this research paper: ECDC 1 and ECDC 2.

ECDC 1 consisted of 161 Head Start students and 40 prekindergarten students of various cultural backgrounds. ECDC 1 was an accredited program through the National Association for the Education of Young Children and offered free services for those who

met residential, age, and income guidelines. ECDC 1 provided childcare and educational programs for children aged 0–5. The teachers at the center had training in early childhood education and provided students with learning and kindergarten readiness in a fun manner. ECDC 1 hosted activities once a month to encourage parental involvement and to provide families with self-help skills and parenting tips.

ECDC 2 was in the inner city and was distinctive from other ECDCs because of its partnership with the local school district, in which ECDC 2 served the community as a learning and literacy resource center to increase school readiness. ECDC 2 was a pilot center that provided services to families, focused on improving educational achievement and economic success. ECDC 2 had about 160 children and served children from 6 weeks to 4 years of age. Ongoing educational programming was available to parents, as was a caregiver resource room. Plans were in place to develop an early learning transition curriculum for students in prekindergarten to third grade to improve standardized test scores in reading.

Protection of Participants

Documentation of several historical research studies deemed unethical were indicators of the need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants before, during, and after participant recruitment. An example of a recorded research study with questionable ethics took place in 1952 by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency called ARTICHOKE (Berg, 2009). In this study, researchers attempted to control the behavior of subjects to gain information from individuals unknowingly and against their will by using drugs, hypnosis, and electric shock (Berg, 2009).

The protection of participants was a critical aspect of this research study. The establishment of ethical considerations took place during the course of collecting the research data. Fully explaining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study eliminated deception and built a foundation for truthfulness (Ponterotto, 2010). A signature from participants on an informed-consent form (Appendix C) signified the individuals willingly chose to participate in the study, with full disclosure of expectations and knowledge of what the research entailed. I attended parent meetings and distributed the informed-consent form to notify participants of the study and to answer questions from potential participants.

Explanations to some teachers took place individually in their classrooms, whereas explanations to others took place individually in a private conference room. Participants learned participation was strictly voluntary, and nonparticipants or participants who chose to withdraw from the study at any point would not incur any type of penalty. Participants learned the study had no immediate benefits or costs other than the participants' time, and participation included interviews and focus-group discussions limited to 1 hour or less. Focus-group discussion participants agreed to audiorecordings using a voice recorder.

For the protection of individual identity and data confidentiality, I assigned each participant an assigned alphanumeric code. Qualitative researchers often avoid the use of the participants' real name, changing them to fictitious names to protect their identity (Berg, 2009). For further confidentiality, participants' names did not appear in any discussions or written reports about the research study (Hesse-Biber, 2011). Interview material will remain stored in a locked file cabinet for a period of 3 years, and afterward,

the information will undergo destruction by shredding. Keeping study participants' names anonymous helped reduce identifying data with any specific participant.

To ensure participant confidentiality, I minimized risk of identity exposure through letter coding of demographic features such as race, age, and location. Participants received assurance that only I can access the information they provided. A computer access code known only by me protected all participant information, and all other information remained in a locked file cabinet.

The principle of beneficence applied when informing potential participants of the benefits of the study and risk of minimal potential harm. I applied the principle of justice to alleviate potential harm by ensuring notification of the participant selection and nonselection process. Publication of research results appears in summary form only, and copies of the results were available to participants upon their request. I used member checking to assure participants' statements underwent no changes or alterations.

Participants desiring to withdraw from the study learned they could do so at any point of the research. Before each interview session, participants confirmed their understanding of the nature of the project and their continued willingness to participate. Voice recordings of consents and withdrawals eliminated the use of the participants' names, further supporting anonymity of participants (Berg, 2009).

Sampling

To obtain participants for the study, a nonstatistical method of stratified purposeful sampling was appropriate to determine a suitable sample. Many researchers use stratified purposeful sampling to denote variations of commonality that may materialize through analysis (Suri, 2011). Specific characteristics of participants were

necessary for the sample. Identifiable variations such as parents of preschool children, teachers of preschool children, and participants of cultural diversity were key factors in choosing the sample.

Participants in this research study included six parents from ECDC 1 and nine parents from ECDC 2. Seven teachers from one center participated and 15 teachers from the other center participated. The participant-selection process was voluntary, as solicited by center directors from researcher-developed flyers. The number of preschool teachers working at the local learning centers determined the ratio of participants for the sample. For every one teacher per learning center, I chose an even number of parents from the learning center for holding focus-group discussions.

Theoretical sampling was germane to this particular study. Theoretical sampling involved the practice of allowing a theory to evolve through the course of data collection as I sought similarities and differences in participant responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As I sharpened concepts, the process of offering tentative propositions began. During this sequence of events, I followed up with additional participant interviews to formulate emerging patterns and build theory until reaching saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Instrumentation

In this qualitative study, I was the main instrument responsible for interviewing participants and establishing interview questions undergirded by the research questions. The development of open-ended interview questions helped me explore the topic and allowed room for elaboration and further questioning in interview and focus-group sessions. As the recorder of the data, I familiarized myself with participant response habits, thereby directing questions for increased quality of data (Creswell, 2008).

As an instrument in the study, the interviewer may influence data collection subconsciously through professional knowledge, theories, previous study on the research topic, and insight. Insight occurs through interchange with the data when use of prior knowledge enlightens research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Although the researcher does not interject ideas into the data, responses to messages occur through mental processing. The interviewer as an instrument takes action by focusing on the responses and actions of participants while evaluating the data against familiarity and experience, which may affect data collection.

Interview questions and focus-group-discussion questions were also instruments in this study. I developed interview questions from the research questions to gain information on how parent–teacher collaboration supports literacy among culturally diverse communities. I shared interview protocols with participants before the actual interviews and focus-group discussions. I queried participants with the interview questions. Based on participant responses, I asked additional interview questions when participants revealed information relevant to the research study. Interview protocols are useful in helping researchers stay focused on the main topic, and reduce the possibility for the interviewer and the interviewee to stray off topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Data-Collection Procedures

Procedures for moving forward in the research study included (a) gaining permission to conduct research at learning-center facilities (see Appendices D, E, F, and G), (b) obtaining signed consent letters from participating teachers and parents, (c) scheduling and facilitating interviews and focus-group discussions, (d) recording and coding anecdotal records from participant interviews and focus-group discussions, and

(e) analyzing the collected data. Data-collection methods included recording data from interviews and focus-group discussions. Interview questions for parents and teachers appear in Appendices H and I.

Information from individual interviews with parents and teachers concerning perceptions about what and how collaboration should take place was among the information recorded. Including focus-group discussions in the study helped me investigate the experiences, concerns, and perceptions of parents and teachers on collaboration to promote literacy. Krueger (1994) referred to focus-group interviews as gaining meaning from the tendencies of human attitudes and perceptions, as engagement and interaction take place.

Through focus groups, people can express, explore, and clarify their views in ways potentially hidden through one-on-one interviews (Webb & Kevern, 2001). When moderators lead focus groups, they encourage individuals to talk, ask questions, exchange ideas, and give feedback on each other's points of view. Focus groups tend to have high face validity because interaction is a key factor in the method, where participants can reinforce or contradict ideas (Webb & Kevern, 2001).

Distinctive to the grounded-theory methodology is open coding, a key phase in the data-collection process (Creswell, 2008). Consistent with grounded theory, a process of open coding supported data collection by forming categories from the data collected through interviews and focus-group discussions. The process of open coding comprises comparing likenesses in data by coding information in as many ways as feasible (Glaser, 1998). The researcher reviews the data, contemplating possible indications, major

coincidences, and concerns of participants to make a determination after reaching the full saturation of the data (Glaser, 1998).

The use of subcategories was necessary to provide further detail on each of the coded categories. During this process, data analysis occurred simultaneously while searching for a core category and related themes (Holton, 2010). Axial coding followed the open-coding process. The procedure for axial coding helped me direct attention to one main open-coding category, to emphasize a connection between other categories and subcategories. Generation of a theory emerged after skilled induction from analyzing the data. A flowchart of the research method is shown in Appendix J.

The research design methods incorporated in this study accomplished most of the study goals of gaining insight into parent–teacher collaboration and learning how collaborating promotes literacy. The knowledge resulting from this research may help determine the productivity of current parent–teacher collaboration. Information regarding the necessity for further research in childhood settings surfaced in the study findings.

Validity

Qualitative researchers seek to discover the credibility of their research by examining trustworthiness of the data (Johnson, 1997). One method to examine trustworthiness of the data is considering possible causes and effects until no further explanations emerge. The use of data triangulation helped ensure the collection of rich, thick data. Triangulating or scrutinizing several data sources for substantiation or agreement helped ensure the credibility of the research. Triangulation is a method used to safeguard the integrity of the research by increasing the likelihood that the interpretations of the data are dependable (Elliott, Eyles, Farmer, & Robinson, 2006). For this research

study, data triangulation took place by recording and coding information obtained from interviews and focus-group discussions.

Reflexivity functioned to reduce researcher bias or tendencies, with the potential to interfere with the research process and outcomes (Johnson, 1997). Bias is evident when the researcher finds predetermined information from selective observation and records those results. One method of decreasing researcher bias in the study was to allow directors at the ECDCs to solicit parent and teacher volunteers to participate in the study, thereby removing researcher involvement in the selection process. A section on researcher bias in the study contained an explanation of the strategies used to decrease the problem.

Descriptive validity refers to the accuracy of reporting information from observations, focus groups, and interviews (Johnson, 1997). I used a portable recorder as a cross reference to the written recordings to substantiate inclusion of all key information supplied by study participants. Interpretive validity was essential to verification of participants' viewpoints and intentions. The methods of checking to secure accurate understanding of participants' views was to repeat key information back to participants for clarification of misunderstandings.

