WHEN PARENTS MEET WITH A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

by

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(Under the Direction of SALLY J. ZEPEDA)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between parents and principals in principal-parent conferences in a high school setting. Ethnographic research procedures, guided by the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, were used to report the interactions from the perspectives of the participants. This research was a case study featuring in-depth interviews with parents and principals. Interviews, focusing on participant perspectives of the conference, were audio taped and transcribed for interpretation and analysis. Additional research procedures included observations of the conferences, journal writing, and the inclusion of archival materials drawn from the site. A phenomenological analysis, applied to the data, yielded categories and themes that were grounded in the data and framed interactions as stories based on the perspectives of each principal and parent participant.

Although limited in scope, findings from the study revealed principal-parent interactions provide a valuable source of knowledge surrounding principal-parent conferences. The study revealed differences in the meanings principals and parents attached to the same conference. At times, these differences blocked partnership building between parent and principal participants. Results from the study emphasized the importance of understanding meanings parents attach to interactions with principals. This kind of knowledge could contribute to building more effective relationships with parents. The study also points to the need for more research that could help principals implement strategies for building partnerships with parents for the benefit of all students.

INDEX WORDS: Parent Involvement, Principal-Parent Interactions, High School
                Conferences, Perspectives, Communication, Partnerships

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DEDICATION

This work has been one of my greatest challenges in life and would not have been possible without the help and support of three very special people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study explored principal-parent interactions from the perspectives of both the parents and the principals who have recently spoken, face-to-face, with each other in a high school setting. The title of the dissertation, *When Parents Meet with a High School Principal*, aptly describes the intent and purpose of this perspective-seeking study.

Chapter 1 presents a description of the study. This description includes the statement of the problem and describes the purpose for the study. The background provides the rationale for the study. The research questions are presented as the focus underlying the course of study. Drawing from the literature, Chapter 1 provides a description of theoretical lenses applied to the study. Definitions of key terms follow a discussion of the significance and limitations of the study. The organization of the study concludes Chapter 1.

Statement of the Problem

In the daily operation of school, principal-parent interactions may set the climate for parent participation and support for the entire school. Yet, research on the principal-parent relationship has been limited in the literature. This gap in the literature may be due, in part, to the element of privacy principals extend to parents. Parent-principal conferences are usually conducted behind closed doors. Parents are often

uncomfortable discussing their children in an open forum, especially when dealing with a problem.

The principal-parent interaction may be foundational in promoting parent involvement in today's schools. We need to examine why principal-parent interactions occur. We need to delve deeper into parents' and principals' perspectives of the interactions they have with each other. This void led the researcher to the current study—an exploration of interactions from the perspectives of principals and parents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between parents and principals in principal-parent conferences in a high school setting. The study featured an in-depth inquiry designed to explore principal-parent conferences at the high school level. This research was a case study featuring in-depth interviews with parents and principals in a suburban high school in northeast Georgia.

Background of the Study

Educational reforms in the 20th Century included parental involvement as integral to school improvement (Crotta, 1994; Epstein, 1992; Henry, 1992). For instance, Goals 2000, Educate America Act, indicated "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement" (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p. vi). Parental involvement in education continues to impact schools of the 21st Century, and current laws and policies across the United States reflect a continued emphasis on parental involvement (Nakagawa, 2000). Federal education funds are linked to parent involvement initiatives. To obtain federal funds, school districts are encouraged to create innovative parent involvement programs (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000).

As the world changes so do the requirements for effective leadership for schools (Munitz, 1998). Leadership for the 21st Century may be described as leadership of partnerships. To succeed, leaders must partner with individuals and groups. Successful leadership requires an appreciation for collective power, along with an appreciation of differences (Spiker & Brown, 2000). In the current landscape of school reform, school-parent interactions surface as a critical component of parent involvement. In fact, interactions with parents have been reported as being foundational to the success of parent involvement in schools (Drake, 2000; Epstein, 1995; Greenberg, 1989).

Research has been instrumental in helping educators understand the importance of parental involvement and partnership building in schools (Boone & Barclay, 1995; Brandt, 1998; Drake, 2000; DeMoss, 1998; Epstein, 1995). Studies have shown that the more parents are involved in their child's education, the better education the child receives (Warner, with Curry 1997). Avenues for parent participation have been suggested in the literature (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Epstein, 1987, 1992). Some studies have sought to define parent involvement (Vandergrift & Green, 1992). Parent participation has been shown to vary among parents of children in elementary, middle, and high school (DeMoss, 1998). Studies have revealed that the education, socioeconomic status, age, and past experiences with schools influence parental participation in the schooling of their children and the involvement with the schools their children attend (Epstein, 1983b). Researchers have examined features of the school workplace that influence parent involvement (Bauch & Goldring, 1999). However, much of this literature on parental involvement is focused on the teacher-parent relationship.

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Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- What is the purpose of principal-parent interactions in conferences at the high school level?

- What are parents' perspectives on these interactions?

- What are principals' perspectives on these interactions?

Principal in this study refers to any member of the school's administrative team—the building principal or an assistant principal.

Theoretical Framework

This study, designed to explore principal-parent interactions from the perspectives of parents and principals, is grounded in symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism maintains a focus on interpersonal interaction. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is "the activity in which human beings interpret each other's gestures and acts on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation" (pp. 65-66). This inquiry required me to put myself in the place of the participants, seeing things from their perspectives.

Data collection focused on the generation of descriptive data gleaned from the participants' perspectives, seven parents and four administrators. Participants' perspectives were explored through open-ended interviews and direct observations. Psathas (1973) explains this approach:

Methodologically, the implication of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that the actor's view of actions, objects, and society has to be studied seriously. The situation must be seen as the actor sees it, the meanings of the objects and

acts must be determined in terms of the actor's meanings, and the organization of

a course of action must be understood as the actor organizes it. The role of the

actor in the situation would have to be taken by the observer in order to see the

social world from his perspective. (pp. 6-7)

The symbolic interactionist perspective values understanding events, situations, roles, etc.

from the perspectives of the participant.

Interviews began with an open-ended request to allow each participant to share

their account of the conference. Subsequent questions and probes sought to clarify

participants' recollections of the event. Jotting down key words helped control the course

of the interview. Bracketing, journal writings, and fieldnotes were used to distinguish the

ideas, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher. Data presentation, analysis, and

interpretation focused on the use of participants' own words to capture their particular

perspectives and reflections on the conferences they had with each other.

Significance of the Study

Today's schools offer many opportunities for principal-parent interactions.

In Georgia, like Chicago, Kentucky and Florida, the establishment of local school

councils in all state schools promotes additional opportunities for principal-parent

interactions. School principals may find themselves under prepared to work with parents

whose voices in school involvement have increased (Murphy, 1994). Principals may

sense an increase in the need to develop strategies that lend support for interacting with

parents. Principals may benefit from an in-depth inquiry into this important aspect of

school life—principal-parent interactions—the focus of this research.

Findings from this study might help novice administrators learn more about conferencing with parents. Aspiring educational leaders could also benefit from this kind of exploration. Reflecting on my graduate studies, coursework did not prepare me for principal-parent interactions. Knowledge discovered from this study may contribute to the curriculum offered in educational leadership programs of study.

The study offers a look into the real life of schools. Findings may build new awareness of the sometimes conflictive and cooperative relationship that exists between parents and school administrators. Providing a view from inside the administrators' doors may promote the exploration of principal-parent relationships in future research. Presently, the principal-parent relationship has limited exposure in the educational literature.

The ideas and concepts identified in this study may contribute to further developing the knowledge base of school reform efforts surrounding parent involvement. With focus on increased parent involvement, educators may benefit from the knowledge gained from the perspectives that promote positive principal-parent interactions. Identification of interactions that have negative impact may help school leaders develop appropriate strategies for effective principal-parent interactions.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on several key assumptions. First, participants understood the purpose of the study. Participants were honest in their responses. Participants trusted the researcher and were comfortable in sharing their perspectives of the conference. And, participants were provided sufficient time to share their perspectives.

Interviews were designed to promote these assumptions. The interviews were conducted in a private setting with each interview beginning with a statement of ethical guidelines governing the study and sharing the purpose of the study. To put the parents at ease, the researcher asked the participants to talk about themselves before responding to the interview questions. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and void of any time limits.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to clarify and to reinforce the meanings of key terms used throughout this study.

Perspective— According to Becker (1961), perspective is:

A coordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation. … Perspectives differ from value in being situationally specific; they are patterns of thought and action that have grown up in response to a specific set of institutional processes. (p. 34)

Principals—Any member of the administrative team in the chosen site, including in this study the principal and assistant principals.

Parents—Adults of children who attend the chosen high school site.

Disconnects—Differences in perspectives of principal and parent participants.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations associated with the study. Representation is limited. Parent participants were selected from one school. Only one team of administrators, the building principal and the assistant principals, participated in the study. Findings do not apply to all high school administrative teams. To minimize the limitations of the study, the focus

was on providing an in-depth look into principal-parent interactions. While limited in scope, this in-depth exploration served to bring focus on the importance of interactions between administrators and parents.

Overview of the Research Procedures

This qualitative research study provided an in-depth view of principal and parent conferences. Ethnographic research procedures were used to capture accurate perspectives of the participants. These methods included conducting participant observations during conferences, followed by separate interviews with parents and with the administrative participants. All interviews were conducted within 48 hours of the conference due to the temporal nature of the interaction. The typical interview lasted about one hour and took place in a private setting. Interviews were transcribed for future interpretation and analysis. The researcher's subjectivities were recorded in a journal. Archival materials drawn from the site contributed to the database.

Analysis of the data required repeated readings of the transcriptions. The initial reading included coding outstanding words or phrases in each line. Categories emerged from the codes. Additional readings related the data back to these categories. Common themes emerged across the categories and provided a framework for representing each participant's story.

Researcher's Perspective

As an assistant principal in a suburban high school, my job description includes many responsibilities. Like many administrators in public high schools, my days are often unpredictable. I rely on knowledge gleamed from years of graduate study in school

administration and my experience in the field of education to address the challenges of my role as an assistant principal.

I began the 2001-2002 school year with a new responsibility. My principal, in response to a recent state mandate, charged me with establishing a local school council for the school. To assist me, I was handed a large notebook containing state guidelines for implementing school councils. A quick perusal of the material revealed the state was mandating a council that would provide parents a voice in decision-making in the school. I felt totally unprepared for my new responsibility. Parent involvement in decision-making was new to me.

I was not enthusiastic about my new job responsibility, and I needed more knowledge about parent involvement before I could tackle the task assigned to me. I wondered why our state would mandate such a council. I pondered over how the council might operate in the school. And, I must admit, I was not sure I even believed in the concept.

One of the greatest challenges accompanying my role as an assistant principal has been working with parents. As an assistant principal, I am always anxious when a parent requests a conference. My anxiety stems in part from not knowing the purpose of the request, and this uncertainty makes it difficult to prepare in advance for the conference. Adding to my stress is my lack of knowledge of parent involvement. My knowledge of parent involvement is based predominantly on personal experiences with parents. My interactions and experiences with parents have, at times, frustrated me. I have made decisions that paved the way for parent conferences riddled with controversy. At times, conflicts were not resolved and this frustrated me even more. These experiences with

parents influenced my initial response to forming a local school council for our school.

Serving as an assistant principal for 14 years, I have had many opportunities to interact with parents. I have always been the decision-maker in parent conferences and I considered myself to be effective in this role. In reflection, I can only wonder how parents might have perceived those same experiences. Viewing my world only through the eyes of self has not prepared me for building effective relationships with parents, a necessary requirement for implementing a successful school council. As a school leader, I now felt compelled to view my world through the eyes of significant others, the parents.

Graduate studies in qualitative research offered my first opportunity to explore principal-parent interactions. Responding to a class assignment, I conducted a pilot study designed to examine principal-parent interactions. Data were collected from an interview with a parent following a principal-parent conference. Data analysis rendered insights from the parent participant and caused me to reflect on the apparent gap between my reality and the reality of the parent who participated in this pilot study. I wondered how the principal participant viewed the conference and how the principal's views might compare to the views of the parent participant. These ponderings led me to conduct a follow-up interview with the principal. Extending data collection to include the principal offered greater insights into understanding the principal-parent interaction. The results of the pilot study pointed to the value of investigating the perspectives of each participant and influenced the design of the present study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. This review includes the major field of inquiry—parent involvement literature. Parent involvement literature features current

reform initiatives and the historical and theoretical development of parent involvement. The chapter concludes with existing studies contributing to knowledge of parent involvement.