Reliability

Reliability is a term most often used in quantitative research to measure or test the consistency of scores from an instrument (Creswell, 2008). Quantitative researchers may administer instruments such as surveys or questionnaires multiple times looking for consistency in which individuals answer questions (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative researchers often refer to the term dependability rather than reliability (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). In this qualitative research to measure the dependability of the research instruments, I presented open-ended interview questions of similar content to teachers and parents. I developed the instruments with similar questions for the assessment of consistency of participant responses. Pilot-study participants reviewed teacher interview questions to enhance credibility of the research instruments. Constant-comparative analysis provided another measurement to test the similarity of participant responses. This approach of instrument development and query method aligned with alternative-forms reliability. In quantitative research, alternative-forms reliability entails the use of two instruments measuring similar variables (Creswell, 2008).

Data Analysis

Use of theoretical sampling assisted in the process of constant-comparison analysis, the method used for data analysis in the present study. Constant-comparison analysis used in grounded-theory studies serves as a method the researcher uses to explore the concepts, looking for indicators of the concepts that may lead to discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Constant-comparison analysis was essential in generating a theory, as categories emerged from the data collection, coding, and analysis.

Development of a codebook to enter data was a crucial step in data-analysis procedures (see Appendix K). Codebooks provide a guide to analyze interview data (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). Phrases and sentences appearing to have specific connections received assigned codes. The development of the codes was an iterative process based on raw data collection, and the structure of the codebook consisted of code names, definitions, and examples.

Coding permitted the establishment of associations and links among thoughts and concepts. Coding the data provided the opportunity to see how the data supported or conflicted with initial theories guiding the research and enabled me to pinpoint a core category. Using descriptive language, determining a supposition about what seemed to happen was possible. In grounded-theory research, the core category may produce a middle-range theory.

The use of qualitative investigative computer software did not take place in the data-analysis process. I organized the data by creating tables and graphs in Microsoft Word to support the data-analysis process and to show concepts, codes, and categories built from the data. Creating tables in Microsoft Word allowed management of the data by separating and arranging it to develop codes and themes.

Summary

The objective of the study was to generate a theory describing approaches to positive parent–teacher collaboration in culturally diverse communities to support literacy. The information in Chapter 3 provided readers with greater insight into why the grounded-theory methodology was most appropriate for this particular study. Grounded-theory research is a method of inquiry in which researchers explore phenomena while attempting to gain understanding by developing a theory after data saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded-theory research method chosen for this study included interviews and focus-group discussions.

Topics for the focus-group discussion questions developed after participants completed the interviews, and followed leads determined from participant responses. The methodology discussed in Chapter 3 outlined the population, sampling frame, and data-

collection procedures. The information in Chapter 3 provided readers with ethical considerations for the protection of participants and the coding procedures used in analyzing the data. A detailed analysis of data and findings from the study appear in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore strategies preschool teachers used to collaborate with parents to support literacy in culturally diverse communities. The grounded-theory method served as a guide to allow examination of the experiences of participants, providing direction through the data-analysis process and enabling me to revise and amend interview questions while building a theory to serve as a contribution to the education profession. A purposeful sample of 37 participants, including 22 teachers and 15 parents, contributed to the study through interviews and focus-group discussions to determine the significance of parent–teacher collaboration. The following research questions directed formulation of the questions for the open-ended interviews and focus-group discussions.

R1. How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy development?

R2. What factors aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments?

R3. What perceptions do teachers have concerning the impact of parental involvement during the school day and outside of the school day?

R4. What perceptions do parents have concerning their roles as copartners in the educational process?

R5. What theoretical model can explain the effects of positive collaborative interactions between teachers and parents?

Information in Chapter 4 includes participant demographics and data analysis of the interviews and focus-group discussions. The study findings form the heart of Chapter 4. Data analysis took place to develop the emerging themes relevant to strategies preschool teachers used to collaborate with parents to support literacy among culturally diverse communities.

Participant Demographics

Participants with specific knowledge and relevance participated in this study on parent–teacher collaboration. Demographic data gathered from parent participants whose children attended two different Head Start programs in the greater metropolitan area of a large city in a southeastern state yielded a profile of the participants. The demographic data collected from parent participants included gender, age range, employment status, and ethnicity.

The collected demographic data in the study provided information regarding the sample of participants (see Tables 1 and 2). One parent was a man and 14 were women. Eight were employed, four were unemployed, and the employment status of three was unknown. A sample of 15 parents and 22 teachers volunteered to participate, generating a sample size of 37. Teacher participants did not provide demographic data, to maintain confidentiality of the early childhood centers and their employees. Table 1 describes age range and number of parent participants in the study.

Table 1

Participant Age

Age range	*f*
18–25	5
26–33	3
34–40	4
40–46	1
47–53	0
Over 54	2

Table 2 describes the ethnicity and number of parent participants in the study.

Table 2

Participant Ethnicity

Ethnicity	*f*
Black	11
White	1
Hispanic	1
Asian	0
Unknown	2

Data Coding and Analysis

I used a constant-comparative-analysis approach to assess the developing categories and themes until I gained no further insight. Comparisons and documentation of recurring phrases and words led to the development of each theme and for saturation. Constant-comparison analysis allowed the review and revisiting of the collected data after initial codes and categories began to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). Tables 3 and 4 indicate cross-checking similarities and differences between the themes in data gathered.

Table 3

Comparison Analysis of Themes 1 Through 4

Theme 1 Establish rapport	Theme 2 Parental presence	Theme 3 Scheduling of activities	Theme 4 Parent and teacher collaboration
Build relationships	Awareness	Variety	Cohesiveness
Showing interest	Communicate Daily	Extend invitation	Sharing of information
Acknowledgment	Participate	Convenience	Work out strategies
Home visits	Know what's going on	Flexible times	Set goals
Positive teacher communication	Volunteer	Consider parent availability	Daily conversations
Come together		Communicate with teachers	Discuss academic progress
Get to know one another		Demonstrate awareness	

Table 4

Comparison Analysis of Themes 5 through 8

Theme 5 Parent and teacher education	Theme 6 School-to-home literacy connections	Theme 7 Literacy-rich home environments	Theme 8 Ongoing communication
Educate teacher and parents	Teachers supply resources to extend learning	Encourage use of home items to promote literacy	Positive interactions
Make programs available	Teachers share the curriculum	Increase home libraries	Continuous engagements
Variety of educational workshops	Teachers offer advice on ways to teach reading	Read to children at home	Variation of communication
Acquire skills to improve parenting	Encourage in home reading programs	Question children during reading	Working together
Offer parenting classes	Provide parents with reading materials	Participate in Read Alouds	Teachers reaching out
Offer parenting workshops according to interest	Reading logs	Read together	
Offer professional development according to personal needs	Booklist		
	Websites to extend learning		
	Communicate what children are learning at school		
	Encourage reading together		

The constant-comparison analysis entailed refining categories and cross checking the data until no other themes emerged and data saturation occurred. Continuously consistent statements occurred among teachers from both centers. The coded data used in the study included interviews from parents and teachers at two early childhood centers in

the greater metropolitan area of a southeastern city. Focus-group discussion data were among the data analyzed.

Several themes emerged after reviewing, coding, and aggregating the data from responses to interview questions and focus-group discussions. Participant direct quotes, phrases, and sentences led to the development of themes. Contributions from responses during focus-group discussions and interview questions led to the emerging themes congruent with research questions.

Using grounded-theory methodology involved several stages of coding. The first stage involved open coding, which involved reviewing words and phrases from each respondent. One element of open coding included highlighting and comparing similarities in the interview data and focus-group-discussion data, as well as frequencies of occurrences of similar responses among the participants, to begin establishing properties for the codes. Note taking and questioning during open coding assisted with beginning to understand and interpret data.

The second stage of coding comprised focused coding. Focused coding consisted of refining codes and selecting the most useful information to answer the research questions. During the course of focused coding, some interview questions and responses were similar enough to merge the data. Categories and themes developed during this stage of coding while noting comparable responses among the collected data.

Axial coding, the final stage of the coding process, entailed developing, identifying, naming, and linking relationships among the open codes. Axial coding included data interpretation and conceptual concerns found in the data. Results of axial coding consisted of developing concepts from interpretation of the data. The arrangement

of participant responses by themes addressed and answered the research questions and generated a theory. Axial coding facilitated creation of coherence by moving from viewing fragments of the data into grasping the entirety of the data.

Axial coding extended beyond initial coding and the development of themes and categories (Charmaz, 2006). Researchers conducting grounded-theory studies often employ axial-coding methods to develop a theoretical framework to narrow the research from multiple themes into one main category, explaining how, when, and why. The generation of themes emerges from words found in the data.

Theme 1: Establishing Rapport

Research Question 2 was "What factors aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments?" The theme of establishing rapport illuminated the research question by explaining factors to aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments. For this study, establishing rapport consisted of the teacher welcoming and inviting parents by offering opportunities for meet-and-greet occasions and relationship building. Parents and teacher participants noted a variety of opportunities allowed them to stay connected with each other and contributed to positive teacher–parent collaborative environments. Establishment of rapport with parents fostered willingness to volunteer and better communication, as noted by Parent 4B:

> I can relate to open door, building relationships, and communication. I find that having a good relationship with the teacher is important. Simply communicating with the parents, whether it is just good morning, or showing a genuine interest. Parents may feel more open to communicate.

Parents learn of school activities and feel welcomed when the teacher acknowledges them upon dropping off their children, as noted by Parent 4A when asked the question, "How does the staff welcome you to participate in school activities?" 4A replied, "They get me as I come in, and fill me in, or put info in my child's cubby." Six of 14 parents interviewed stated they were welcomed by face-to-face contact as they left their children or picked them up at school, or by written messages.

Teachers also communicated home visits were a means of establishing rapport. All (100%) teachers at both ECDCs stated they were required to make two home visits during the course of the school year. The first home visit took place after student enrollment. Teacher interviews revealed the purposes of the home visits were to establish rapport and allow parents and teachers to get to know each other outside of school. According to Teacher 6B, "Teachers welcome parents to participate in school activities through home visits. We have an open door policy." Positive teacher communication with parents helped establish rapport and keep parents informed of school activities, as noted by Parent 6A: "Parents and teachers need to come together to understand the parent. Parents and teachers need to come together to know each other and the child first, and then the child will be able to learn."