The methods and the research design are the focus of Chapter 3. This chapter opens with a discussion of the major theoretical perspectives applied to the methods and research design of the study. Chapter 3 continues with a discussion of the major considerations involved in conducting a case study. A description of the sample population is highlighted in this chapter. Data collection methods and data analysis and interpretation are also discussed in this section, as are elements of validity and reliability. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this case study. The chapter provides a description of the school site, along with profiles of the participants. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, analysis, implications, and recommendations for school personnel, university programs that prepare aspiring administrators, and researchers who may want to extend the research of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

The literature on parent involvement was explored as the primary conceptual foundation for this study. Included in this review are current reform initiatives that increase focus on parent involvement. Reform initiatives presented highlight national and state legislation, school-choice and charter schools. This part of the review revealed the increased focus on parent involvement and the increased opportunities for principal-parent interactions.

With the assumption that the past bears influence on the present, this literature review also examined the historical and theoretical development of parent involvement. As our nation has evolved, so too has our definition of parent involvement. Examining theoretical perspectives helped to bring understanding to the forces that have influenced the current emphasis on parent involvement in K-12 schools.

The conclusion of Chapter 2 focused on existing studies contributing to knowledge of parent involvement. Examining principal and parent interactions surfaced as a valuable extension to the research on parent involvement.

<u>Current Reform Initiatives</u>

This research is presented at a time when school reform initiatives have included increased parent involvement (Conley, 1991; Klecker, Austin, & Burns, 2000; Raywich, 1990; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Vann, 2000). These reform initiatives are evident in

legislation, school-choice programs, and charter schools. The following review of the literature on parent involvement grounds this study in these current reform efforts.

<u>Legislation</u>

In the Goals 2000, Educate America Act, Goal 8 indicates that "by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p. vi). Goals 2000 paved the way for many state mandates requiring the development of parent advisory councils in local schools. In Georgia, passage of the Education House Bill (HB) 1187, known as the *A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000*, requires the establishment of school councils with parents as members in all schools by the year 2003. House Bill 1187 furthers that: The school council, comprised of parents, teachers, business leaders, and the school principal, shall make recommendations to the local board of education on:

- Developing school operations, including curriculum and calendar;

- Encouraging greater parental and community involvement in the school;

- Establishing budget priorities for the school; and

- Recommending to the local board, in the case of principal vacancy, which candidate should be hired by the Board of Education.

Moreover, H.B. 1187 contains specific language related to the overall operations and procedures by which local school councils (LSC's) shall operate, mainly that:

- School councils will be subject to the Open Records and Open Meetings laws;

- Any recommendation of a school council can be overturned by a vote of the local school board;

- Council members are to serve for 2-year terms;

- Parents choose the parental representatives; teachers choose the teacher representatives; and the council and the local board of education each choose one business representative. (cited in Advancing Education, Inc., 2001, pp. 41-142)

Georgia, the state in which this study was conducted, has, with the passage of 1187 and the establishment of local school councils, joined the ranks of other states that mandate parental involvement.

Nakagawa (2000) provided examples of state laws, codes, policies, and contracts being used across the United States to reflect the emphasis on parent involvement in schools. According to Nakagawa, pending legislation, session laws, codes, or statutes in every state mention parent involvement in some capacity. For example, California requires school boards to create programs for parent involvement. These programs must be integrated into each school's master plan for accountability. In Indiana, an education code links performance awards for educators for parent involvement. Each school's performance awards program must include extraordinary levels of parental involvement in classroom and extracurricular activities. And in Colorado, state policy requires that parents agree either verbally or in writing to a list of parent responsibilities before their child will be allowed to enroll in district preschool programs.

Many charter schools use parent contracts. For instance, California charter schools require parents to sign a contract before their children may enroll in the school. These contracts often specify number of hours for involvement and detail kinds of involvement. For example, one contract requires parents to work on one of the school's committees. Also in California, a 1994 Family-School Partnership Act was created and

stipulates that parents, guardians, and grandparents are expected to spend 40 hours per year for parent involvement activities in their child's school (Nakagawa, 2000).

School reform has seen emphasis on decentralization and site-based management. States have responded to decentralization and site-based management by turning to parent involvement as a key element. New York, Chicago and Kentucky were at the forefront of this school reform (Easton & Storey; 1994; Hess, 1991; Klecker, Austin, & Burns, 2000; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Vann, 2000).

The roots of The Chicago School Reform Act can be traced back to the 1960s. A movement for community control and community empowerment, fueled by concerns over desegregation and the war on poverty, swept across the country. In New York City, there was pressure to decentralize the school system and to bring control closer to the community (Hess, 1991).

> Rogers, in his study, *110 Livingston Street*, described the situation in the 1960s:
> In New York City public schools, one out of three pupils is a year or more
> retarded in arithmetic, and the gap between a pupil's achievement and national
> standards widens as he remains in school. In the past ten years reading scores
> have gone down, dropout rates have gone up, community protests have increased,
> and the middle class has been steadily withdrawing its children from the public
> schools. … Teacher strikes, deteriorating community relations, and increasing
> criticism from business of student unpreparedness are further indications of the
> schools' failure. In 1967, Superintendent Donovan made a public statement of
> hope that soon all high school graduates would be reading at or above eighth
> grade level. Many businessmen in the city were reportedly shocked at such a

statement; they are angry at the school system's failure to produce an employable

black and Puerto Rican population. (cited in Hess, 1991, p. 86)

Stories of corruption on several community school boards and union domination

filled the papers. Eventually New York City created 32 elementary school districts

governed by community school boards whose members won local elections. Studies

revealed the decentralization efforts in New York City resulted in higher reading test

scores at every grade level (Hess, 1991).

Proponents of the Chicago reform constantly referred to the New York City

experience to further their decentralization efforts. Much like New York City, Chicago's

reform movement was intensified by the creation of a picture of a school system failing

its students and more interested in protecting bureaucratic jobs than in improving its

schools. Local control was evident in the Chicago school reform effort with the passage

of the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act. The Chicago School Reform Act was an

attempt to revitalize an urban school system in desperate need of improvement. The 1988

reform emphasized parent and community involvement and control. This aspect of the

reform was based on the belief that local people are in the best place to solve local

educational problems (Shipps & Smylie, 1999).

The Chicago reform decentralized real authority to Local School Councils

(LSCs). Parents had major decision-making power in three important areas: principal

evaluation and selection, budgeting, and school improvement planning (Easton & Storey,

1994). Under the 1988 reform law, principals became locally accountable. Instead of

reporting to central administration superiors, principals, no longer tenured, worked under

four-year performance contracts subject to LSC review (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Through

the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, the local school was the essential unit for educational governance and improvement that places the primary responsibility for school governance in the hands of parents, community residents, teachers, and the school principal at the school level (Easton & Storey, 1994).

The passage of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) reflected Kentucky's commitment to school-based decision-making that went beyond an advisory nature and supported parent involvement. All public schools, with few exceptions, were required to implement School-based Decision Making (SBDM) Councils by July 1, 1996. These SBDM Councils included three teachers (elected by school faculty), two parents (elected by parent members of the largest parent organization associated with the school), and an administrator (almost always the building principal) (Klecker, Austin, & Burns, 2000).

Schools in Kentucky had the option of increasing the membership of councils by including more teachers, parents, and administrators in the three-two-one ratio. The teacher and parent members of the SBDMs were elected for a one-year term, and they were eligible to seek reelection. The building principal, who usually serves as chairperson, was the continuing member of the SBDM Council (Klecker et al., 2000).

Chicago and Kentucky have provided models of school-based decision-making councils that support parent involvement. Today, many states have been influenced by the reform efforts that have occurred in Chicago and Kentucky. For example, New York State mandates that each school have a site-based management committee of parents, teachers, and administrators to engage in shared decision-making to improve student achievement. Each local board of education sets each school's committee composition,

membership selection process, and issues that these committees can and cannot consider. The local board of education decides whether their district Shared Decision Making (SDM) committees have any funding or enforcement authority to implement their decisions (Vann, 2000).

Interestingly, most school boards in the state of New York have not allocated funding or authority to the decision-making committees; therefore, the SDMs function in more of an advisory capacity. The SDMs can make and try to implement recommendations for change, but if there is a cost, the committee is at the mercy of the board of education or superintendent for funding. Without money for additional staff or programs, many recommendations cannot be realized (Vann, 2000).

School-Choice

School-choice programs have surfaced around the country in response to the belief that parents with children in these types of programs attend more school activities, volunteer more in their children's schools, communicate more with teachers, and help more with homework (Vassallo, 2000). School-choice can be a stimulus for increased parental involvement.

In the early 1990s, Milwaukee instituted Wisconsin's voucher program. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) was the first publicly sponsored school-choice program in the United States. Milwaukee students and parents were eligible for an equal share of per pupil public aid no matter which school they choose to attend. Participating parents can send children to a neighborhood public school, another public school within the district, a specialized public school, a private sectarian school, or a private nonsectarian school (Vassallo, 2000). About 8,000 low-income students

currently receive a publicly funded voucher of up to $5,100 to attend 1 of the 91 private schools taking part in Milwaukee's voucher program, and about 70% of the voucher students attend religious schools (Miner, 2000).

Currently, there are three voucher programs in the United States—in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida. In each of these programs, public dollars are used to pay tuition at private schools, including religious schools. Such programs appear to be gaining popularity, and voucher bills were on the docket in more than 20 states in the spring of 2000 (Miner, 2000). However, vouchers are under legal challenge because most private schools have some religious affiliation and the use of public money to send students to religiously affiliated schools strains the doctrine of separation of church and state. Milwaukee's plan was upheld in the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the decision. Similarly, Maine's Supreme Court rejected a suit by parents who sought to overturn the state's policy of restricting vouchers to nonreligious schools (Melcher & Bernstein, 1999).

Other school-choice experiments occurring across the United States have increased low-income parents' ability to have a greater voice in the education of their children. Private scholarship funds have offered children from low-income families opportunities to participate in school-choice programs. Billionaires Theodore J. Forstmann and John Walton of the Wal-Mart fortune launched the country's largest scholarship program for poor children. This scholarship fund offers poor children scholarships to attend private or parochial schools of their choice (Melcher & Bernstein, 1999).

School-choice is in itself a type of parental involvement. Typically, parental involvement is viewed as involvement in school activities, volunteering in the school, communication with school, and help with homework (Epstein, 1996). School-choice expands types of parent involvement to include decision-making in the school selection process.

Charter Schools

Charter schools give even more decision-making responsibility to parents in local communities (Manno, Finn, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1998). Charter schools began as an effort to develop new American schools. Since Minnesota passed the nation's first charter school law in 1991, another 28 states and the District of Columbia have enacted charter laws. By 1998, nearly 800 charter schools were attended by as many as 2-3% of all youngsters in some states. Parents, seeking a greater voice in the education of their children, have founded some charter schools (Manno et al., 1998).

Charter schools are designed to do things differently. Such schools have found many ways to involve parents and community members. Some are obvious, for instance, including these individuals on governing boards. Other interesting ideas associated with charter schools include contracts for parents, parents as instructors, courses for parents and community members, and the use of the school as a social-service center (Manno et al., 1998).

Charter schools are typically consumer-oriented Created to fit the needs of families and students, charter schools strive to satisfy clients and constituents These schools shift power from bureaucracies to the schools themselves and ultimately to the individuals responsible for them—educators, parents, and students. (Manno et al., 1998).

The charter concept offers families school choice under the umbrella of public education without micromanagement by government bureaucracies. Charter schools are open to all, paid for by tax dollars, and accountable to public authorities for student learning and other results (Manno et al., 1998). Charter schools are yet another example of reform initiatives committed to parent involvement.

The purpose of this review was to frame the study, conducted in Georgia, in the context of national reform initiatives such as charter schools, school-choice programs, and legislation in other states. The review revealed Georgia has joined the ranks of an ever-growing movement that seeks to give parents a greater voice in the education of their children.

Historical Development of Parental Involvement

Examining the historical and theoretical development of parent involvement provided background for understanding the current focus on increasing parent involvement in schools. This section examined the historical development of parental involvement, and key questions directed this inquiry: What is the history of parent involvement in our nation's schools? What theoretical perspectives have influenced parental involvement? In what ways can parents be involved in today's schools? Are there areas of concern in involving parents in schools? What practices contribute to effective parental involvement in schools? Does the literature provide suggestions for involving parents in the schools in which their children attend? The discussion opens with a profile of the history of parent involvement in our nation's schools.

Toffler (1980) presented the history of parent involvement that occurred through three major waves. Using this ocean metaphor, Toffler suggested that, as each wave rose

and moved across the nation's landscape, a new wave began to build. The following historical description is based on Toffler's work, unless otherwise noted.

Toffler depicted the first wave of parent involvement as the Agrarian Age. The primary purpose of schools was to produce educated citizens who appreciated good literature and worshipped a Protestant God (Button & Provenzo, 1989). Schools were mostly private. Many students were taught in the home. The passing of the Massachusetts Act of 1647 mandated the establishment of Reading Schools in all towns of 100 or more citizens (Toffler, 1980).

The imprint of parent involvement in the Agrarian period was complete control. Parents exhibited a lack of respect for teachers and education. The typical teacher was a young woman. These young women replaced masters who fled to the academies. Teachers were typically more humble, more proper, and more dedicated than former well-paid masters (DeMoss, 1998; Toffler, 1980).