Theme 2: Parental Presence

Research Question 4 was, "What perceptions do parents have concerning their roles as copartners in the educational process?" The theme of parental presence arose from focus-group discussions and individual interviews. The definition of parental presence was the act of showing awareness by communicating daily with teachers by telephone, notes, e-mails, face-to-face meetings, or sending children to school prepared.

Parent respondents indicated the importance of showing interest in the educational life of their children, as noted by Parent 5B:

> I think it is sad not to see the parent participation. The time that something goes wrong, the parent runs up to the school. Teachers need you to be on the scene; parents need to be present at all times. That bothers me. The parent participation is what really holds things together.

Even if parents cannot be physically present, they feel a certain responsibility for showing awareness, as stated by Parent 5B: "Being present means knowing what is going on and having your child ready to participate in school activities. It's not just about being present physically, because as you know, we have to provide." As a partner in the educational process, 100% of parent participants indicated the importance of corresponding daily with teachers through small notes, e-mails, telephone calls, or by preparing the child for the school day.

Being present and involved in school activities appeared to be an essential aspect for parents and teachers to be partners in the educational process, as attested by Parent 3A: "I think that teachers should push the volunteer mode to the parents." All teacher responses pointed to a variety of activities offered during school hours and after hours to increase parental participation. Three parents indicated they volunteered as often as possible. Three of 14 parents also noted they volunteered at least twice a year. Focus-group conversations with parents revealed parents with younger children in the home as well as work schedules often lacked the ability to volunteer during school hours.

Theme 3: Scheduling Activities for Increased School Participation

Research Question 3 was, "What perceptions do teachers have concerning the impact of parental involvement during the school day and outside of the school day?" Scheduling school activities to increase parental participation is fundamental for creating positive teacher and parent cohesiveness for academic success. Of the parents participating in the study, 92% agreed the early childhood facilities often scheduled a variety of activities to keep parents involved.

Six of 14 parents interviewed stated teachers invited them to participate in all school activities. Of 14 parents interviewed, 12 agreed that school activities were scheduled at convenient times. More than half of the 21 parents interviewed responded positively to scheduling meetings at times most convenient for parents. Seven of the 21 teachers affirmed that flexible times helped accommodate working parents.

Scheduling school activities at convenient times was an important factor in increasing chances for greater parent participation. According to Parent 10A, "Parent activities are scheduled according to parent availability and convenience. For example, parent conferences, PLO meetings, and Open House." Ongoing efforts coordinated by the ECDCs assisted in providing and scheduling activities for fostering greater parental involvement. According to Teacher 6B, "Parents are asked what times are convenient for them." Parent participation in school activities denotes that parents communicate with teachers and demonstrate awareness of activities provided by the school, as noted by Parent 3B: "Yes, activities are scheduled at convenient times and there are constant activities to participate in."

Theme 4: Parent and Teacher Collaboration

Research Question 1 was, "How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy development?" Collaboration between parents and teachers helped ensure the best possible education for the child, as corroborated by Parent 5B: "The parent and the teacher are cohesive, working out strategies with the child and setting goals. What works for my children and I is that I get with the teacher."

For this study, parent and teacher collaboration meant communication between teachers and parents regarding the physical, emotional, and educational well-being of the child. Eight of 14 parents reported they had daily conversations with their child's teacher to discuss the child's academic progress. Parent perceptions toward collaborating with their child's teacher centered on positive communication, as affirmed by Parent 1B:

> Parent–teacher relationships should always be an open door with sharing information about the child; for example, whether they had a bad night's sleep. There is always a story behind the child, why they are behaving the way they do. If parents do not share information with the teacher, they will never know what is going on.

Parents perceived they were collaborating whenever they spoke to their child's teacher on issues regarding the well-being, behavior, or academic progress of their child. According to Parent 1A, "Parent teacher collaboration is communication daily in a variety of ways that work with both. I like getting texts, or call me if there are concerns. A home visit, or anything that works for the parent and the teacher."

Of 14 responses from participants, 11 referred to collaboration as verbal or written communication between the teachers and parents. According to participants, collaboration could be daily discussions concerning the child's school day or formal scheduled conferences to discuss student progress. Parents and teachers collaborated on issues concerning the emotional, physical, and educational health of the child. No specific information surfaced to answer how collaboration supported literacy. All teacher participants indicated some type of daily communication with parents. Informal short conferences occurred regularly during student pick-up and drop-off, as indicated by Teacher 6A: "Parents are informed of student progress every day and according to certain milestones."

Theme 5: Parent and Teacher Education

Research Question 2 was, "What factors aid in creating positive teacher-parent collaborative preschool environments?" Educating parents and teachers is a factor assisting in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative environments. According to Parent 6A, "Programs need to available for moms and dads so they can work together in the teaching process of the child." Of 15 parents, 10 believed such parent workshops enhanced relationships between parents and teachers.

Parents and teachers indicated their schools provided or needed to provide a variety of educational workshops to enhance parenting skills and personal development. Three of 15 parents indicated they could apply the skills learned at the workshops at home. Three of 15 parents stated they enjoyed spending more time getting to know their child's teacher.

Five of 14 parents indicated parenting skills was one of the main workshops offered at their child's school. Parenting classes offered support to help parents acquire skills to improve parenting, as indicated by Parent 3A: "Perhaps they should have parenting classes for young mothers who lack parenting skills. Sometimes parents lack skills of teaching their child." Schools provided a variety of parent workshops to meet interests. Parent 1A, stated, "Workshops that are offered include safety, behavioral, healthy eating and exercise, parent planning, mom workshops, and Pro Dads."

All (100%)of teacher participants stated school administrators required them to attend ongoing professional-development sessions related to their duties and responsibilities as early childhood teachers. Teacher 14A stated, "Workshops are offered at different levels according to your personal needs." Teacher 6A articulated, "Workshops are held to be attended mostly 10 or 20 times a year." Several responses from teachers and parents were strong indicators that parent and teacher education was a factor that could aid in creating positive teacher and parent school environments.

Theme 6: School to Home Literacy Connections

Research Question 1 How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy?

This theme developed from parent and teacher responses when questioned, "How can parents and teachers collaborate to support literacy?" School-to-home literacy connections take place when teachers supply parents with resources that extend learning through literacy lessons learned at school but continued in the home. Parent participant 6B remarked,

> Teachers need to let parents know the curriculum, what is being read, seen, and discussed. Parents need to be provided with a copy of the curriculum for parent use at home so that conversations can be supported, connections made, and encouraged.

Parent participant 10B suggested the need for, "Advice from teachers on effective ways to teach children to read." Parent 9A recommended that teachers, "Encourage an at home reading program requiring parental involvement, check-ins by both parent and child."

Teachers also noted meaning in school-to-home literacy connections. All teachers interviewed suggested providing parents with reading materials or websites to promote literacy in the home. Six of 22 teachers proposed supplying parents with reading logs to record home literacy activities daily. Of 22 teachers, 14 recommended providing parents with a book list or other specific reading materials useful in promoting literacy of preschool children. Teacher 3B responded that teachers should, "show parents how they should be reading together with their children." According to Teacher 5B, "Literacy connections are also made when teachers provide websites to extend the learning and encourage reading together." Teacher 7A replied, "Communicate about what is being read and studied in the classroom, and make sure that parents read to their children." Another teacher stressed the importance of, "Providing parents with little readers or worksheets to promote scheduling a special time just for reading together." Teacher 7B advised, "Teachers send home a book or reading passage to promote reading every day."

Theme 7: Literacy Rich Home Surroundings

Research Question 1 How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy?

Literacy-rich home environments are homes or communities that have items or devices parents use to engage their children for the promotion of literacy development. These items may include toys that promote literacy, games or activities that parents create from cereal boxes to make billboards promoting letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and sight words, as well as visits to the community public library. This theme developed from teacher responses to the question posed on collaborating to support literacy of preschool age children. Eight of 22 teachers made suggestions that encouraged parents to use items in the home or community to promote literacy among preschool children. Teacher 8B stated,

> Parents can start reading with their children from birth. Even if the child doesn't understand what is being said, the act of holding a book and showing it to them will begin to foster a love of books. Teachers can select books for the classrooms that appeal to children in the proper age range and encourage children to share their favorite books from home at school.

Teacher 9B proposed, "Increasing home libraries through every way possible and make sure parents are reading to students as much as possible." Teacher 3B advised, "Both parties take advantage of the public library system and utilize them to support classroom teaching, and enable parents to support the formal learning that takes place at school." Teacher 12B shared that parents should, "read with children at home, and encourage children to share what they have read with their teachers or on their own during the school day." Teacher 7A responded that parents need to, "sit down and do homework with children. Understand that literacy does not have to be about books. It can be asking questions about a billboard. What letters do you see? What words can you

read?" Teacher 14B suggested, "Instead of reading a book, find other readings on cereal or food boxes, even sales papers. Children can cut and paste pictures of words, food, and clothing items in sales papers and match the words to the pictures."

Literacy-rich home environments also include engagement of parents by reading to their children through read alouds. Read alouds occur when a teacher or parent engages in storytelling through book reading, printed material, or picture walks with children. Read alouds may comprise conversations between the child and parent through a series of questions and answers. The development of this concept emerged from parent responses to the question, "What reading suggestions or book reading recommendations have you received from your child's teacher?" Eight of 15 parents replied that teachers suggested reading together.

Theme 8: Ongoing Communication

Research Question 5 was, "What theoretical model can explain the effects of positive collaborative interactions between teachers and parents?" The theoretical model used to explain the effects of positive collaboration interactions between teachers and parents was Vygotsky's social-cultural theory. The base of the sociocultural theory is the premise that learning takes place during interactions with others (Slavin, 2006). Sociocultural theory, the main framework for this research study, interjects that continuous engagement of individuals helps support learning.