Curriculum and instruction during the Agrarian period were dependent on parents' morals, knowledge, and trade. The absence of compulsory attendance laws supported home schooling. Children learned by participating in chores at home, and for some, reading was taught in the home (DeMoss, 1998; Toffler, 1980).

As the first wave of parent involvement moved into the western frontier, a second wave of parent involvement surfaced. The beginning of the Eighteenth Century gave rise to the second wave in the New England area. Toffler (1980) depicted the second wave as the age of efficiency, industrial revolution, and progressive education. Educational focus was on standardization with community support. The quality of schools depended on the commitment of local taxpayers. Citizens of each school district levied taxes, appointed

instructors, determined the length of the school year, maintained the school house, and acted as final arbiter in conflicts between students and teachers (Button & Provenzo, 1989). Parents determined what children would learn, and teachers satisfied their customers or were put out of business (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The Bible was the most common text. Teachers often lived with a local family. Classrooms and teaching were seen as extensions of children's parenting. However, schooling was not seen as vitally important (DeMoss, 1998; Lightfoot, 1978).

The nation's government was formed and parent involvement changed. The first compulsory attendance law was passed in 1852 in Massachusetts. More children attended schools, increasing the need for common schools (Toffler, 1980). Church supported schools and locally controlled district schools continued to be prevalent. Parents chose schooling by what they could afford. The one best system developed, the United States' Public Education System (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

The importance of education grew during the second wave. Business organizations served as a model for education. With this period came the centralization of power. Higher degrees and certification programs increased the professionalism of teachers. The Great Depression brought focus on cost-efficiency. Schools boasted larger classes resulting in teacher isolation. Curricula and instruction were geared to standardized student achievement (DeMoss, 1998; Toffler, 1980).

Second wave sediment brought a deterioration of home-school-community relations. The social development of the child was seen as a family responsibility and the education of the child was seen as the school's responsibility (Lightfoot, 1978). Schools

sought to Americanize the influx of immigrants. Parents were viewed as inadequate as educators.

Toffler's third wave of parent involvement, coined the Age of Collaboration, brought with it the first lawsuit against a school by a parent. Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka, Kansas) in 1954 ended segregation. Democratic leadership and group dynamics surfaced as elements of reform. Educational focus turned to parent and community involvement. Head Start and the 1975 Education of Handicapped Children Act gave rise to mandated parent involvement.

The 1966 Coleman Report, followed by *A Nation at Risk* published in 1983, added to the development of the Age of Accountability in education (Carr, 1996). Carr suggested these two reports brought forth a revival of parent involvement. The professionalism of educators was threatened. A struggle for collaboration developed between parents and our nation's schools. This struggle for collaboration gave rise to home-school-community partnerships (Carr, 1996).

This brief journey through the history of parent involvement revealed the role parents traditionally have played in the education of their children. This literature review indicated the role of parents, though ever-changing, have provided an impetus for change in the ways in which parents have been involved with their children's education (Toffler, 1980).

Theoretical Perspectives Influencing Parental Involvement

Researchers have revealed theoretical perspectives that have influenced parent involvement. This section describes theoretical perspectives influencing the involvement

of parents in the education of their children. Studies presented offer much support for building effective partnerships with parents.

The ecological perspective views school and family as mutually embedded; it is assumed that any action taken in one will affect the entire system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Henry, 1996). Parents are seen as a natural link to the community. Those maintaining an ecological perspective believe parents can provide valuable information about their children. Schools are seen as a valuable resource to parents offering information on children and community resources (DeMoss, 1998; Toffler, 1980). The ecological perspective fits Toffler's first wave philosophy.

Separation theory holds that family, school, and community have separate responsibilities in education and in the development of children. Second wave philosophy rests on the premise of professionalism of teachers. Teachers are seen as experts and parents are viewed as non-experts (Powell, 1991). The child's social development is the responsibility of the family while the school is in charge of education. Separation theorists believed schools were more objective and parents, being emotionally attached, were more subjective (Lightfoot, 1978). Lightfoot referred to this separation as the Worlds Apart Theory.

Another theoretical perspective influencing parent involvement is known as the overlapping spheres theory. According to this theory, family and school overlap depending on time, age, and grade level (Force A); experience/philosophy of family (Force B); and experience/philosophy of school (Force C) (Epstein, 1987). In 1992, Epstein added another sphere, community, to this theoretical model. Partnerships and

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collaboration are important aspects of this perspective (Crotta, 1994). The overlapping spheres perspective fits the third wave philosophy.

Current literature on parent involvement contributes findings that support the overlapping spheres perspective. The following discussion reveals the prevalence of the overlapping spheres perspective in recent studies on parent involvement. Parent involvement has long been recognized as a key factor in student achievement (Lindle, 1992). In fact, studies have shown students make higher grades, have better attendance, have less discipline problems, are more motivated, and are more likely to complete homework when their parents are involved in their education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Lindle, 1992). According to Dodd and Konzal (2000), parent involvement fosters positive learning outcomes. Elmore (1990) and Johnson (1990) contributed to the overlapping spheres perspective by suggesting the changing roles of parents and teachers would lead to partnerships that could enhance schooling for all children.

From a study of ten magnet schools in Ohio, Gibbons (1989) recommended greater parent involvement in school activities. Davies' study (2000) added support for parent teacher partnerships. Davies argued that the educational gap between affluent students and those of lesser means could be significantly narrowed when educators and parents work together in partnerships.

Work by Baugh and Goldring (1996) revealed a belief that strong teacher and parent involvement in school-wide decision-making could coexist. Henry (1996) supported Epstein's views on the value of parent involvement in decision-making in schools:

The intimate knowledge mothers and fathers gain in the course of rearing their

children is valuable knowledge that is often neither respected nor utilized in the

school setting. It simply makes good sense to use this knowledge to make better

decisions about learning opportunities for children. (p. 84)

Earlier, Lindle (1992) reported that both parents and teachers brought important

knowledge to the discussion about "good" schools. Teachers know about teaching and

learning and parents know about their own children, community, and culture (Lindle,

1992).

According to Lewis and Nakagawa (1995), parents chosen to serve on committees

in schools should be empowered to make decisions in lieu of just maintaining the status

quo. Vann (1999) suggested school decision-making committees consisting of parents

and educators may provide good opportunities for sharing ideas and suggestions for

improving student achievement.

Working to build partnerships, schools can involve parents in a variety of ways.

Epstein (1996) created a framework supporting parent involvement in schools. According

to Epstein, there exist six major types of involvement:

- *Type One*—Focus is on parenting and providing help for families in

  establishing a home environment that supports the child as student. Examples

  of Type One involvement include workshops, home visits, coordinating

  services, and organizing neighborhood meetings.

- *Type Two*—Focus is on communication from school to home and home to

  school. Examples of Type Two involvement include newsletters, phone calls,

radio and TV announcements, web sites, email, work folders, memos, report

cards, and multilingual forms.

- *Type Three*—Focus is on volunteering. Examples of Type Three involvement

    include homeroom parents, PTO, and implementing a parent resource room.

- *Type Four*—Focus is on learning at home. School providing learning packets

    for parent use and homework are examples of Type Four involvement.

- *Type Five*—Focus is on decision-making. Type Five examples include parents

    as a voice in governance and parents serving as committee members.

- *Type Six*—Focus is on community partnerships. Type Six features

    partnerships developed through collaboration with health departments,

    counseling services, social workers, community services, and public

    assistance.

Given Epstein's identification of six major types of parental involvement, Type 2

comes the closest to focusing on communication between the school and the home,

including phone calls, e-mails, and memos. However, Type 2 communication is broadly

focused on products as a means of communication with parents. The products used to

communicate with parents include newsletters, radio, TV announcements, web sites,

work folders, memos, report cards, and multilingual forms. Although these products and

formats for communication with parents are valuable, these formats do not foster one on

one communication between the principal (or other school administrators) and parents.

This study examined the perspectives of both the parents and the principal

regarding the conference in which face to face interaction occurred. Conferences were

observed by the researcher and follow-up interviews were conducted with the parent

participant and the principal participant. This study extended Epstein's work by narrowly focusing on one-on-one communication as a valuable means of communication with parents.

Problems Associated with Parental Involvement

Involving parents in schools is not without problems. Many studies on parent involvement point to areas of concern (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Baugh & Goldring, 1996; Connell; 1985; Dodd & Konzal, 2000; Jehl & Kirst, 1992). The following discussion highlights some of the problems associated with parental involvement.

The latest wave of reform initiatives has included school-based management, teacher participation in school decision-making, increased parental involvement, and parental choice (Conley, 1991; Raywid, 1990). These initiatives have changed relationships between parents and teachers. Parents and teachers have had opportunities to participate in school decisions by serving on governing bodies, local school councils, and advisory boards (Conley, 1991; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Smylie, 1992). In some instances, parents have been allowed to choose the school their child will attend. Parents have been allowed to exit a school if they are dissatisfied. School-choice has contributed to a sense of "consumer empowerment" for involved parents (Hirshman, 1970).

Chapman (1995) concluded that partnerships cannot be formed unless there is mutual respect between parents and schools. Vann (1999) poses important questions that accompany shared decision-making committees:

1) Who will comprise the committee composition?

2) How will members be selected?

3) With mandated formation of committees, will there be mandated funding?

4) What role will parents have in the decision-making process?

Lack of time, training, and resources paves the way for conflicts as schools seek to implement greater parent involvement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Jehl & Kirst, 1992). From their research, Abrams and Gibbs (2000) offered this insight: "The minute you open up the door to sharing power and letting the community help shape the school, then, of course, you are going to have power struggles" (p. 89).

Many teachers have negative attitudes toward parent involvement (Montandon, 1993). Work by Baugh and Goldring (1996) suggested a consumerism relationship between parents and school. Baugh and Goldring asserted that teachers act as experts and may not wish to include parents' opinions and ideas in their decisions. Teachers tend to view parents as clients of education rather than partners (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990).

Connell (1985) found that teachers seldom respond to parental pressure through genuine power sharing. Connell asserted that teachers generally responded defensively and involved parents in tokenistic ways to minimize contact with them. Dodd and Konzal (2000) offered a similar view by contending that, too often educators viewed parents as problems to be placated if angry, but usually, to be kept at a safe distance from the real work of schools. Dodd and Konzal suggested the practice of keeping parents outside the school can make some parents more hostile. Huang and Gibbs (1992) and Winters (1993) contend that feelings of disempowerment or tokenism may elevate adversarial elements in relations between teachers and parents.

Changing roles for teachers and parents opens the door to conflict. As teachers seek more autonomy in the classroom, parents are demanding equal voice. Leadership and power sharing create arenas of struggle (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Adding to these

tense relationships, parents tend to judge what happens in school in terms of the effect the school has on their own children. Teachers bring a different perspective to effective schooling by focusing on *all* children. Often parents are influenced by their own personal school experiences. Indeed, mental models of effectiveness may conflict with mental models of others (Dodd & Konzal, 2000; Senge, 1990).

Teachers also have formed mental models of effective schools—based on their training and experience. Parents have not been a part of the training of teachers and have thus been left behind. Consequently, parent and teacher images of effective schools are moving further and further apart (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). Baugh (1988) revealed some parents expect professional teachers to make necessary decisions for children while others increasingly want to be involved in those decisions. Studies revealed teachers support certain types of parental involvement but not empowerment in decision-making (Stallworth & Williams, 1982). Clark and Williams (1992) found that veteran teachers place less importance on parental involvement than novice teachers.

The size and complexity of today's schools add to the challenges of building partnerships. According to Henry (1996), problems occur as a result of a school's *Gesellschaft*, depersonalized and officious, attempts to develop partnerships with parents that are *Gemeinschaft*, or personalized and user-friendly in nature.

Coleman (1987) reported that well-educated parents are more inclined to criticize teachers, undercut their authority, and hold them in low regard. Minority parents and parents of low socioeconomic status are least involved in their children's education (Jones, 1995). Baugh and Goldring (1999) offered a word of caution in response to state mandates for parent involvement: "Little can be expected by way of parent involvement

by mandating it or by increasing opportunities for parents to be involved. Parent involvement appears to depend more on the attitudes of teachers" (p. 18).

These studies point to some of the challenges accompanying parent involvement in schools. Some studies looked beyond the challenges of parent involvement and offered suggestions for building positive relationships with parents. The next portion of the literature review highlights these studies and some of the suggestions for schools to build positive relationships with parents.

Parent-Educator Partnership Strategies

Researchers have sought to uncover effective strategies that support meaningful partnerships and that pave the way for reduced conflict between parents and educators. According to Baugh and Goldring (1996), schools need to develop an openness and responsiveness to parents if they are to work together effectively. Parents and teachers need to trust each other. Parents and teachers need training in each other's expanding role in school governance matters. A culture of collaboration, caring, and community needs to be established to support an appropriate environment for reform. In-service training should focus on the development of relationships and roles.