The theme of ongoing communication between parents and teachers supported the fidelity of social-cultural theory. One notation from a parent during a focus-group discussion to support this theory was, "Parent–teacher collaboration is communication daily in a variety of ways that work with both. I like getting texts, or call me if there are

concerns. A home visit or anything that works for the parent and the teacher." Another parent maintained,

> Parents and teachers could work together to help each other to know the child. The teacher educates the parent on what the student needs to learn, and the parent educates the teacher on helpful things to know about that particular child. Parents and teachers need to come together to know each other and the child first, and then the child will be able to learn.

A third parent stated,

> I think the common denominator is communication, as stated before. If you think about it, a teacher reaches out to a parent that is more involved quicker. I am one of those parents who leave every avenue open: e-mail, my cell phone. I am one of those parents who will call a conference quick when I see there is something going on with my child.

Teacher interview data to support the theoretical framework and theme of ongoing communication showed 14 of 22 teachers interviewed communicated with parents through written forms such as calendars, newsletters, flyers, and message boards. Of 22 teachers, 11 specified they had verbal or face-to-face interactions with parents regularly. Four of 22 teachers noted they used technological sources such as texting, Google texting, and e-mailing as forms of ongoing communication with parents. All 22 teachers interviewed noted they used various forms of communication to increase interactions with parents, keeping them informed of school activities and student progress.

Findings

Comparable results collected from parent interviews and parent focus-group discussions aided in the development of themes and the generation of the theory. Although respondents of focus-group discussions communicated the importance of two-way correspondence through notes, e-mails and phone calls, participants of interview questions also mentioned multiple means of communicating including text messaging. Parents noted that communicating by text messaging was a quick way of sending and receiving notes, and providing teachers with a direct line of communication in place of putting notes in students' homework folders.

Focus-group participants noted building positive relationships by valuing the interest of parents, whereas interview participants commented on the significance of teachers welcoming, informing, and inviting parents to participate in school activities to establish positive relationships. Focus-group participants communicated that greetings from the teacher such as "Good morning" were essential to relationship building between parents and teachers. The data obtained from focus-group discussions and interviews suggested that teachers spending time building relationships and establishing rapport with parents increases the likelihood of better communication between parents and teachers.

Participant interviewees and focus-group-discussion respondents expressed awareness of school happenings and the curriculum as essential. Parents staying active through communication with teachers and participating in various ways indicated their presence and a sense of interest in the educational life of their children. Teachers informing parents of the curriculum and providing them with a copy for home usage allowed them to know what was happening and participate in conversations specific to

literacy and other school subjects. Parents may feel more apt to illicit advice from teachers on effective strategies for encouraging home-reading development.

Focus-group participants articulated the importance of knowing teacher availability for volunteering and also to set up conference dates. Interviews from respondents indicated that teachers and school leaders make an effort to schedule activities at times that are convenient for parents. Teachers accommodate working parents through flexible scheduling of school activities. The majority of parents interviewed indicated that schools make efforts to schedule activities at convenient times that would increase the likelihood of greater parent participation.

Focus-group discussions led to greater understanding of how parents and teachers collaborate, whereas interview data provided specific information on how literacy was supported through parent and teacher collaboration. Interview participants conveyed that literacy is supported by encouraging home-reading activities and fostering a love of books. Interview participants also communicated they make connections from school to home by providing parents with resources to continue literacy activities students learned in their classroom, offering activities that parents can use to engage their children at home.

Teachers develop standards to establish rapport with parents the first few weeks of school. The establishment of rapport begins with the teacher. Expressing kind words such as “Good morning” toward the parent are essential in building working relationships with parents before addressing academic and student concerns. Teachers taking the time to build rapport may have better results communicating with parents.

ECDCs provide a variety of opportunities for parental involvement to allow for maximum collaboration and parent participation. Daily correspondence from parents and from teachers through small notes, e-mails, or telephone calls represents *presence*. Even if parents are working and cannot physically participate, teachers know the parents are interested in what is going on in the educational life of their children.

The ECDC staff attempted to make continuous efforts to schedule activities for maximum parental participation. However, only half of parents responded to receiving invitations. Reminders through notes and telephone calls helped parents stay abreast of opportunities for volunteering. Parent–teacher collaboration takes place when parents and teachers have discussions regarding the well-being of a child. Parents and teachers often discussed behavior and academic progress on a regular basis through daily discussions, home visits, and scheduled parent conferences. Among the teachers, 57% stated they collaborated with parents daily. All teachers interviewed (100%) affirmed they communicated with parents daily either in person or through written correspondence.

ECDC leaders offered educational programs to parents and teachers on a regular basis. All teacher participants in the study asserted administrators required them to attend educational courses monthly to assist them with their employment requirements of caring for children and building relationships with parents. ECDC leaders also prepared regular educational programs for parents. Only 21% of the parents interviewed asserted they were able to use the learning strategies they received in the educational classes.

Parents welcomed suggestions and activities from teachers. The initiation of school-to-home literacy connections begins with the classroom teacher. Providing parents with a curriculum promotes transparency of what students should be learning at school,

and provides parents with an opportunity to teach literacy skills at home. Parent and teacher participants suggested the importance of making resources available to parents to assist parents with in-home literacy learning. The suggested resources included book lists, books, reading materials, and reading logs for monitoring and parent accountability.

Teachers should remind parents and assure them that parents' homes and communities are already literacy-rich environments. Printed materials surround parents and children as they attend grocery stores, pass billboards, or walk to the local library. Parents can make use of items in their homes to play letter-and-sound correspondence games.

Communication between parents and teachers occurred regularly and teachers used a variety of resources to reach out to parents. According to teacher participants, the most common source of communication was in written form. The parent preference of communication, according to participants, was face-to-face conversation with the teacher. Engagement of parents and teachers created positive working relationships and aided in the support of learning, a key factor in social-cultural theory.

Theoretical Abstraction

The final stage of the coding process was the generation of a theory to explain how parent–teacher collaboration could support literacy development in early childhood children. The foundation of the theoretical abstraction was the themes developed through open, focused, and axial coding. The data revealed elements that led to how literacy is supported through parent–teacher collaboration. Eight prevalent themes developed to explain that literacy is supported through a process of communication and interactions between parents and teachers: establishing rapport, parental presence, scheduling

activities for increased school participation, parent and teacher collaboration, parent and teacher education, school-to-home literacy connections, literacy-rich home environments, and ongoing communication.

The data revealed teachers should seek to establish rapport with parents during the first few weeks of school. Establishing rapport early in the school year strengthened teacher–parent relationship and made available future positive communication and collaboration. Parents may desire to be physically present to participate in school activities, but many had limited physical involvement due to their work schedules. ECDCs may need to explore other opportunities for physical presence and collaboration through technology. The use of a survey could help determine appropriate times for scheduling events and reveal interest in the types of parental-education workshops to generate greater parental involvement. The theoretical abstraction from the data revealed ongoing communication, specific discussions about school-to-home literacy connections, and literacy-rich home environments were necessary elements to establish parent–teacher collaboration for the support of literacy. The theory that emerged from the data is that literacy is supported through a process of interactions that lead teachers to share information, materials, and resources to enable parents to extend literacy activities learned at school to their natural home environments.

Pilot-Study Results

The purpose of the pilot test was to determine if the research instruments were applicable to the proposed study and to discover any researcher biases in the instruments. Pilot studies are often conducted so researchers may refine the proposed study, and resolve issues with researcher biases (Yujin, 2011). I conducted a small-scale pilot test

consisting of four educators. I selected participants for the pilot study based on their knowledge of working with culturally diverse parents. I gave educators interview questions for the proposed doctoral study and afforded them the opportunity to respond to the questions, as well as give input to whether they believed the questions being asked properly addressed the research study.

Pilot-study participants compared the interview questions to the proposed research questions to determine if the interview questions would adequately address the proposed research study. Questions that arose from the pilot study were, What significance will teachers who attend workshops have on the proposed study? and Why is the question, "How are special events and activities communicated to parents?" relevant to the study.

Addressing the significance of teachers attending workshops arose from the literature review of the importance of teachers receiving continuing education to understand cultural diversity of students. Upon hearing the explanation, participants agreed the question was applicable. The second question regarding the interview-question instruments was on the importance of communicating special events and activities to parents. After further discussion on this question, participants and I agreed that this question may help determine how collaboration is initiated, and the method of the initial communication to which parents seemed to be more responsive. Recommendations from the pilot study included suggestions on being familiar with the intended population for the study by attending community events for awareness of customs and traditions. Pilot testing was useful in helping me make appropriate interpretations through the

development of familiarity with culturally diverse family structures and to reduce researcher bias.

Summary

Interviews with 37 participants, 22 teachers and 15 parents, led to data on the research topic, parent–teacher collaboration to support literacy. Parents also participated in focus-group discussions. Data analysis included the use of open, focused, and axial coding to generate a theory. Eight themes developed from the participants' responses. The themes and participant responses addressed the research questions in the study. Sociocultural theory asserts that learning development takes place through interactions of others. Specifically the research in this study revealed support of literacy through a series of interchanges that occur and led to precise discussions on literacy development. I included pilot-study results in this chapter for greater reassurance of reliability of the research instruments. Chapter 5 contains further findings leading to theoretical abstraction, significance, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early literacy among culturally diverse communities. A grounded-theory approach was appropriate to achieve this purpose, carrying out the goal of interviewing teachers and parents and having parents take part in focus-group discussions. Data analysis resulted in the emergence of eight themes used to answer the research questions and to determine whether parent–teacher collaboration in preschool educational environments had a significant bearing on children's progression toward literacy.