Epstein and Dauber (1991) suggested that partnership models of collaboration, planning, communication, and evaluation are promising. Others supported partnerships that stress parents as learners as a way to prevent or, at least, to manage conflicts (Dodd, 1995). Suggestions for involving parents as learners come from Dodd and Konzal (2000):

- Hold curriculum workshops that help parents experience new practices teachers are using;

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- Involve parents in an action research inquiry process based on their own

  questions about schools;

- Provide opportunities for role-playing that allows parents and teachers to

  share different perspectives about teaching and learning practices; and,

- Form alliances with churches, clubs, and other organizations to engage parents

  and other community members in conversations about the needs of the school

  and community.

Dodd and Konzal (2000) also emphasized that collaborative efforts could be more effective if a school's climate for learning is characterized by genuine caring. Smiles, pleasant greetings, wall décor that recognizes different languages and cultures in the community, and clean, bright schools can contribute to the success of any collaborative effort (Davies, 2000). Davies offered ways to make the school family-friendly:

- Establish a parent or family center within the school;

- Offer good, frequent, and user-friendly communication;

- Provide good after-school programs that involve parents and community

  organizations;

- Organize social activities for teachers and families;

- Provide parent education and family literacy programs; and,

- Offer programs that link families to needed health and social services.

Collaboration based on trust requires a two-way conversation to build a bridge between home and school. School and parent leaders must reach out to those considered hard to reach (Davies, 2000). Davies offered some practical ideas:

- Train parents and community residents to visit families at home;

- Go where the people are i.e., hairdressers, restaurants, health clinics, and listen to their concerns;

- Work with health and social service agencies to gain information and possibly invite these services into the school to address family needs;

- Allow community access to physical facilities (computer labs, gyms, playgrounds);

- Involve students in community service projects;

- Hire local residents who reflect diversity of the community;

- Buy from local merchants; and,

- Join neighborhood projects (crime watches, cleanup projects, food banks)

Research has been instrumental in helping educators understand the importance of parental involvement and partnership building in our schools. Studies have helped us create many avenues for parent participation. Other studies have informed us that parent participation varies among parents of children in elementary, middle school, and high school (De Moss, 1998). Education, socioeconomic status, age and past experiences of parents influence participation. Much of this literature is focused on the teacher-parent relationship.

Of all the literature reviewed on parent involvement, none has dealt with the day-to-day interactions of school administrators and parents. Schools of the 21st century should offer a prime setting for delving into principal-parent interactions. The purpose of this study was to build an understanding of the interactions between parents and school administrators. Knowledge of principal-parent interactions could be valuable as leaders seek to implement ongoing reform initiatives focusing on parent involvement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the perspectives of principal-parent interactions in conferences. A case study model of research was used to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What is the purpose of principal-parent interactions in conferences?

- What are parents' perspectives on these interactions?

- What are principals' perspectives on these interactions?

This chapter includes a discussion of the methodology and research design of the study. Theoretical perspectives guiding the research design open the discussion. Case study criteria, taken from the literature, and a description of the sample population are presented. This chapter also presents an overview of the data collection procedures and describes methods of analysis and interpretation of the data. Finally, Chapter 3 highlights credibility criteria and ends with a summary of the study.

Theoretical Perspectives

A symbolic interactionism perspective guided the study's methodology and research design. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, I sought meaning from the perspectives of participants engaged in a principal-parent interaction. Symbolic interactionism rests on the view that meaning is constructed, not discovered, by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). According to

Crotty: "Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

The study was designed to discover the perspectives of parents and administrators of the interactions they had with one another. Taped interviews provided accurate renderings of people's experience (Moustakas, 1994). I sought to understand the viewpoint of participants by searching out the meanings participants attached to their experiences of interacting with each other (Spradley, 1980).

The study was a case study. Researchers, according to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) do case studies to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon. This case study involved fieldwork in which I interacted with study participants in their school. The goal was to learn about principal-parent interactions from the perspectives of participants (Gall et al., 1996). The following discussion highlights criteria used for conducting this case study.

Case Study Criteria

A case study was employed to shed light on parent involvement. Parent involvement has many aspects. In this case study, the focus was on identifying the purpose and participant perspectives surrounding principal-parent conferences. Data collection and analysis concentrated on this focus. Case studies break down the focus of the phenomenon into units that can be sampled (Gall et al., 1996; Merriam, 2001). The unit of analysis in the study was principal-parent interactions.

A substantial amount of data was collected over an extended time period; interviews were conducted over a 6-month period. Multiple methods of data collection were used. The goal was to learn about parent interactions with administrators from the

perspective of parents and principals (Gall et al., 1996; Merriam, 2001). Observations were conducted on site and with the administrators and parents of a school in northeast Georgia.

Since this study was designed to seek the participants' viewpoint, participant observations were conducted as administrators and parents interacted with each other in conferences. Administrators and parents were then interviewed following each conference. Interviews focused on participant perspectives of the conference.

Case study researchers maintain their own perspective, the etic perspective, as investigators of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). To capture my etic perspective, I kept a reflective journal to help make sense of the case, and to report the findings more accurately.

In qualitative research, cases are selected for a particular purpose. Researchers do case studies for one of three purposes: (1) to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, (2) to develop possible explanations of it, and/or (3) to evaluate a phenomenon. The key issue in selecting a case is deciding what one wants to be able to say at the end of the study (Gall et al., 1996; Merriam, 2001). Given the nature of this study, a case study format was the most appropriate way to produce descriptions of principal-parent interactions. The descriptions were presented from the perspectives of the participants. Pseudonyms were employed for names of the school site and each participant.

Sample Population

The sample population for this study included principal and parent participants from one high school. The principal participants, the administrative team of the school,

were comprised of one veteran principal and three assistant principals. The team of administrators was selected for several reasons. First, each principal participant was willing to participate in the study. The lack of any hesitancy to participate reflected their willingness to open their doors to in-depth examination. The willingness of the principal participants was a first step toward ensuring trustworthiness in this study. Next, the four administrators differed in gender, years of experience, and assigned job descriptions adding to the diversity of the study.

Every member of the administrative team shares in the discipline of the student body. Each team member is involved in maintaining a safe school environment. As a team, they are expected to contribute to a positive school climate. The duties and responsibilities of the administrative team often times lead to conferences with parents. These administrators offered an opportunity to explore a variety of principal-parent interactions in a natural setting. Profiles of each principal participant are featured in Chapter 4.

Parent participants included 2 mothers, 3 fathers, 1 stepfather, and a grandmother. The seven parent participants were selected based on their involvement in a principal-parent conference and their willingness to participate in the study. A profile of each parent participant is offered in Chapter 4 as a preface to each participant's story.

Parent participants were drawn from parents coming to the school for principal-parent conferences. Parents were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to participate. Only willing parents were included in the study. The study documented principal-parent conferences for each member of the administrative team. The number of conferences and which principal participated in the data collection was determined by the

conferences held in the school during the six-month (August, 2002 through January, 2003) observation period.

The original study design sought to collect perspectives from eight parents who met with the principals at Middle Brook High School. However, data were only reported from six parent and principal interviews because data collection for each case consisted of the researcher 1) observing the parent and principal conference, 2) interviewing separately the parent(s) after the conference, and 3) interviewing separately the principal after the conference. Two data sets were incomplete and dropped from analysis because the parents or the principals did not participate in an interview with the researcher. Hence, the data set included six completed conferences (e.g., the conferences and the interviews with the principals and the parents).

Data were collected from a total of six principal-parent conferences. One conference involved a mother and Dr. Tap, the school principal. Parent conferences with the assistant principals yielded 5 more data sources. The study included a total of seven parent participants (one conference included both mother and stepfather). In sum, the two criteria for parent participation were the willingness of the parent to participate and the involvement of the parent(s) in a conference with an administrator.

Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research guided me in seeking the protection of participants. Voluntary informed consent was sought. I informed each participant of my involvement in a study designed to look at the interactions between the principals and parents. Participants were told that the data collected would be used as part of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Georgia. Each parent participant was assured protection of privacy and confidentiality. Parents

were informed that names of participants, location, and dates would be changed to conceal identities. Pseudonyms were used for the name of the school and for each participant. All participants were informed of their right to request nonparticipation in the data collection.

The value of looking at principal-parent interactions as an important element in school improvement was stressed, along with a statement of gratitude for allowing the researcher to involve them in this process. Each participant was asked to sign a letter of consent detailing the aforementioned process. Participants were given a copy of this signed document.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethnographic data collection methods were employed in this study. Drawing from Fetterman (1998), I began data collection by exploring the emic perspectives of participants through systematic participant observation and interviewing. Data collection for the study was designed to incorporate participant observations of conferences and follow-up interviews. The purpose of data collection was to obtain knowledge of the purpose of the principal-parent conference and the participants' perspectives of the conference. Participant observations and interviews focused on the participants' world. I sought to be open to the participants' experiences, and bracketed my subjectivities (Kvale, 1996).

Administrators informed me of upcoming conferences with parents. I attended the conferences and took notes. These notes became a part of my participant observation data. Following each conference between parents and administrator, I explained my research project to each parent. Participants were told data collected would become part

of my dissertation research for the university. I requested their participation in my project. I informed each participant of the need to audiotape the interview. If the parent agreed to participate, I scheduled a time for an interview.

Ethical issues were a concern in my interview inquiries. deMarrais (1999), quoting in part from the *American Anthropological Association's Revised Principles of Professional Responsibility*, 1990, reminds researchers that the interests of people one studies take precedence over other considerations. I maintained every effort to protect the dignity and privacy of my participants. In keeping with this responsibility, I shared a prepared script (see Appendix A) with each participant. The script included the purpose of my research and an invitation to participate. Other information included in the script was as follows: All information obtained will be treated confidentially. Names of participants, location, and dates will be changed to conceal identities. Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping data collected in a locked file cabinet in my home. Willing parents were asked to read and to sign two copies of a consent form detailing the aforementioned assurances and granting me permission to audiotape the interview. Participants retained one copy of the consent form for their records.

An open phenomenological approach was used to get at the interviewee's perspective of the experience. This approach involved an informal, interactive process and employed open-ended comments and questions. Beginning the interview with an open-ended probe paved the way for responses that revealed participants' perspectives. Parents were allowed to talk freely about their interaction with a principal. Follow-up

questions were drawn from participants' words. I purposely veered from using guided

questions in the interview so as not to influence their responses.

The interview began with social conversations aimed at creating a relaxed and

trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994). I sought to create a climate in which participants

felt comfortable and would respond honestly and comprehensively. I arranged chairs so

that I was in close proximity to participants and direct eye contact could easily be

maintained. A tray of ice water and glasses were positioned next to the participant. I

began each meeting by expressing my gratitude for his/her willingness to participate. I

read the prepared script to participants and requested their signature. I began each parent

interview by asking participants to tell me about themselves. I inquired about family,

work, and educational background. I then asked participants to take a few moments to

think about the conference. The taped interview began with: "Describe for me, in as

much detail as possible, the interaction you had with the principal." As the participants

responded, I jotted down key words. I used these words to ask for clarification of some of

his/her statements. There were times when I referred back to these key words to help me

keep participants on course. Continual probing, based on these key words, yielded

valuable data.

Following each principal-parent conference, I requested a taped interview with

each administrator. I began this interview process much like the one described for the

parent participants. Each administrator was asked to sign a participation consent form.

The interview began with the same opening, "Describe for me, in as much detail as

possible, the interaction you had with the parent." Jotting down key words and probing

for clarification contributed to this database.

The purpose of the interview, the primary data source, was to tap into the interviewee's experience for sufficient meaning and depth. I began each interview with an open-ended probe that allowed participants to share their renderings of the experience. Additional probes were based on participants' words and facilitated thick descriptions and vital insights into the perspectives of each participant (Mousakas, 1994). I taped each interview for later transcription.

Transcribing the taped interview proved to be a challenging endeavor. I sought to provide an objective account of the interview by focusing on the purpose of the research. According to Kvale (1996) transcripts are void of context. I addressed this challenge by actively listening to participants' responses. I paid attention to details and silences that occurred during the interview. I made an effort to write as soon after the observation as possible. I listened carefully to the tapes so as not to put my words in place of my participants' words. I considered all aspects of the situation. I tried to confirm or triangulate using other data sources (deMarrais, 1999). Other data sources included fieldnotes, research journal notes, and memoranda. Journal writing and use of bracketing was employed to constantly assess any subjectivity on the data. A methodological journal was used to describe research decisions, emotional reactions, hunches, questions, problems, and other reactions to the research process (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993).

Archival material presents opportunities for discovery (Hill, 1993). Guided by this notion, I included archival materials as an additional data source. The archival collection consisted of student files, correspondences written by the administrators to parents and organizations, parent newsletters, and two interviews from my pilot study. Athletic

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programs and student handbooks with highlighted messages from the administrators to parents were included in the archival collection. Other school artifacts were used in the data collection: memos, date books, and administrators' logs.