The findings helped generate a theory on how parent and teacher collaboration supports literacy, as well as necessary elements that lead to positive parent–teacher collaboration among culturally diverse communities in early childhood school settings so the teaching of literacy extends from school to home. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the findings and connections of the findings to the literature review. Discussions of the implications of the results and recommendations for further research are in Chapter 5. Use of the grounded-theory approach allowed examination of the data in a systematic manner to generate a theory.

Findings and Interpretations

Theme 1: Establishing Rapport

The research question, "What factors aid in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments?" led to inquiries in parent and teacher interviews and revealed the importance of welcoming parents to participate in school activities.

Parents and teachers noted various welcoming actions such as verbal invitations, sign-up sheets, flyers, and bulletin boards, allowing parents and teachers to remain connected to each other. Epstein (1995) emphasized the influential nature of creating positive school, family, and school partnerships. Team members from the School-Development Program mentioned in the literature-review section stressed the significance of making school environments welcoming for parents by providing a warm atmosphere to increase communication between parents and teachers (Squires & Kranyik, 1996).

Keyser (2007) noted building meaningful partnerships began with two-way conversations, with one partner listening while the other partner spoke, recognizing each other's good intentions. Mapp (2003) suggested parents needed to feel welcome and connected to the school community to build and maintain flourishing educational collaborations between parents and teachers. Indications from data analysis and a review of the literature revealed that when parents feel welcome and invited to participate and teachers inform them of school activities, positive relationships develop. Teachers and school administrators should initiate the establishment of rapport with parents through continued home visits and activities to welcome parents. Commencement of establishing rapport with parents bears on subsequent themes of parental presence, increased parental participation, collaboration, and ongoing communication.

Theme 2: Parental Presence

The theme of parental presence developed from Research Question 5 on parent perceptions concerning their roles as partners in the educational process. Conclusions drawn from the parent focus-group discussions and individual interviews signified all parents desired greater involvement in school activities. Often factors such as work

schedules or younger children in the home hindered them from being physically present for school activities. Overcoming obstacles leading to poor parent participant may require innovative thinking from educational leaders (Price-Mitchell, 2009). The willingness of educators to provide additional or innovative ways for parents to become more involved may prove beneficial to the learning and development of children.

Although parents received notification of volunteer activities, no conclusive evidence indicated the majority of parents interviewed volunteered on a regular basis. Educators should consider providing activities appealing to the interests of parents. Educators may draw inaccurate conclusions from a lack of physical presence among parents (Williams & Baber, 2007). Understanding parents' perspectives on parental presence may help school leaders redefine their ideas of parental participation.

In many instances, school leaders do not consider the culture of families or do not consult parents regarding ways to show their support and educational values (Williams & Baber, 2007). Study findings showed, from the parents' perspectives, parental presence means being aware of day-to-day school events by communicating with teachers through telephone calls, notes, or e-mails. Parents perceived their role as partners in the educational process was being aware of the daily school happenings and in communicating with their child's teacher.

Theme 3: Scheduling Activities for Increased School Participation

Scheduling school activities at convenient times increases the chances for greater parent participation. Ongoing efforts to coordinate and schedule activities by ECDC leaders could assist in fostering greater parental involvement. The theme scheduling

activities for increased school participation addressed Research Question 3 on teacher perceptions concerning the impact of parental involvement during and after school hours.

Parent participation in school activities suggests communication with parents ensures awareness of activities provided by the school. Provisions of various school activities signify teacher perceptions of parental involvement are vital; therefore, schools attempt to schedule a variety of activities for parental participation at convenient times. Schools schedule activities such as iMOM and ProDad to empower parents to see their roles as essential to the educational process. Feuerstein (2000) expressed that parental involvement occurs in various categories, attesting to the variety of activities schools offer parents. Categories of parental involvement may be school choice, decision making, councils, teaching and learning, equipment, materials, and communication (Feuerstein, 2000).

Several teachers from ECDC 1 noted the parent-leadership organization is a source for parental involvement. Observation from attending one of the meetings indicated a chance for leadership among parents involved in this organization because the parents solely facilitated the meeting, with the school providing breakfast and space for parents to meet and discuss ways to provide activities to support the school's programs. Teachers and school leaders scheduled and provided a wide range of activities to reach and involve as many parents as possible because they believed parental involvement supported education.

Theme 4: Parent and Teacher Collaboration

The theme of parent and teacher collaboration corresponded with Research Question 1 on how collaboration takes place to promote and support early literacy.

Feuerstein (2000) mentioned another aspect of parental involvement with a bearing on the school climate. Parents seek communication with teachers for assurance of the well-being of their children (Feuerstein, 2000). Aligning with research from the literature review, collaboration takes place to ensure the physical safety and behavioral interests of children and to receive academic updates on student progress.

Several parents substantiated they met with the teacher daily to discuss the happenings of the school day, addressing academic progress and behavioral concerns. Daily conversations took place to address concerns or confirm the school day was productive. Teachers and parents also collaborated on scheduled parent–teacher conferences taking place to discuss academic achievement. No specific indicators suggested collaboration took place to support literacy. Two of 22 teachers mentioned parents came into the classroom to read to students during story time. Although parent–teacher collaboration took place on a continual basis to address academic progress, data analysis revealed little to no specific specialized collaboration for the promotion of early literacy.

Theme 5: Parent and Teacher Education

Interviews and focus-group discussions revealed numerous ongoing educational workshops for parents and professional learning for teachers. Of the 22 teachers, 18 stated they attended workshops on a monthly basis, whereas other teachers indicated they attended workshops frequently, or every couple of months. Of 14 parents, 10 positively noted parent workshops enhanced relationships between parents and teachers. The theme parent and teacher education aligned with Research Question 2 on factors aiding in creating positive teacher–parent collaborative preschool environments.

Supporting the theme of parent and teacher education was the success of the Companion Curriculum Program developed by Mendez and Fogle (2002), which provided strategies for partnerships with parents consisting of staff-development programs for teachers, as well as workshops for parents to raise their awareness of educational themes, and approaches for implementing educational activities at home. McKinley (2010) referred to the model of Teaming for Culturally Responsive Classrooms, which emphasized the importance of professional development for improved instructional practices and endeavors to reduce the achievement gap. McKinley noted educators attending workshops were able to share information with colleagues and determine the effectiveness of their instructional strategies. Workshops for parents were useful in helping them understand what goes on during class time and suggesting ways they could assist their children with academics at home.

Theme 6: School-to-Home Connections

School-to-home connections developed from participant responses to address Research Question 1, "How do preschool teachers and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds collaborate to promote and support early literacy?" Parents favor tangible resources from school educators to assist them in extending literacy activities in the homes. Providing parents with a copy of the curriculum denotes that schools welcome parents to participate in their child's educational process. Supplying parents with a copy of the curriculum also demonstrates that teachers value input from parents, and recognize that parents need to be equipped with the appropriate tools to bestow on their children in home educational activities.

Making school-to-home connections by providing parents with resources encourages autonomy from being reliant on merely word of mouth from the teacher. Teachers equip parents with actual documents and tools to reference, and gain advanced knowledge of what their children will experience throughout the year, enabling them to reinforce at home the literacy skills taught at school. Researchers Gettinger and Stoiber (2008) commented on the importance of providing parents with resources to use in the home to create home environments for the academic success of preschool students. Tompkins (2006) specified the value of exposing children to learning in their natural surroundings where children initially began the process of taking on reading and writing skills. School-to-home literacy connections also promote social capital. Social capital refers to the availability of networks enabling parents with access to resources to provide their children with sound educational opportunities (Feuerstein 2000; Haghighat, 2005). Teachers serve as arbitrators to enable productive in-home literacy activities when they supply parents with materials and resources to extend language-learning activities from school to home.

Theme 7: Literacy-Rich Home Environments

Parents and teachers collaborate to promote literacy by communicating and gaining a common understanding of the significance of making use of printed text and items already in their homes, from cereal boxes to children's favorite toys. Preschool teachers often teach literacy development by focusing on a specific letter of the alphabet. Teachers can encourage parents to extend this learning by gathering items in the home that begin with the same letter that students are learning at school. Parents may choose to make learning fun by playing hide and seek with the items, or have students distinguish

the letter sound by holding up two items and choosing the item that makes the designated sound.

Rief (2001) noted the substantial role of parents as children's first teachers of literacy development, and that literacy skills occur through day-to-day interactions of reading aloud, playing, and simply talking to children. Communication between parents and teachers is essential so that teachers can build on the knowledge and experiences students have already achieved in their home environments (Wallace & Zeece, 2009). This type of communication demonstrates to parents their value in establishing and creating literacy skills and development in their children. Through the development of the EMERGE program, researchers Gettinger and Stoiber (2008) discovered an increase in literacy and language when teachers provided parents with suggestions for home-based activities to encourage literacy. Student improvement also increased when parents carried out literacy activities in the homes; participating students scored higher on literacy and language tests than students in regular Head Start preschool classrooms. Students' learning of literacy is only supported through specific conversations about language and reading and those conversations lead parents to engage in literacy activities in their homes.

Theme 8: Ongoing Communication

Vygotsky's social-cultural theory asserts individuals can learn from each other through frequent interactions (Slavin, 2006). The theme ongoing communication aligned with social-cultural theory and with statements from study participants. Educators used a variety of methods to communicate with parents to inform them of school happenings.

Teachers made efforts from the beginning of the school year to lay a foundation for the importance of communication through home visits made before the school year.

Throughout the school term, teachers communicated with parents in person and through numerous written methods to inform them of student progress, events, parent workshops, and conferences. In like fashion, parents stopped in to their child's classroom as often as they liked to chat with teachers regarding their child's school day. Parents also communicated with teachers through written notices, text messages, and face-to–face meetings when attending school events or parent conferences.

Keyser (2007) emphasized that meaningful partnerships commenced with two-way conversations between parents and teachers such that speaking and listening were reciprocal. Information sharing is significant for creating positive teacher–parent partnerships (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004). Teachers communicating with parents by substantiating their roles as their children's first teacher bear significance in student learning. Ongoing communication is just one of several elements that may steer teachers toward dialogue with parents related to literacy development. Literacy is supported through a process of interactions that lead teachers to share information, materials, and resources to enable parents to extend literacy activities learned at school to their natural home environments.