Finally, a highly regarded biography from the principal's personal library was incorporated into the archival collection. The principal made many references to the impact of this biography on his life. The book provided additional insight into this key participant. Hill (1993) offered a quote by C. Wright Mills (1959) that spoke to this endeavor with the principal: "We have come to see that the biographies of men and women, the kinds of individuals they variously become, cannot be understood without reference to the historical structures in which the milieu of their everyday life are organized" (p. 158). These archival materials provided additional clarity to the study. Archival data provided support for understanding the principal and the other administrators.

Data collection began in August of the 2002-2003 school year and continued through January of the 2002-2003 school year. During the observation period, I collected data from 1 conference involving the school principal and a mother. Data were also collected from 5 parent conferences with the assistant principals. Some factors influenced the data collection. Time constraints and job responsibilities of the assistant principals proved problematic. Occasionally I would conduct a participant observation on a principal-parent conference, follow-up with an interview with the parent, and fail to get an interview with the assistant principal within a reasonable amount of time. The incomplete data sets were not included in the data analysis. Other times, I observed conferences, completed interviews with the administrators, and parents cancelled because

of some unplanned circumstance. The incomplete data sets were not included in the data analysis. Data collection ended when following a conference, at least 1 parent interview and principal interview had been completed for each of the 3 assistant principals and the principal. The final database yielded 12 interviews, 6 in-depth parent interviews and 6 in-depth principal interviews, in addition to 6 participant observations.

<u>Data Analysis and Interpretation</u>

This section of the paper will highlight the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. Data analysis involved managing a substantial amount of data. The analysis process included organizing the data into manageable pieces. Each piece of data was systematically sorted, coded, and compared one to the other.

A phenomenological analysis was applied to the data. Work by Moustakas (1994), Bogdan and Biklen (1982), and Wolcott (1994) influenced the analysis and interpretation of the data. Moustakas (1994) explained:

Every method in human science research is open ended, with no definitive or exclusive requirements. Each research project holds its own integrity and establishes its own methods and procedures to facilitate the flow of the investigation and the collection of data. (p. 104)

A phenomenological analysis was applied to the primary data sources— transcribed interviews with the principals and parent participants. The first reading of the data was guided by the following question: What does the text really say? As the text was read, I highlighted key words and phrases that stood out in each line of the interview (Mousakas, 1994). I then posed a second question on the data: What is the meaning of each highlighted word? Repeated readings rendered key categories. Categories were

derived directly from the data and in keeping with the purpose of the research—to contribute to the understanding of principal-parent interactions (Mousakas, 1994). Principal-parent interactions involve many elements. The interview provided an opportunity to understand the experience from the perspective of parents and the principals. The data analysis yielded in-depth insights into major categories of principal-parent interactions.

Analyzing data derived from participant observations and journal writing was influenced by the work of Bogdan and Biklen (1982). As I read and reread the data, I looked for what stood out in the data. Categories or themes were recorded and examined for emerging patterns. Concepts were developed that were grounded in the data and found in the literature. At this point, data collected was discounted. Discounting involves analyzing external factors that might have influenced the data. I devised a working chart to include descriptions, participants, and specific words created to help in this process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Interpretation of data followed and was guided by the question, "What is to be made of it all?" (Wolcott, 1994).

<u>Presentation of Findings</u>

Wolcott (1994) advises researchers to think "finish-to-start" (p. 404). He suggests looking for a story to be told, encouraging researchers to "think like a storyteller" (p. 58). Influenced by Wolcott's advice, I presented each principal-parent interaction as a story with emphasis on description. Providing an appropriate descriptive base may contribute to an almost nonexistent literature field, an examination of the purposes and perspectives surrounding principal-parent interactions.

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), there are many ways to shape one's data. These authors stress the importance of shaping the material to meet one's aims and to reach one's audiences. My study was geared toward an academic readership in keeping with the requirements of a formal dissertation. Each story was written with the intended audience in mind, the dissertation committee. The goal of the presentation was to "bring the case alive" for the readers and to convey the point-of-view of the participants (Wolcott, 1994). Each story revealed the answers to the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the principal-parent interaction in the conference?

- What was the parent's perspective of this interaction?

- What was the principal's perspective of this interaction?

Using a reflective reporting style, each story began with a description of the principal-parent interaction. Data collection captured the story from the eyes of each participant. I used participants' own words to capture their particular perspectives and reflections on the interaction (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996). Participant observations, interviews, fieldnotes, journal writings and memos contributed to these stories. Special attention was given to presenting the facts in an interesting manner.

An analytical and interpretive section followed the descriptive account, but with less emphasis than was placed on description. Interpretation of the analysis was focused on answering the question, "So what?" (Wolcott, 1994) Interpretation was geared toward implementing the findings of the study to build more effective parent-principal interactions.

Tables were developed to facilitate the presentation of data. Miles and Huberman (1984) lend support to the use of charts and tables. These researchers remind us to "Think

display" (p. 21). Wolcott (1990) emphasizes the value of using visuals in our work: "charts and diagrams not only provide valuable supplements to printed text but can condense and expedite the presentation of supporting detail" (p. 63). According to Wolcott (1990), graphics capture the attention of readers who "see" facts.

I closed the study with a summary that reviewed what had been attempted, what had been learned, and what new questions had been raised. My goal was to leave readers—as well as this researcher—"mulling over" findings that described the purposes of principal-parent interactions and the perspectives of parents and principals on these interactions (Wolcott, 1990).

Validity

Validity, often referred to as credibility, refers to a study's trustworthiness. A study can be considered credible, or valid, if its findings represent the realities of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several criteria were employed to ensure the credibility of the study: Triangulation, thick descriptions, and peer debriefing. The following discussion will feature each of these credibility criteria.

Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods to explain findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Multiple sources of data included interviews, conferences, journals, fieldnotes, audiotapes, verbatim quotes, and archival materials. Multiple participants were interviewed to gain multiple perspectives. Triangulation of data was supported by a reliable audit trail and persistent observations over a prolonged engagement (Denzin, 1978; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Wolcott, 1990). Observations began in August 2002 and continued through January 2003.

Multiple methods (participant observations, transcriptions, and journal writing) added to the study's credibility. Denzin (1978) suggests that the use of appropriate multiple methods will result in more valid research findings. "The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1978, p. 302).

To add to the trustworthiness of the study, detailed descriptions of the process, concrete depictions of the site and sample selection, and thick descriptions of observations were provided. To ensure rigor, the study included adequate amounts of appropriate data and also incorporated feedback from participants and secondary sources (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1990).

Peer debriefing, the process of communicating with a peer, provided an external check on the research process. Peer debriefings, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), help the researcher detect biases and promote sensible decision-making. My research advisor scrutinized my work and provided continuous feedback. Two fellow doctoral students added additional suggestions throughout the course of the study.

Reliability

To ensure a high quality qualitative study, elements of reliability were employed throughout the process. Personal and professional information that posed possible influence on the data collection (Patton, 1990) was reported in a subjectivities statement. A reflective journal was maintained while conducting the study. Interviews were designed to allow participants' freedom in their responses while limiting the researcher's contribution. My goal was to talk very little but listen a lot. Transcriptions focused on

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recording accurately the participants' words. I sought feedback from others throughout

the process. Writing immediately after or during events provided greater assurance of

accuracy and contributed to the reliability of the study (Wolcott, 1990).

  Merriam (1998) provides two questions that helped in determining reliability: (1)

Can the findings be replicated? (2) And, are the results consistent with the data collected?

In establishing reliability, concern was given to my position as an assistant principal and

the possible bias this could bring. Introducing the study, I stated my role as a researcher

at the chosen school site. Maintaining a reflective journal provided a check on my

subjectivities. Use of Triangulation (multiple methods of data collection and analysis)

and the laying out of the process, the audit trail, contributed to reliability in this study.

The study reduced threats to internal reliability by including mechanical

recordings and low inference descriptions (verbatim quotes and detailed accounts) (Goetz

& LeCompte, 1984). The effectiveness of the research depends on the consumers of the

research. The consumer can assess whether the particular details of one case can be

generalized to another (Erickson, 1986). This researcher makes no claim of

generalization.

<u>Summary</u>

This research was designed to examine principal-parent interactions from the

perspectives of each participant in the selected site. The study featured the purpose and

significance of the inquiry. Limitations of the study were presented along with issues

surrounding parent involvement.

This study was designed to contribute to the literature on parent involvement.

Findings may contribute to the literature on building effective relationships with parents.

Data gleaned from this study may lead to further analysis and interpretation. It is

anticipated that questions may arise that will lead to future research endeavors, further

expanding knowledge of this important subject.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Perspective, as defined in *Webster's New World Dictionary*, is simply stated as a specific point-of-view in understanding things or events. Becker (1961) provided a more in-depth definition of perspective:

> A coordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some
>
> problematic situation; a person's ordinary way of thinking and feeling about and
>
> acting in such a situation. These thoughts and actions are coordinated in the sense
>
> that the actions flow reasonably from the actor's perspective from the ideas
>
> contained in the perspective. Similarly, the ideas can be seen by an observer to be
>
> one of the possible sets of ideas which might form the underlying rationale for the
>
> person's actions and are seen by the actor as providing a justification for acting as
>
> he does. (p. 34)

The point-of-view of each parent and principal that participated in this study provided perspectives to the research questions:

1. What is the purpose of parent-principal conferences?

2. What are parent's perspectives of the conferences?

3. What are the principal's perspectives of the conference?

This study sought to understand the perspectives of both parents and administrators who had participated in a principal-parent conference. The study focused on the perspectives of the interaction and the meaning each participant attached to the conference.

Elements of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology influenced the design of the study. Attention was given to gestures, words, and actions. Through open-ended interviews, participants shared their perspectives. Throughout the interview, fieldnotes captured subsequent probes drawn from the participants' words. There were no right or wrong answers, no one truth. Each story revealed truth as known to each participant and from these truths, the researcher sought to contribute to the knowledge surrounding principal-parent interactions.

Interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed for key categories and common themes. Journal writing helped the researcher gage subjectivities about the data. Following each interview, the researcher recorded thoughts in a journal. Other ethnographic methods supported the data collection and contributed to the findings. The presence of the researcher in each principal-parent conference provided the opportunity for the researcher to make better sense of the follow-up interview with both the parent and the administrator. Student records, memos, agendas, letters, and principal logs supplied sources of archival materials that added to the data.

Data collection was followed by an analysis of the data. Each line of the interviews was analyzed for key elements. Categories and themes were developed from the key elements. These categories and themes provided the framework for each account. The researcher sought to organize participant's accounts into a story, one that focused on the participants' words and reflected truth as they reported their experiences. The stories were presented as six clearly defined cases. Each case was different, each case contained a story that was real to the participant, and each case provided an opportunity for the researcher to get behind the closed doors of parent conferences. Table 4.1 highlights the

participants of each case and the reason for the parent and administrator conference. (Pseudonyms are used for the names of all participants.)

Table 4.1: Participants and Purpose of Each Case

Case #	Principal Participant	Parent Participant(s)	Student Participants	Purpose of Conference
1	Dr. Tap, Principal	Mrs. Brown, mother	Jimmy	Make-up work
2	Boyd Bennett, Assistant Principal	Tom Sargent, father	Tommy	Fighting
3	Diane Arks, Assistant Principal	Mary Banks, grandmother	Angie	Free Lunch Card, Check-ins
4	Diane Arks, Assistant Principal	Mr. Meadows, father	Devin	Irrational Behavior
5	Homer Johnson, Assistant Principal	Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, stepfather and mother	Cale	Defiance
6	Homer Johnson, Assistant Principal	Mr. Moots, father	Brian	Disruptive Behavior

Table 4.1 illustrates the variety of individuals that represented the definition of parent in this study. Parent, as adult involved in the life of the student, included mothers, fathers, a stepfather, and a grandmother.

The primary objective for reporting the findings was to contribute descriptive data to a limited field of study—principal-parent interactions. Emphasis has been placed on the description, each participant's story, as well as on the interpretation and analysis of perspectives from both the parent and the principal.

The principal-parent conference is an elusive but important facet of school life. Conferences are usually a very private affair. This study provided a glimpse of what goes

on behind the closed doors of principal-parent conferences. Seven parent participants'

and four administrators agreed to participate in the study. Individually the participants

willingly opened their private world to the researcher, and the names of participants and

location have been changed to protect the dignity and rights of the participants. The

stories were drawn from the words of the participants. Each story is special, some are

sensitive, and every story provided an opportunity to contribute to the understanding of

the principal-parent conferences.

The Research Setting

Middle Brook High School (a pseudonym) opened in the fall of 1988. Built in

response to rapid growth in the southern part of the county, Middle Brook High quickly

became a hub of community activity within the area it serves. Information taken from the

county profile publication and the school's application for the state's School of

Excellence program provided the data for the following description of Middle Brook

High School.

The school began as a rural, public high school located near a major city in

northeastern Georgia. The county has experienced an increase in commercial, industrial,

and residential development during the past ten years. Undeveloped property, proximity

to the city, and the lure of the expansive area lake support the continuation of rapid

growth. The county is beginning to look more suburban. Farmland is rapidly being

transformed into housing subdivisions. Bulldozers continuously clear trees for large

industrial parks. The population is becoming larger and more diverse with each passing

day.

In 1988, Middle Brook opened its doors to 1,034 students. Today, the school serves 1,540 students in grades 9 through 12. The ethnic composition shows a slight, but consistent, change from 1993 to present. While the majority of the students are white non-Hispanic, the percentage of this group has decreased from 93.8% in 1993 to 88.30% in 2000. This decrease is due to a corresponding increase in all other ethnic groups.

The demographic figures for the entire school system reveal 77.8% white, non-Hispanic. The number of limited-English speaking students has shown an increase from 5 in 1993 to 22 in 1998 to 34 in 2000. The percentage of the student body qualifying for free and reduced lunches has decreased from 17% in 1993 to 11% in 2000. In the county system, 32% of students are enrolled in free and reduced price lunches.

Middle Brook High students seeking college preparatory diplomas is 47.5% compared to 40.6% for the county school system. Students seeking Vocational Tech/Prep diplomas equal 14.8% for the school and 11.1% for the system. Though many of the students plan careers requiring advanced degrees, others plan to enter the workforce upon graduation.

County demographic figures show the estimated average household income to be $49,930; an estimated median household income of $35,020; and the estimated per capita income to be $18,627. Students come from upper-income households (many living on the lake), middle-income families, and lower-income families (many living in mobile homes).

Parents include those who have been transferred to the growing metro city area from a variety of states and countries, as well as those whose families are native to the rolling farmland of the county's Appalachian foothills. Some parents live and work in the

county. Others choose to commute to the city for employment, while making a home for their families in this county.

The Middle Brook High School physical plant is both architecturally efficient and aesthetically pleasing. Designed on one level to be accessible to everyone, a single building houses almost everything. Students may travel from the gymnasium, music rooms, classrooms and vocational labs through the broad, inviting lobby to the media center, the theater, or the administrative offices without going outside. Athletic fields, parking lots, and the stadium encircle the building as a silent testament to the central importance of academics and community to the school's life. The unique design of the facility has been much studied and emulated.

In only 15 years of existence, Middle Brook has become known for its award-winning faculty, students, and programs. The school has been named twice by the State as a High Achieving School. Students are recognized for achievements in the classroom, in athletics, and for outstanding citizenship. Students have won international scholarships, as well as many national, state, and local scholarships and awards. Teachers at Middle Brook have won many outstanding national, state, and local awards.

Middle Brook's mission statement recognizes the importance of the school to the life of the community it serves: "Our mission is to create and maintain A Community for Lifelong Learning." A statement copied from the school profile highlights the philosophy behind this mission statement:

Education does not end at graduation; therefore, we believe that diligently nurturing a spirit of cooperation and community among students, faculty and

administrators encourages the young people whom we serve to view their time here as preparatory rather than final, as commencement rather than closure.

The school offers a wide range of opportunities aimed at meeting the diverse and dynamic needs of the student population. In addition to a solid core of academic courses, the school offers Advanced Placement courses, remedial and tutorial programs, programs to encourage at-risk students, an English as a Second Language program (ESOL), a vibrant fine arts program, work study, joint enrollment for students who desire to exercise the post-secondary option, apprenticeships with local businesses and industries, basic and highly-advanced technology opportunities, third-year foreign language classes, and an active reciprocal foreign exchange program.

The school profile boasts a school culture built on the belief that learning involves the whole person and that education involves the entire community. From the well-qualified faculty to concerned parents and members of the business community, multiple stakeholders contribute to the culture of Middle Brook High School, working together to ensure a quality education for the students.

The teachers strive to be role models for lifelong learning. Among Middle Brook teachers, 26% hold a degree of specialist or above (twice the system average) and 68% have master's degrees or above. The teacher turnover rate is low. These statistics indicate the faculty's level of commitment to excellence, and they provide stability to the overall educational program and its stakeholders at Middle Brook High School.

Middle Brook has an active Parent-Teacher-Student Organization and many opportunities for parent involvement. Parents serve as volunteers, mentors, chaperones, club moms, classroom speakers, and liaisons for the community-at-large. The newly

formed Local School Council features two parent representatives. System-wide, parents participate on committees involved in interviewing prospective candidates for school principals. Selected parents serve on an advisory board for the county superintendent of schools.

Through the years the school has forged a number of beneficial partnerships with outside entities. Chief among these partnerships are relationships with the county Medical Center and a major manufacturing company (the School Partners-in-Education), the community college, the county evening school, the County Apprenticeship Program, Regional Education Services Agency, area colleges and universities, and numerous business enterprises. "Networking and partnership building help us to model for our students the importance of active, ongoing learning," attests a veteran teacher.

Recent focus has been on the use of technology in classrooms, interdisciplinary learning, and multi-cultural inclusion. The faculty and administration take advantage of many staff development opportunities to stay abreast of innovative practices that can be used in their classrooms and throughout the learning environment.

Many courses at Middle Brook High are paired with student organizations to offer co-curricular activities that strengthen classroom learning. As class and organization members, students are given the opportunity to gain leadership skills through competitive events related to each field of interest. Community projects, community presentations, and self-improvement activities are part of the broad program of co-curricular activities at Middle Brook High School.

The participants of this study included seven parents and four administrators. The following descriptions give background on each of the parents and administrators. For the purposes of this study, parents were defined as any adult involved in the life of the student. The participants, listed by pseudonyms, included Mr. Brown, Tom Sargent, Mary Banks, Mr. Meadows, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, and Mr. Moots. These pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. The parent participants featured one grandmother, two mothers, three fathers, and a stepfather. Table 4.2 details the parent participants per case.

Table 4.2: Parent Participants

Case Number	Parent Participants	Parent Role
Case 1	Mrs. Brown	Mother
Case 2	Tom Sargent	Father
Case 3	Mary Banks	Grandmother
Case 4	Mr. Meadows	Father
Case 5	Mr. and Mrs. Bentley	Stepfather and Mother
Case 6	Mr. Moots	Father

The principal participants included three male administrators and one female administrator. Pseudonyms for principal participants included Dr. Tap, Principal of Middle Brook High School, Homer Johnson, Diane Arks, and Boyd Bennett, all assistant principals at Middle Brook High School. Principal participants were defined in this study as any member of the administrative team in the selected school site. Principal, according

to this definition, included the principal and three assistant principals. Table 4.3 provides

a breakdown of the participants along with number of interviews:

Table 4.3: Principal Participants

Name	Gender	Title	# Interviews
Dr. Tap	Male	Principal	1
Homer Johnson	Male	Assistant Principal	2
Boyd Bennett	Male	Assistant Principal	1
Diane Arks	Female	Assistant Principal	2

Profiles of Principal Participants

Dr. Tap, the school principal, is a veteran administrator with 31 years of

experience as a principal. Area high schools have benefited from his leadership. Dr. Tap

is the only person to serve as principal at Middle Brook High School that has been

opened for 15 years. Nearing retirement, this principal brings many past experiences and

lessons learned to each day. His wisdom should offer valuable insight into his daily

interactions with parents. Finally, Dr. Tap was willing to participate in the study. The

lack of any hesitancy to participate reflected his willingness to open his doors to in-depth

examination. The willingness of the principal was a first step toward ensuring

trustworthiness in this study.

Homer Johnson has served the school as an assistant principal for five years.

Formally, the boys' varsity basketball coach in the selected school, Mr. Johnson was

hired by Dr. Tap to oversee the athletic and vocational programs of the school. His 27

years school experience includes serving as a physical education teacher in area

elementary schools and one of the area middle schools. He has a specialist degree in educational leadership from a state university.

Diane Arks brings 28 years experience to her role as assistant principal. Mrs. Arks began her career as a special education teacher and has taught in area elementary and high schools. Mrs. Arks served as a special education specialist for the state board of education before accepting the position of assistant principal in the selected sight. Mrs. Arks, with a specialist degree in educational leadership from a state university, has served as an assistant principal for the past three years. Her job responsibilities include supervising special education teachers, implementing staff development for the school, serving as administrator on the school student support team, and overseeing the development of the school technology program.

The newest member of the school administrative team is Boyd Bennett. Mr. Bennett was recently hired as assistant principal. He was a former member of the faculty of the selected school. Five years ago, Mr. Bennett accepted an assignment to teach physical education and to help coach basketball and football in the school. He brings 14 years teaching experience to his role of assistant principal. He is the assistant principal in charge of the facility and grounds.

The findings of this study are presented as specific cases. Each case is introduced with a profile of the parent(s) participant. The profiles are drawn from interviews with each parent.

Case 1: Mrs. Brown

Mrs. Brown is the mother of Jimmy, a 17-year-old junior at Middle Brook High School, and a 3-year-old daughter. Mrs. Brown dropped out of high school when she

became pregnant with Jimmy. She had been an excellent student. She never got in trouble at school and managed to make good grades. "I didn't even have to study to do good in school," reported Mrs. Brown. After Jimmy was born, she suddenly realized she had to take care of not only herself, but also a child. Mrs. Brown shared her reflections about that time, "Gosh, I've got a kid and myself. I've got this kid I gotta raise and make the best of our lives." For Mrs. Brown, this thought pushed her to take some necessary steps in her life. She shared: "For me, it forced me to make some steps in my life that I may not have." As a single parent, she earned her GED, went on to complete a college degree, and secured a "good" job. Table 4.4 provides a profile of Mrs. Brown.

Table 4.4: Parent Profile, Mrs. Brown

Parent Role	Education	Son
Mother	GED and College Degree	Jimmy, age 17

Mrs. Brown has maintained a close relationship with Jimmy's paternal grandmother. Occasionally, Jimmy stayed with his grandmother while his mother was at work. At times, Jimmy's grandmother attended parent-teacher conferences when Mrs. Brown was unable to leave work. Many times, Mrs. Brown asked Jimmy's grandmother to attend conferences with her. Both mother and grandmother have been involved in Jimmy's life and openly discussed issues surrounding Jimmy's progress in school.

Jimmy's grandmother works in the special education department in a nearby school system. The grandmother works with Student Support Teams (SST's) and according to Mrs. Brown, the grandmother, "knows all about special education services." Mrs. Brown continued:

Had it not been for her, there's no way I would have known a lot as a parent. Jimmy would have already quit school had I not known I had rights. And I know there are parents out there that do not know that. It would be hard to find out what your rights are and there are lots of rights for parents. The teachers in the school are not going to tell you, that would be like adding extra work. Well, I'm sorry but that's my child and whatever it takes, that's what I expect.

School, according to Mrs. Brown, has always been a challenge for Jimmy. "One year they put him in a behavior class and I didn't know until the teacher called and said Jimmy didn't seem to belong in that class," claimed Mrs. Brown. He was held back in kindergarten and in 2nd grade, and he was tested for learning disabilities. Mrs. Brown explained, "Jimmy's scores were borderline, he was 3 points away from a qualifying score." Although test results did not qualify him for special education services, the school, according to Mrs. Brown, "made recommendations" to help Jimmy achieve success in school. She clarified, "By school, I guess I should say the psychologist of the county schools." Since that time, Mrs. Brown has fought to get these recommendations implemented in Jimmy's classes, and she reported:

My conferences at school have not been pleasant. It's been an ongoing fight every year to get the recommendations followed. Jimmy does not comprehend what he reads. I have to read to him out loud. This reading disability has affected every subject. According to the recommendations, Jimmy should have his tests read to him and should be offered assistance with reading class assignments. Every year I have to get into it with somebody, like really get angry to get anything done. If I come and just try to be really nice, I never get anything done.

It's always going away in tears or on the phone in tears with somebody. It's like I'm asking too much when it was the school's idea to give Jimmy these things, you know, or to say this is what Jimmy needs.

At times, Mrs. Brown has tried to be understanding of other viewpoints as she explained:

It's hard, but I try to look at it from a teacher's point of view. I know it's hard to picture Jimmy as a special education student when he's not in special education. But, that's the way the school system chooses to do things. So it's not my rules. It's what the school system came up with for Jimmy and never has followed. Mrs. Brown has been vigilant in her role as advocate for her son. She explained: And like I said, I go in for a conference and the recommendations will be followed for a little while then it just drops off. Then I have to go back in. I feel like everyone knows me because I gotta go in every so often. I feel like I'm griping all the time. If the recommendations had been followed, then Jimmy could have been successful and I think every year could have been a joy for Jimmy and me.

Mrs. Brown, like many mothers, has hopes and dreams for her son. She expressed the value of an education and what graduation might mean for her son. She offered a glimpse into her aspirations for her son:

I want Jimmy to see that he can accomplish graduating and go on and whatever. If it's just technical school or no school at all after high school, whatever decision he makes if it is within reason. If he quits school, he's gonna feel like a failure. I think for him to see that he can graduate, and see that he can be successful in

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school will be a start for the rest of his life. He will see that even though there's

problems that you overcome those problems, that you do what it takes to make it

and you go on and get whatever it is you want.