Implications of the Results

The evidence from this study suggested several elements necessary to create positive teacher–parent collaborative environments for the support of literacy. The first element was the establishment of rapport. Parent and teacher collaboration improve when school leaders and teachers present a host of welcoming activities to aid in building

partnerships to assure meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. All teachers responded positively to initiating welcoming activities at the beginning of the year to establish rapport. Parent-participant responses signified a greater willingness to communicate through the establishment of rapport. Establishing rapport is a key element necessary for continued conversations specific to literacy development.

Evidence from this study suggested educational-development courses for teachers and parents was a necessary element to create collaborative environments and focused learning to support literacy. Supporting literacy means that the offerings of parent educational courses to assist parents in improving parenting skills and personal development also need to include detailed information on reading and language development. Professional-development sessions should consist of information geared toward communicating with parents about how to extend literacy learning from school to home. The literature on Teaming for Culturally Responsive Classrooms supported teacher professional development as assisting in improving instructional practices (McKinley, 2010). Teacher professional development should include workshops instructing teachers on valuing the cultures and languages of culturally diverse students, as well how to encourage parents to provide literacy skills at home.

The results of this research suggested that even if parents could not always be physically present, they still considered themselves partners in the educational process. Parental presence may be considered another element in establishing collaborative efforts for the support of literacy. Parents perceived when they showed awareness of school activities and communicated with their child's teacher by texting, e-mailing, or note writing, they were actively participating as collaborative partners. Parents desire to

volunteer at their child's school, but often circumstances such as work schedules or younger children in the home prevented them from being physically present. Although parents may not be able to physically attend school-related activities, they still show parental presence when they sign off on home-reading activities in reading logs or other materials related to literacy development from home.

Preschool leadership-team members made every effort to schedule events and activities at different times of the day and evening to accommodate parents. School leaders might find benefit in collaborating with community leaders and scheduling joint events away from school campuses and in neighborhoods. School partnerships should not always require parents to make adjustments, but school leaders and teachers should be more willing to meet parental needs by going outside of the school walls. Collaborative relationships should reflect a willingness to show value in others' cultures, languages, family, and community. Teachers may encourage off-campus literacy activities by recommending reading of labels during grocery shopping, documenting time shared through reading together at home, literacy computer games, or trips to the local library.

Parents and teachers specifically collaborate to support early literacy when direct communication takes place to encourage continued literacy development at home. Findings indicated necessary elements could lead to positive communication toward the support of literacy. The elements indicated in the themes suggested that a positive relationship must be in place before conversations regarding literacy may be acceptable. Parents and teachers should collaborate to support the overall well-being of students, their academic achievement, and improvement of academic achievement and literacy development by extending the learning that takes place in school at home. Parents and

teachers get together formally through parent–teacher conferencing to discuss academic achievement and ways parents can support learning in the home. Parents and teachers could meet informally through short gatherings to discuss happenings of the school day. Teachers should take the active role in supplying parents with materials and resources that promote increased literacy skills. Supportive preschool environments should consider surveying parents at the beginning and end of the school year and allowing them to offer suggestions for establishing rapport, introducing activities requiring parental presence, and scheduling school events as well as collaboration, parent education, resources, and other opportunities for increased communication to support literacy.

Limitations

This grounded-theory study included data collected from a sample of 15 parents and 22 teachers from two separate ECDCs in the greater metropolitan area of a southeastern U.S. city. Limitations of the study were participant availability for the sample and researcher bias in the selection of research questions. The population of choice was defined based on characteristics significant to the study. The research topic suggests the need for gaining perspectives from parents of preschool children and teachers who instruct children in early literacy. Populations may be generalized through defining the target population and constructing a sampling frame (Greenstein, 2006). Configuration of the sampling frame for the targeted population identified elements such as early learning facilities, parental interactions, and a populace of cultural diversity. Use of stratified sampling may also support application to a generalizable study by ensuring profile equivalency of two common factors between the sample and the broader

population (Salkind, 2003). Theoretic findings based on the common threads of the elements add a basis for comparisons among a more generalized population.

Limited access to the general population led to the use of a sample to represent the population of teachers and parents. The use of a sample representative of all the necessary elements functioned to draw conclusions and generate a theory regarding parent–teacher collaboration to support literacy. Assessing the population produced useful information regarding the characteristics of participants in the study. Knowing participant characteristics helped ensure inclusion of all participants, regardless of language barriers. Member checking helped reduce researcher bias. Repeating responses back to participants during interviews and focus-group discussions helped assure accurate recording and interpretation of comments.

Significance of the Findings and Recommendations for Further Research

The current research study was beneficial in answering the research questions suggested for the study. Parent–teacher collaboration supports literacy upon presence of the conjoining of each core theme, concluding that communication has to take place from relationship building to specific talks about literacy development. Findings indicated that through continuous interactions, productive engagement, and specific conversations about literacy, teachers and parents may positively impact the literacy development of preschool students. Teacher initiation of communication is essential to the establishment of focused conversations regarding literacy. The findings also indicated that parents of culturally diverse backgrounds anticipate that teachers are the catalyst, providing them with information, materials, and resources to assist them in supporting home literacy activities. Providing educators with the elements/core themes from this research may

provide a solution to challenges many educators face in attempting to convey the importance of literacy development in the early learning years.

Further investigation will tell how the incorporation of all the themes helps to support literacy. Perhaps a longitudinal research study would be advantageous for tracking parent–teacher collaborative practices from preschool to kindergarten. Data collection could include tracking the number of interactions between parents and teachers, parent participation in literacy activities, and literacy-achievement data. Data analysis from such a longitudinal study would provide documentation over a sustained period of whether parent–teacher collaboration supported literacy. A longitudinal study would provide educational leaders and teachers with opportunities to reflect on current educational practices and embrace suggestions to enhance and increase parent and teacher collaboration. Such a study would be significant because current discourse suggests many teachers lack understanding of and value for family practices, which may hinder teacher–parent collaboration (Mandell & Murray, 2009).

A future mixed-methods study with a similar focus on understanding how collaborative actions among parents and teachers support literacy is a further recommendation for increased generalization, transferability, and validation of the findings of the current study. A mixed-methods study would use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The use of mixed-methods research would provide a wider range of data collection and analysis, making connections between results through statistical analysis. Frequent behaviors and trends from a larger sample would include qualitative data to allow for detailed specific information through interviews.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative grounded-theory study was to explore how parent–teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in culturally diverse communities. The goal was to generate a theory on increasing parent–teacher collaborative partnerships using the grounded-theory research method. A total of 37 teachers and parents contributed to the data obtained. Information gained from focus-group discussions and individual interviews resulted in the development of eight themes, yielding an enhanced understanding on collaboration between parents and teachers.

The study limitations included participant availability and researcher selection of research questions. A sampling frame was useful to represent the elements of the population to address the research questions. The use of data triangulation and member checking limited researcher bias. Grounded-theory methodology involves processes of gathering and analyzing data for the formulation of a theory (Creswell, 2008). In this research study, grounded-theory methodology, including a literature review, interviews, focus-group discussions, coding of data, refining themes, constant-comparison analysis, and theoretical sampling were instrumental in the generation of the theory. The theory that emerged from the use of grounded-theory methodology is that literacy is supported through a process of interactions that lead teachers to share information, materials, and resources to enable parents to extend literacy activities learned at school to their natural home environments.

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APPENDIX A:

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

University of Phoenix®

Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory Study

Janice Wilson

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

As a researcher working on the above research study at the University of Phoenix, I understand that I must maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning all research participants as required by law. Only the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board may have access to this information. "Confidential Information" of participants includes but is not limited to: names, characteristics, or other identifying information, questionnaire scores, ratings, incidental comments, other information accrued either directly or indirectly through contact with any participant, and/or any other information that by its nature would be considered confidential. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the information, I hereby agree to refrain from discussing or disclosing any Confidential Information regarding research participants, to any individual who is not part of the above research study or in need of the information for the expressed purposes on the research program. This includes having a conversation regarding the research project or its participants in a place where such a discussion might be overheard; or discussing any Confidential Information in a way that would allow an unauthorized person to associate (either correctly or incorrectly) an identity with such information. I further agree to store research records whether paper, electronic or otherwise in a secure locked location under my direct control or with appropriate safe guards. I hereby further agree that if I have to use the services of a third party to assist in the research study, who will potentially have access to any Confidential Information of participants, that I will enter into an agreement with said third party prior to using any of the services, which shall provide at a minimum the confidential obligations set forth herein. I agree that I will immediately report any known or suspected breach of this confidentiality statement regarding the above research project to the University of Phoenix, Institutional Review Board.

Signature of Researcher	Janice Wilson Printed Name	8/26/2012 Date
Signature of Witness	Gloria Weaver Printed Name	8/26/2012 Date

APPENDIX B:

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Responses to question from Parents at Center A: What are factors that aid in positive teacher-parent collaborative preschool environments?

1A–Parent teacher collaboration is communication daily in a variety of ways that work with both. I like getting text, or call me if there are concerns. A home visit, or anything that works for the parent and the teacher.

2A–Parents and teachers should collaborate to make sure that the children are getting the best education possible. The parents should know each other, I noticed a difference in my how my daughter's teacher brings the parents in so we can get to know each other, and it's a lot better atmosphere when the parents know each other.

3A–I think that teachers should push the volunteer mode to the parents. Maybe they should during the first few weeks of school have parents come in for a meet and greet, to get to know one another. The teachers should have a list of different dates of different activities so the parents can choose an activity that they want to volunteer on. Teachers should send out reminder notes, that state remember when you signed up to volunteer for read a book day? Here's a reminder. Even if the teacher has to send out a weekly or monthly reminder to get the parents to really stick to that date without making excuses, like oh I have a meeting or oh I forgot. Make the parent stick to what they signed up for.