Mrs. Brown described her son as "very sweet with a really big heart." She

stressed he never had any real discipline problems at school or at home. She reminisced

that even in elementary school, if something went wrong, Jimmy was the first to say, "I

did it." He never blamed it on other people. "I'm so proud of him for being such a really

good kid," attested Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Brown's perspectives of the conference were based, in part, on past

experiences. Sharing her perspectives on the principal-parent interaction included

comparing the conference with a previous conference:

> The conference we had the other day went well. I felt like Dr. Tap [Principal] was
>
> concerned and really interested in what we had to say. It was one of my better
>
> ones for sure because before that, around the first of the year, I had a meeting with
>
> Diane Arks [Assistant Principal], and it was quite different.

Mrs. Brown was referring to a conference held with Jimmy's teachers and Diane

Arks, an assistant principal. Mrs. Brown's words painted her picture of that conference:

> Diane Arks started out the meeting with, well, Jimmy can't read. For whatever
>
> reason, Jimmy can't read. Instead of saying, 'we have documented that Jimmy has
>
> a learning disability when it comes to reading,' she just said, 'he's not a good
>
> reader.' I really felt awful. I felt like she thought I was wasting her time. Well, his
>
> paperwork, his school file, follows him year to year, and if she really knew what
>
> she was talking about she would have said that. But, you know, I just never see

eye-to-eye with Mrs. Arks. Even Jimmy told me nobody likes her, and I know if she would treat a parent like that, what would she do to kids?

The conference had not been a positive experience for Mrs. Brown. Hints of that experience surfaced throughout events leading up to the conference with Dr. Tap. Jimmy continued to struggle with his schoolwork and his grades steadily declined. Then, adding to this situation, Mrs. Brown caught Jimmy skipping three days of school. Jimmy had decided he was going to quit school. Mrs. Brown immediately called the counselor at the school to discuss the situation, and she described the conversation with the counselor this way:

I called Beth Parks, Jimmy's counselor, and said, 'there's a problem. Jimmy skipped school on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but he's decided he's made a huge mistake and I'm proud that he's decided that. He's at the point that he's sick but I don't think it's that he's sick. I think it's just nerves and a lot of different things, maybe some things even outside of school.' He just said, 'Sometimes the work is more than I can do.' He is just having a hard time. I asked if she would schedule a conference so we could get Jimmy back in school.

The conference was scheduled with Diane Arks, but on a day when Mrs. Brown could not leave work. To expedite the process, Mrs. Brown asked the counselor if Jimmy's grandmother could come in with him. The counselor told Mrs. Brown, "That was fine and that Mrs. Arks would be made aware of the change." The conference was scheduled for 8:30 Monday morning. Mrs. Brown recounted the events of that day:

At 7:30 on Monday morning, Diane Arks called me at work and said she had tried to call me all day on Saturday. I thought that was weird because I was at home all

day and there were no calls from the school or Mrs. Arks. Anyway, I asked why she called. Her response was that there was no need for the morning conference, that Jimmy just needed to go to class and make his work up. I told her it would be hard to change the appointment because I was sure Jimmy and his grandmother were already there. I told her Jimmy's grandmother had driven a long ways to be with him. And, I said, 'If you could just relay that to them, I would appreciate it.'

Mrs. Brown requested that Mrs. Arks meet with Jimmy and his grandmother. She explained the reasons for her request, "I sorta wanted Mrs. Arks to tell Jimmy he had really made a bad mistake, then tell him what his punishment would be." Mrs. Brown expected the conference to take place following the phone conversation with Mrs. Arks. She shared, "I know things come up but I asked if she would just tell them what she told me. She said she would."

The conference with Jimmy, his grandmother, and Mrs. Arks did not occur and resulted in another call to Mrs. Brown, this time from Jimmy's grandmother. Mrs. Brown explained:

Well, in a little bit, I get a call from Jimmy's grandmother. She told me Mrs. Arks saw her and shut her blind and called the secretary and told her to tell me she did not have time to meet with me. Mrs. Arks was not cordial. I told Jimmy's grandmother to ask to speak with Dr. Tap. She did and *all of a sudden* Mrs. Arks, along with Dr. Tap, had time to meet with them.

According to Mrs. Brown, the conference that proceeded "did not go well."

Jimmy's grandmother called her and claimed it was a "horrible" meeting. However, reported his grandmother, Jimmy was allowed to return to class with permission to do make-up work.

The next day, Mrs. Brown wrote a note to Jimmy's teachers asking for his makeup work. His teachers told Jimmy they would have "to check with the office first." The teacher responses "really upset me" shared Mrs. Brown, "obviously neither Mrs. Arks nor Dr. Tap had informed the teachers of their decision." Two weeks later, Mrs. Brown called Mrs. Arks to let her know she "was disappointed that the teachers had not been informed, and Jimmy had yet to get his makeup work." Within an hour, Mrs. Brown received a phone call from Dr. Tap. She described their conversation:

He and I proceeded to have words. I told him, 'You know my son skipped school but if my son quits school I will hold the county school system responsible because this is the kind of stuff I go through to get anything done and this is ridiculous.' I asked Dr. Tap if he wanted to put me on payroll at Middle Brook High School. I told him I'd come over there everyday but until then, I had a job to do, and I needed for him to do his.

Mrs. Brown focused on her reaction to the situation. She described her feelings, "I'm at a point that I don't care." Justifying her feelings, she continued:

They don't care what they say to us. They lied to me. I would not have written the teachers a note requesting makeup work had it not been what was told to me. Now, all of a sudden, they have no memory and I think it's awful. I told Jimmy he would get his makeup work, and now this makes me look like a liar.

The phone conversation ended with Dr. Tap scheduling a meeting with Mrs. Brown. Unforeseen circumstances forced Dr. Tap to cancel their meeting. Two weeks later, Dr. Tap and Mrs. Brown had a conference. During the interim, Mrs. Brown called the local board of education and also E-mailed the state board of education. She shared the reason for her actions:

> I am not going to tolerate this anymore. If the school is so interested in these kids, then why do parents go through what they have to go through? It pushes parents away but it's not going to push me away because I'll be here every time I have to. I don't care. Some parents are intimidated and don't feel comfortable coming to school. I come for a reason. I come for Jimmy.

The day of the scheduled conference arrived. Mrs. Brown and Jimmy's grandmother sat in the quiet reception area outside Dr. Tap's office. Classes were in session so the building seemed rather quiet and the hall outside the office was empty except for an occasional student arriving late to school, according to Mrs. Brown's description. Nearby table lamps gave a warm glow to the sofas that filled the small space. Having arrived ten minutes early for their appointment, Mrs. Brown and Jimmy's grandmother signed the visitor sheet and sat down to wait for their conference.

At 9:30, Dr. Tap opened the door to his office and with a smile greeted both ladies with a handshake. After introducing himself to his guests, he asked them to join him in a nearby conference room. Mrs. Brown commented, "This was the first time I'd ever met Dr. Tap. We had it out on the phone but this was the first time I'd met him in person." Dr. Tap chose to meet in a room that featured comfortable seating around a large table. The area was private and free from any distractions. Only lamps adorned side tables. There

were neither telephones nor public address systems to break the quiet atmosphere. Focusing on the interaction between Mrs. Brown and Dr. Tap, I asked her to describe the conference. Her story of that interaction revealed her perspectives of the interaction. The perspectives she shared reflected "truth" as she experienced it.

According to Mrs. Brown, the purpose of the meeting was "to find out when Jimmy would get his make-up work, and if he was going to fail because he had skipped three days of school." She had other questions she wanted answered, "Why was there such a delay in getting the work to him? Was the school going to punish Jimmy for skipping? And, what could be done to help Jimmy be successful at school?" Mrs. Brown had questions, and as she stated, "I came to the school to get answers from Dr. Tap."

She focused on emotional elements surrounding the interaction. Mrs. Brown described anger that gave way to empathy, anxiety, and hope:

I had calmed down a lot by the time we met with Dr. Tap. I guess time helped me get over my anger. I tried to be fair and picture myself in his shoes. I didn't know what to expect, but I had hoped we could figure out something so Jimmy could stay in school. I was a little nervous. I knew if Jimmy failed because of those three days, he would not go back. I knew that because Jimmy was at a breaking point. He wanted answers. He had asked me earlier if he would still pass if he went back. I thought that deserved an answer and Dr. Tap gave it to him that day.

Mrs. Brown turned her focus to Dr. Tap's actions: " First of all, Dr. Tap brought Margie (Jimmy's grandmother) and me in. We could not settle things over the phone. I like to put a name with a face." Dr. Tap met not only with Mrs. Brown but also with

Jimmy's grandmother. Dr. Tap also requested that Jimmy be included in the meeting.

Table 4.5 displays the format of the conference with Mrs. Brown.

Table 4.5: Conference Format

Requested by	Present in conference	Purpose
Dr. Tap	Dr. Tap: Principal Mrs. Brown: Mother Margie: Grandmother Jimmy: Student	Get student makeup work

Mrs. Brown thought this was a good idea. She elaborated:

> Then he wanted to bring Jimmy in. Jimmy's never been a part of a meeting and he said he felt like we should bring Jimmy in to make sure he understands he is important and that this is what this is all about. I thought that was a good decision.

Dr. Tap began the meeting by stating the purpose of the conference. The purpose, according to Dr. Tap, centered on Jimmy. Mrs. Brown found comfort in Dr. Tap's focus as she explained:

> He started out with, 'This is all about Jimmy and that the school and everyone else involved is worried about Jimmy and his education.' He started off really good. He put me at ease. I felt that no matter what happened in the meeting, at least he had Jimmy's best interest in mind.

When Jimmy entered the room, Dr. Tap shook Jimmy's hand and invited him to sit at the table with them. Jimmy looked across the table at his mother and grandmother then sat down beside Dr. Tap. The puzzled look on his face dissipated as Dr. Tap began to speak to him. Mrs. Brown described this exchange and Jimmy's response to Dr. Tap:

And then he talked to Jimmy in a way that Jimmy could understand. I believe Jimmy respected what he had to say. Kids today think adults are idiots and will walk away but Jimmy didn't walk away that day. He really knew where Dr. Tap was coming from and believed he was interested in him. Dr. Tap told Jimmy he could still pass if he got his work done and got passing grades. He showed Jimmy he cared and that the school cared. And, he made Jimmy feel important by telling him it was important to everyone that he graduate.

Mrs. Brown thought it was important for her son to graduate from high school. She wanted him to learn from his mistakes. She believed the school should work with her and support her in these aspirations. Mrs. Brown felt Dr. Tap's interaction with Jimmy reinforced her teachings at home. She described her reaction to his support:

I appreciated him letting Jimmy know that it was important to the school that he graduate and that yeah, he made a mistake, but it was not the worst mistake in the world and it could be corrected if Jimmy wanted it to be. He also told Jimmy that we can do everything in the world for you but it's got to be you that really wants to do it. And that's true. I needed those things said to Jimmy. It's important to know the school feels the same way I do because sometimes Jimmy thinks what I say is just crazy and that I just know nothing. Coming from a school official, that it was important for him to graduate meant a lot to me and I think it did to Jimmy. So, I guess that's what I mean when I say it went well.

Dr. Tap's use of time contributed to the success of the conference. Setting aside time for the conference, time for including Jimmy, and sufficient time to address key

concerns influenced the outcome of the conference according to Mrs. Brown who referenced the time factor at the end of the interview:

> I didn't know when to get up and go when it was over because he just gave us all the time we needed. I felt like he was interested in what we had to say. He never once just said it was over. The conference lasted an hour or maybe a little longer than an hour. This was the best conference I've ever had and I have been in for conferences every year for years. I've felt bad many, many times but not this time. I do hope I get to talk to Dr. Tap again and I'm sure we will. I think we got off to a bad start and that my problem was not handled in a professional way, but we all make mistakes. I feel like Dr. Tap corrected these mistakes, and he would be okay if I called for another conference.

Mrs. Brown had a lot to say about her son and her experiences with schools. Her response to the probe, "Describe the conference you had with the principal," revealed the purpose of the conference and this parent's perspective of the interaction. The participants' words were used to tell her story. The open-ended probe allowed her to focus on what she felt was critical to the interaction. This parent had strong feelings about her child and what goes on in schools. The probe used in the data collection also revealed a history of past experiences that impacted her response.

Mrs. Brown extended involvement to her son's paternal grandmother who shared in the concern for the child's welfare. She sought support from the grandmother, the school, and the local and state boards of education. As a parent, she saw her role in the school as a student advocate. Mrs. Brown considered herself to be a role model for her son, and she believed the school should work with her for the good of the child. Mrs.

Brown wanted her child to feel good about himself, to experience success, and to overcome challenges to achieve goals.