4A–Have separate conferences with just the teacher and the parent, and one for the parent and the child to come in if there are any behavioral issues, or learning issues. The teacher can say, "Let's go over here to the board and you show me that you know

what you are doing." We have to hold the student and the parent accountable. The teacher can say, "Are you familiar with how to help your child with his or her homework?" The teachers need to teach parents how to do the homework.

It would work perfect for schools to have Saturday enrichment programs. The Saturday program would delete parent excuses for not coming to school, of working Monday through Friday. Teachers could do a 30-minute information session with parents. A room of parents learning simple skills they may need to brush up on to help their children. It could be ELA, Math, Reading, Articulation or anything that would help the parent to help the child. If you start articulation with the parent, then the parent won't speak improper English to the child, and the child is not out in public speaking improper English. We have to get the parents in here.

5A–The school should offer food or giveaways as incentives to get the parents to participate, perhaps breakfast or lunch. Parents should come together as a team.

6A–Parents and teachers need to come together to understand the parent. Parents did not get instructions when they gave birth to the child, and often hears don't do this or that, but rarely receives instruction on what to do. As parents we feel like we are frowned upon as opposed to praised upon. What do I need to do to show commitment? I love my child, but I have to work. When you leave a crying child with the teacher, the teacher can't teach, and doesn't know what to do with the child. Have volunteer parents to come in and talk to the teachers about what they can do to soothe the child. Parents and teachers could work together to help each other to know the child. The teacher educates the parent on what the student needs to learn, and the parent educates the teacher on helpful things to know about that particular child. Parents and teachers need to come

together to know each other and the child first, and then the child will be able to learn. Sometimes parents feel discouraged when teachers say, “Oh you shouldn’t have done that!” How can we as parents encourage our child if we are discouraged?

3A–To piggyback on what she said, “Perhaps they should have parenting classes for young mothers who lack parenting skills. Have programs where the school works with the parents’ jobs so that the parents can spend more physical time in the classroom. Sometime parent lack skills of teaching their child.

6A–Programs need to available for moms and dads, so they can work together in the teaching process of the child. A lot of times the teachers don’t really know the dads. How can my child really be successful without both of us working together? Parents need more resources available to them.

Responses to question from Parents at Center B: What are factors that aid in positive teacher-parent collaborative preschool environments?

Nine parents of children attending an early childhood educational center in a Southeastern U.S. city participated in the focus group discussion. All of the parents had at least one child in the program and several others had two or more children in the program. All nine of the participants were mothers. Seven participants were African American, one of Hispanic dissent, and one White.

Parent 1B–Parent teacher relationships should always be an open door with sharing information about the child, for example, whether they had a bad nights’ sleep. There is always a story behind the child why they are behaving the way that they do. If parents do not share information with the teacher, they will never know what is going on.

It should always be open door, even if it is just little notes going back and forth to provide the best care for the child.

Parent 2B–Teachers are parents too, and should readily make phone calls, and send out emails, collaborating letting parents know what is going on. They can be busy with sports and cheering, stuff like that. You can still find time to call them or email them to let them know what is going on with your child.

Parent 3B–I think it would be great if the teachers held a meeting once a month to let parents know what is going on. My daughters' school has a classroom mom to correspond with the parents when the teachers are so extremely busy. That classroom mom makes phone calls to parents to let them know about school wide events and if a particular child has forgotten to bring their homework or their backpack. They also let you know things extremely important.

Parent 4B–I can relate to open door, building relationships, communication. I find that having a good relationship with the teacher is important. Simply communicating with the parents, whether it is just good morning, or showing a genuine interest. Parents may feel more open to communicate. Everyone's personality is different and some parents may not feel open to communicate without the teacher showing interest. I have twin girls, so we get double duty with all the communication and sometimes it gets a little hectic. Communication is a big thing with the teachers of both girls, and they do a good job. There is always a sign up list letting parents know what is happening such as breast cancer awareness. Being able to volunteer is a big thing. Getting the interest of the parents can be a challenge. You can bring a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink. I know that getting parent's interested is a challenge for teachers.

Parent 5B–I think the common denominator is communication as stated before. If you think about it, a teacher reaches out to a parent that is more involved quicker. I am one of those parents who leave every open, email, my cell phone. I am one of those parents who will call a conference quick when I see there is something going on with my child.

The parent and the teacher are cohesive, working out strategies with the child and setting goals. What works for my children and I, is that I get with the teacher. When the children know that the parents and teachers are cohesive, they cannot tell you one thing, and the teacher another. The parent participation is what really holds things together. When my children tell me something, they already know that I am going to back the teacher; I will send out an email or come to the school, to determine what happened. The teacher and I will piece things together. My children know that, I am going to go digging, so I can find out what is going on. My teachers will email me or call me at the drop of a dime. I am always one of those parents to participant, because a sign-up sheet is always available for volunteering or bringing in items. What I notice is that it is always the same parents who participate. The same faithful parents are at every meeting or event, even here. We have seen each other repeatedly. You must admit when you do not see the parent, what can you do? The child is not responsible. I think is sad to not see the parent participation, the time that something goes wrong, the parent runs up to the school. Teachers need you to be on the scene, parents need to be present at all times. That bothers me.

2B–You can try to be present at all times but sometimes your work schedule will not allow it.

5B–I am not talking about working parents, being present could be sending something to the school. Being present means knowing what is going on, and having your child ready to participate in school activities. It's not just about being present physically because as you know, we have to provide.

6B–I agree with the open door policy. When parents take learning seriously, so does the teacher. They feel like you are a mom who cares. They will let you know what kind of day your child has had, and parents need to pay attention to this. Teachers respond differently to parents who care. There is only so much that the teacher can do to reach out to the parents, if parents are not taking it seriously. I feel like we have awesome teachers, who are not receiving what is due them. Open door policy is the best thing, between parents and teachers, teachers and students, and children and parents.

7B–One more thing, from what she said, I do think teacher appreciation is important too. A lot of parents don't appreciate their child's teacher. Saying thank you and asking how is your day going. Sometimes I may stop by and get the teacher or the teacher next door a Chick-Fil-A biscuit. The teacher next door is important too, because she may help with my son's snotty nose. The teacher thinks, "She does care enough to make sure that I am not hungry." Whatever makes the teacher happy to make sure that my child has a good day. I may bring donuts or candies. When I brought my daughter late to school and she missed lunched, her teacher took her off the playground and gave her orange juice and a muffin. The teacher got some food into her system. That was something that she was not supposed to do, but feeding my child was my responsibility before she got to school. The teacher said, "Oh no, not my baby." She gave her something to eat. You can't pay for teacher concern.

8B–You are right about that, because I am very impressed with what my child is learning. I feel like the teachers are doing an awesome job. I notice that my children choose educational toys to play with at church. I wish I could take credit for it. Even at home, I would take them to the library, but the most of the learning comes from what the teacher does.

APPENDIX C:

INFORMED CONSENT

University of Phoenix Informed Consent:

Participants 18 years of age and older

Dear Participant,

My name is Janice Wilson and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctorate of Education degree. I am conducting a research study entitled *Parent Teacher collaboration to Support Literacy among Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory Study.*

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the research study is to explore parent and teacher collaborations in early childhood settings. Conducting this study will allow the researcher to explore strategies that preschool teachers have used to collaborate with parents to support literacy among culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, this present study will give the researcher insight on how parent-teacher collaboration contributes to the support of early learning literacy in culturally diverse communities.

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES

Your participation in this research study will involve observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. If you choose to participate in the study, your participation will include classroom observations of teacher-parent interactions, an audio- recorded interview session, and an audio- recorded focus group discussion. The audio recording device will be visible at all times, and no recordings will take place without the knowledge of the participant. The observations, interviews, and focus group sessions may take up to 60 minutes of your time. About 40 participants will be involved in the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research study may be published, but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation may indicate the need of

increased parental participation among culturally diverse communities for supporting literacy.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your right to privacy will be valued, and emphasized throughout the study, and beyond. All identifying information pertaining to you will be kept anonymous. Your written, and audio- recorded responses will be coded using numbers. No identifying information will be seen on any written material. This informed consent form will be locked in a file cabinet for a period of approximately three years, and then destroyed through shredding.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call at xxx-xxxx or xxx@xxx.com

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.
2. Your identity will be kept confidential.
3. Janice Wilson, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.
4. The interviews will be audio recorded, and I grant permission for the researcher, Janice Wilson, to digitally record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews will also be transcribed. The researcher will structure a coding process, and use pseudonyms to assure that anonymity of your name is protected.
5. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.
6. The research results may be used for publication, however no information will be used that may compromise your identity.

“By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.”

Signature of the interviewee _____ Date _____

Signature of the researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D:

PERMISSION TO USE PREMISES (A)

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

PERMISSION TO USE PREMISES, NAME, AND/OR SUBJECTS

Fayette County HeadStart Program
205 Bradford Square
Fayetteville, GA 30215

Investigator: Janice M. Wilson, Doctor of Education Student, University of Phoenix
3640 South Fulton Avenue Suite 1502
Hapeville, GA 30354

Check any that apply:

☒ I hereby authorize Janice M. Wilson, a student of University of Phoenix, to use the premises (facility identified below) to conduct a study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory.

☒ I hereby authorize Janice Wilson, a student of the University of Phoenix, to recruit subjects for participation in a study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory..

☐ I hereby authorize Janice Wilson, student of University of Phoenix, to use the name of the facility, organization, university, institution, or association identified above when publishing results from the study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory.

Dr Irma — 2/28/2013

Signature Date

Executive Director

Title,

Dr. Irma Ellington, Executive Director
Fayette County Head Start Program
205 & 215 Bradford Square
Fayetteville, GA 30215

APPENDIX E:

PERMISSION TO USE PREMISES (B)

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

PERMISSION TO USE PREMISES, NAME, AND/OR SUBJECTS

Early Learning & Literacy Resource Center
404 Fulton Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30312

Investigator: Janice M. Wilson, Doctor of Education Student, University of Phoenix
3640 South Fulton Avenue Suite 1502
Hapeville, GA 30354

Check any that apply:

☑ I hereby authorize Janice M. Wilson, a student of University of Phoenix, to use the premises (facility identified below) to conduct a study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory.

☑ I hereby authorize Janice Wilson, a student of the University of Phoenix, to recruit subjects for participation in a study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory..

☐ I hereby authorize Janice Wilson, student of University of Phoenix, to use the name of the facility, organization, university, institution, or association identified above when publishing results from the study entitled Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory

[redacted] 3/12/2013

Signature Date

Director

Title,

Mr. Steve White, Director
Early Learning & Literacy Resource Center
404 Fulton Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30312

APPENDIX F:

PERMISSION TO RECRUIT SUBJECTS (A)

PERMISSION TO RECRUIT SUBJECTS

Fayette County Head Start Program

205 & 215 Bradford Square

Fayetteville, GA 30215

Investigator: Janice M. Wilson, Doctor of Education Student, University of Phoenix

3640 South Fulton Avenue Suite 1502

Hapeville, GA 30354

As the Executive Director of the Fayette County Head Start Program, my signature below indicates that I agree to participate in the recruitment of subjects in cooperation with Janice M. Wilson, a student at the University of Phoenix, who is conducting the study entitled, Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory.

Date: 5/10/2013

Dr. Irma Ellington, Executive Director
Fayette County Head Start Program
205 & 215 Bradford Square
Fayetteville, GA 30215

APPENDIX G:

PERMISSION TO RECRUIT SUBJECTS (B)

PERMISSION TO RECRUIT SUBJECTS

Early Learning & Resource Center

404 Fulton Avenue

Atlanta, GA 30312

Investigator: Janice M. Wilson, Doctor of Education Student, University of Phoenix

3640 South Fulton Avenue Suite 1502

Hapeville, GA 30354

As the Director of the Early Learning & Resource Center, my signature below indicates that I agree to participate in the recruitment of subjects by seeking volunteers from those associated with my organization in cooperation with Janice M. Wilson, a student at the University of Phoenix, who is conducting the study entitled, Parent-Teacher Collaboration to Support Early Literacy in Culturally Diverse Communities: A Grounded Theory.

Date: 5/7/13

Steve White, Director
Early Learning & Resource Center
404 Fulton Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30312

APPENDIX H:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Early Childhood Development Teachers Interview Questions

1. How does the school staff welcome parents to participate in school activities?
2. What activities are parents invited to participate in at school?
3. Are parent activities scheduled at convenient times to increase the level of participation?
4. How are special events and activities communicated to parents?
5. How often do you inform parents of their child's progress?
6. How often do the parents of students in your classroom volunteer at school?
7. How do school staff members inform parents of volunteer opportunities?
8. How often do you attend workshops held by your school?
9. What parent teacher interactions do you believe are instrumental in supporting the literacy of children attending early childhood programs?

APPENDIX I:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. How does the school staff welcome parents to participate in school activities?
2. What activities are you invited to participate in at your child's school?
3. Are parent activities scheduled at convenient times to increase the level of participation?
4. How are special events and activities communicated to parents?
5. How often are you informed of your child's progress?
6. How often do you volunteer at your child's school?
7. How do school staff members inform parents of volunteer opportunities?
8. How often do you attend workshops held by your school?
9. What types of workshops are offered through your child's preschool?
10. How have the parent workshops enhanced interaction between you and your child?
11. What suggestions do you have for improving the collaboration between you and your child's teacher?
12. What reading suggestions or book reading recommendations have you received from your child's teacher?

Please circle the answer that best fits your description:

Black White Hispanic Asian Other:_____

Employed Unemployed

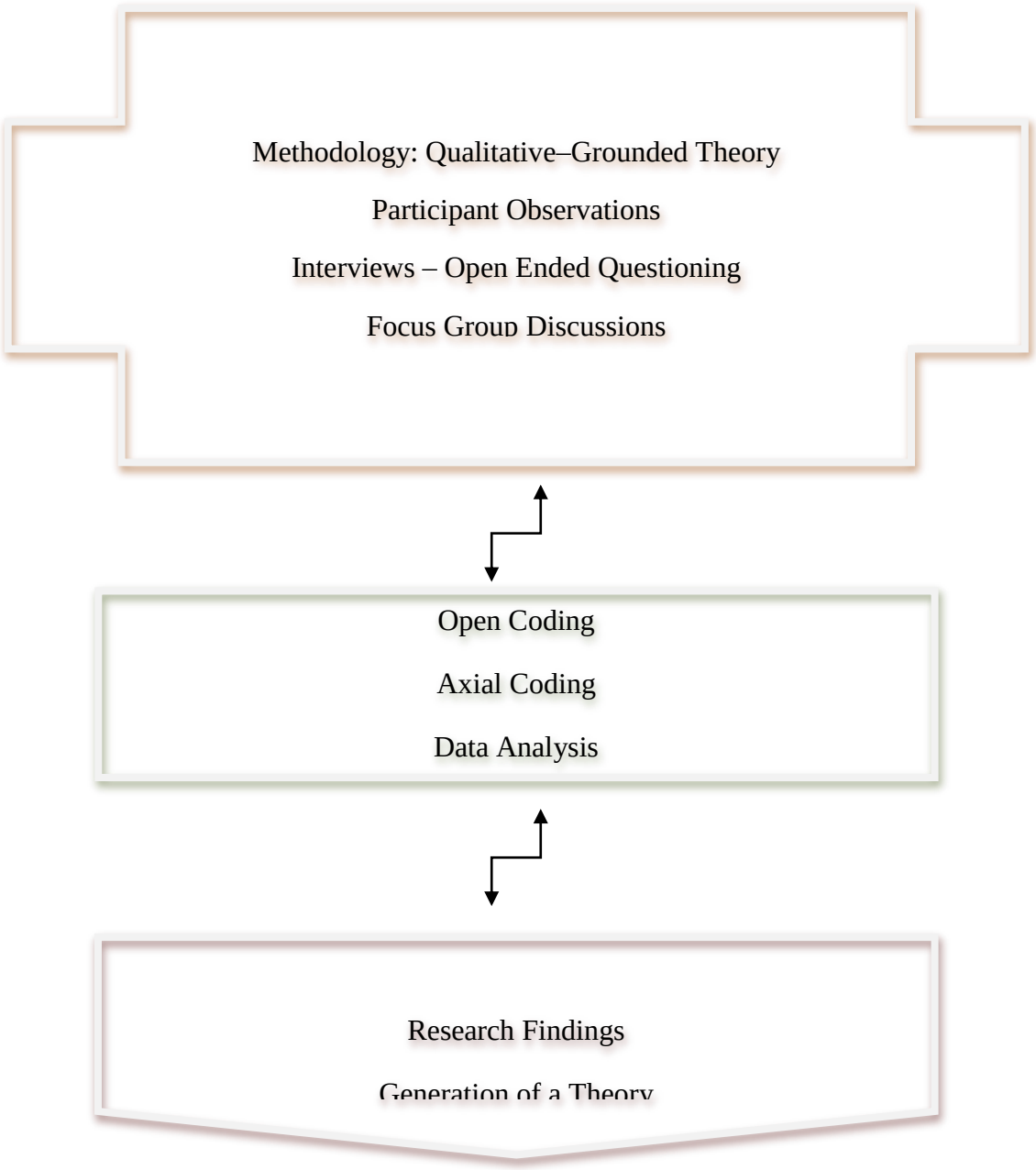
Age Range:

18–25 26–33 34–40 40–46 47–53 Over 54

APPENDIX J:

FLOWCHART OF PROCEDURES FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY

Methodology: Qualitative–Grounded Theory



APPENDIX K:

CODEBOOK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THEMES

Theme	Codes	Definition	Example from interviews/focus groups
Establishing rapport	Communication	Establishing rapport consists of the teacher welcoming and inviting parents by offering opportunities for meet and greets, and relationship building.	Participant 4B, "I can relate to open door, building relationships, and communication. I find that having a good relationship with the teacher is important. Simply communicating with the parents, whether it is just good morning, or showing a genuine interest. Parents may feel more open to communicate."
Parental Presence	Volunteering	The definition of parental presence is considered to be the act of showing awareness, by communicating daily with teachers by phone, notes, emails, face-to-face, or sending children to school prepared.	Parent 5B, "Being present means knowing what is going on, and having your child ready to participate in school activities. It's not just about being present physically because as you know, we have to provide."
Scheduling Activities for Increased School Participation	Parental Involvement	Ongoing efforts from the early childhood center leaders to assist in providing and scheduling activities for fostering greater parental involvement.	Parent 10A, "Parent activities are scheduled according to parent availability, and convenience. For example, parent conferences, PLO meetings, and Open House."
Parent and Teacher Collaboration	Communication	Parent and teacher collaboration is defined as communication between teachers and parents regarding the physical, emotional, and educational wellbeing of a child.	Parent 1A, "Parent teacher collaboration is communication daily in a variety of ways that work with both. I like getting text, or call me if there are concerns. A home visit, or anything that works for the parent and the teacher."
Parent and Teacher Education	Education	Parent and Teacher Education is defined as workshops, or professional development courses taken by parents and or teachers to increase understanding of child development, enhance professional skills, personal development, and increase cultural awareness.	Parent 6A "Programs need to be available for moms and dads, so they can work together in the teaching process of the child."

Theme	Codes	Definition	Example from interviews/focus groups
Ongoing Communication	Communication	Continuous interactions and engagement between teachers and parents	Parent 2B "Parents and teachers could work together to help each other to know the child. The teacher educates the parent on what the student needs to learn, and the parent educates the teacher on helpful things to know about that particular child. Parents and teachers need to come together to know each other and the child first, and then the child will be able to learn."