Mrs. Brown sought "understanding" and "fair treatment." She wanted to be listened to and wanted the school to share in her concerns. Mrs. Brown demanded respect and professional treatment from school officials, along with honesty and compassion. She expected the school to take time for her, and for Mrs. Brown, keeping her informed and meeting face-to-face with school personnel were important.

Story analysis yielded key categories that comprised the parent's perspectives of the principal-parent interaction. These categories, which provided the framework for presenting the case, are shown in Table 4.6. The categories included experiences, values, emotions, aspirations, expectations, and actions. Each category is supported by specific examples taken from the data.

Table 4.6: Mrs. Brown's Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Experiences	years of school conferences, previous conference with assistant principal and phone conversation with principal
Values	honesty, compassion, respect and professionalism
Emotions	anger, anxiety, hope
Actions	scheduling conference, providing sufficient time, stating appropriate purpose, including student, supporting parent, reinforcing values of the home
Expectations	to be understood, to be treated fairly, to be listened to, and to share in concerns
Aspirations	child experiences self-worth, success, and goal attainment

Mrs. Brown referred to the interaction with Dr. Tap as "the best conference she had ever attended." Her judgment was based on her experiences, values, emotions, expectations, and aspirations for her son, and actions taken by Dr. Tap.

Dr. Tap, the principal, was an important participant in the interaction and his perspectives of the conference added additional insight to the investigation. The next portion of this case revealed Dr. Tap's story as only he could tell it. Again, the interview set the stage for searching out Dr. Tap's perspectives of the conference with Mrs. Brown. Fieldnotes, consisting of a participant observation and journal writings, contributed to the organization and interpretation of this part of the story.

Dr. Tap detailed the phone call he received from Mrs. Brown:

I received a call from a very angry Mrs. Brown. She was mad because Mrs. Arks had not met with Jimmy's grandmother. I had to establish that the real legal guardian was the mother, that Mrs. Arks felt she should only discuss Jimmy with his legal guardian, his mother.

Then, according to Dr. Tap, he agreed to meet with Mrs. Brown and Jimmy's grandmother. Past experiences played a significant role in Dr. Tap's willingness to meet with this mother and grandmother. Dr. Tap explained:

We have to be careful not to alienate people involved in the lives of our students. There was a time in my career that I would not have met with anyone but the parents but over the years, I have found that a lot of times the major responsibility for the child has been placed on a grandparent or someone else. Now, I don't have a problem meeting with someone other than a parent as long as the person is interested in the child and is going to be somewhat knowledgeable about what is

going on. I cannot always share student information with others but I can many times learn a lot about a student or a student's situation by listening to these people.

Dr. Tap included a description of the grandmother as he detailed his perspectives of the conference. He shared:

Grandmother was a paraprofessional in another county. She had become an authority in dealing with special education. It was determined that she knew everything about special education and we were not doing enough to meet Jimmy's IEP qualifications. Granny has been interested in this child since he was small. She was a strong force in this family. She wanted her grandson to do well in school and she knew he was not. She also knew he had some learning problems and she was not sure that everyone here knew that. And, she was mad because we had refused to meet with her earlier.

Both mother and grandmother talked a great deal about Jimmy's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and his learning disability. "They wanted to blame the teachers and administrators for him not getting his makeup work," said Dr. Tap, "when the real issue had nothing to do with either of these factors." Dr. Tap explained, "The problem was Jimmy was not taking any responsibility for his education. He was cutting class."

Dr. Tap words pointed to a major disconnect between the principal and the parent. A disconnect, in this study, is defined as opposing perspectives. According to both the principal and the parent, the purpose of the conference was to solve a problem. Mrs. Brown saw the problem as the teachers had not given makeup work to Jimmy. Dr. Tap related the problem to Jimmy's irresponsibility. He said, "The purpose of the conference

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was to stress Jimmy's responsibility for his education." According to Dr. Tap, the solution to the problem rested with Jimmy. The parent blamed teachers and administrators for Jimmy's problems. From the parent perspective, the solution rested with the teachers and administrators. Mrs. Brown came to the conference to "get answers from the principal and to get makeup work from teachers." Figure 4.7 highlights the disconnect between the perspectives of the parent and the principal in regard to purpose of the conference.

Table 4.7: Disconnect in Perspectives

Participant	Problem	Solution
Parent	Teachers and administrators	Give makeup work
Principal	Student Irresponsibility	Build student responsibility

Dr. Tap focused on the emotions of the participants stating: "Both mother and grandmother came in angry but that anger subsided after we listened to them. They left in a much calmer mood." He continued:

Lots of times parents come to school angry. They don't usually come to tell us what a good job we are doing. Most of the time they come because they feel like their child has not been treated fairly. Sometimes they rate what is going on with their child to an experience they had when they were in school. At times, they base their feelings on what their child or some other child has told them. They deal with what they hear, not on what they actually observe. I think any of these things could have had some influence on this mother and grandmother. Anyway, I

think they were like most parents. They wanted me to respond in a way that made them feel better. They felt better because I treated them fairly; I listened to them.

The actions of the principal were an important aspect of the conference. Dr. Tap explained:

It was very critical to listen to them and let them know I was genuinely concerned about their child. I took notes in the conference based on what they were telling me. I asked questions about things they said. I told them Jimmy and Jimmy's education was most important to us.

Another action, referenced by Dr. Tap, involved inviting Jimmy to the conference. He said:

It was critical to bring Jimmy into the meeting because Jimmy did not want to cooperate with his education. He was just sitting back and enjoying the whole thing. He was doing what he wanted to do. I needed to bring him in to reinforce his responsibility in his education.

Dr. Tap considered the element of time as critical to the success of this conference. He said, "I think it was important not to rush this conference. Both the mother and grandmother had things they needed to tell me. I gave them the time to say everything they needed to say." Dr. Tap concluded that this had been a "successful conference." Table 4.8 highlights Dr. Tap's perspectives of the conference with Mrs. Brown. Dr. Tap's perspectives are categorized and supported by specific examples.

Table 4.8: Dr. Tap's Perspectives

Category	Examples
Participants	Mother, grandmother, student
Experiences	Knowledge gleamed from other parent conferences
Emotions	Anger gave way to calm
Actions	Listened, showed concern, included stakeholders, allotted sufficient time

Both parent and principal participants described the conference as successful. Both the principal and parent perspectives included references to participants, emotions, actions, expectations, and past experiences. The parent extended her perspective to include attention to values and aspirations for her son. There was a discrepancy over the purpose of the conference. The parent participant stated she came to get answers surrounding makeup work for her son, while the principal suggested the purpose was to place more responsibility on the student. The match between the parent and principal perspectives appeared to have contributed to their overall feeling that the conference was successful.

The disconnect over the purpose of the conference was addressed by actions taken by Dr. Tap. He listened to the parent and, according to Mrs. Brown, showed concern for her son. Including the grandmother, inviting the student to the conference, and allowing sufficient time for the conference diminished the effects of the disconnect and contributed to the parent's overall positive evaluation of the conference.

Tom Sargent, age 45, is retired from the military with over 20 years of service. He currently works as a deputy sheriff in the county law enforcement division. He described himself as "a pretty disciplined person." He is the father of 15 year-old Tommy and an adopted daughter who is autistic. Mr. Sargent described his daughter's situation:

> Shortly after we adopted Mary, she was diagnosed as autistic. We kept Mary in our home as long as we could. When she reached 15, we found a great program in the north that offered job training and help with independent living skills. We enrolled Mary in that resident facility. My military insurance helped cover the expense. She is doing great. She gets to come home every couple of months for a visit.

Divorced after 20 years of marriage, Mr. Sargent and his former wife share in the responsibility of their son. Tommy lives with his mother, but he visits his father often. Both parents live in the area. Mr. Sargent explained, "Tommy comes over a lot. He used to spend the night on weekends but now that he's older, he doesn't do that so much anymore. You know, teenagers have other things they want to do." According to Mr. Sargent, he and his ex-wife, "work together good for Tommy." Mr. Sargent elaborated, "If the school calls and I am not available, she comes. We still have to reach out to my son, you know, even through the bitterness of the divorce." Table 4.9 profiles Mr. Sargent:

Table 4.9: Parent Profile, Tom Sargent

Parent Role	Age	Marital Status	Custodial Parent	Children	Career
Father	45	Divorced	Mother	Tommy (15) and Autistic Daughter	Retired Military and Deputy Sheriff

Mr. Sargent offered a description of his son:

For a 15 year-old, he is 'humongous'. He is a big boy and really strong for his age. His size and strength have helped him play football on the varsity team even though he is only a freshman. His maturity level is not keeping up with his growth level. He is very immature. He has a cocky attitude. He may have gotten a little bit of that from me. The cocky attitude he is going through and the hormone change, I think, makes him a little out of control.

Mr. Sargent's response to, "Describe for me the conference you had with Mr. Bennett," revealed the purpose of the meeting. According to Mr. Sargent, he received a call from the assistant principal, Mr. Bennett, requesting that he come to school. Mr. Bennett told him Tommy had been in a fight, and he was going to be suspended from school. Table 4.10 highlights the format of the conference with Mr. Sargent and Mr. Bennett.

Table 4.10: Conference Format

Requested by	Participants	Purpose
Assistant Principal	Boyd Bennett, Assistant Principal Mr. Sargent, Father Tommy, Student	Fighting

Tommy was seated in assistant principal Mr. Bennett's office when his father arrived. Mr. Bennett greeted him with a handshake and waited for Mr. Sargent to take a seat in front of his desk. Mr. Sargent sat quietly as he listened to Mr. Bennett describe the fight that had just taken place in the drafting class. Occasionally, Mr. Sargent looked over at his son and shook his head. Tommy's only response was to drop his head and stare at the floor. Mr. Bennett explained that both boys were being suspended for five days. Mr. Bennett turned to Tommy and told him how disappointed he was to see him in trouble again. He offered Tommy a book about a famous athlete and suggested he read it while out of school. "Tommy," he said, "Read this book about Bo Jackson. You will see how another athlete made choices that affected his life. I think it will help you." Mr. Sargent, looking a bit shaken, shared his concern over Tommy's failing grades and lack of self-discipline. He said he thought Tommy might benefit from some counseling. Responding, Mr. Bennett gave him the name of a reputable counselor. At the end of the conference, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Sargent shook hands and Tommy followed his father out of the office.

Mr. Sargent came to the conference with expectations for the assistant principal. As he stated, "I wanted to know all the specifics of what happened. I wanted to know what was going to happen as far as the discipline. And, then I wanted to know what the school was going to do to correct the problem." Mr. Sargent not only wanted to be informed but he also wanted a plan for correcting the problem. He explained:

> The fight took place in a class that Tommy was failing. It was a drafting class and I was not surprised that he was having difficulties. Sometimes his attention span ain't worth shit. I knew he would become frustrated having to pay attention to

detail type work. You know, frustration can lead to tension between class members. The problem was in this class and I wanted to know what the school was going to do to correct the problem.

The conference met most of Mr. Sargent's expectations. According to Mr. Sargent, he had a "good conference with Mr. Bennett." He described Mr. Bennett as "very informative." Mr. Sargent revealed:

Mr. Bennett told me Tommy had gotten into a fight with another student in drafting class. Tommy was walking around the classroom when another student told him to sit down. Tommy did not like that and got in the boy's face and said "make me." The boy stood up and Tommy pushed him, then both boys started hitting each other. The teacher had to break up the fight and brought both boys to the office. Mr. Bennett gave both boys 5 days suspension.

Mr. Bennett provided Mr. Sargent with the details of the incident. Once informed, Mr. Sargent focused on the appropriateness of Mr. Bennett's discipline of his son. Mr. Bennett explained the guidelines for the discipline and the purpose of the discipline. Mr. Bennett's approach to the problem influenced Tommy's response as Mr. Sargent explained:

Mr. Bennett was very professional. He was very calm when he talked to me. He established the guidelines as far as the discipline. He told me he was following board policy, that fighting in school always resulted in suspension. He said the purpose for the discipline was to get Tommy turned back in the right direction. That was what put everything at ease. Being angry with Tommy could have backfired. But, Tommy was calm and listened to Mr. Bennett as he talked to me.

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Mr. Bennett, prior to becoming an assistant principal, had been one of Tommy's football coaches. Mr. Smith pointed out that he had known Mr. Bennett for several years. Mr. Sargent provided his assessment of Mr. Bennett:

> He knows how to talk to people. He talked to Tommy about getting back on the right track, and he talked to Tommy about making the right choices. Mr. Bennett knew how to talk to Tommy because he had been one of Tommy's football coaches. Mr. Bennett told Tommy he was disappointed that he had gotten into trouble.

Mr. Sargent believed the assistant principal's prior knowledge helped him talk to Tommy in an appropriate manner, "He didn't talk down to Tommy. He talked to him on a mature level."

Mr. Sargent described Mr. Bennett as "real supportive." He elaborated, "I needed additional help for Tommy, and Mr. Bennett gave me the name of a reputable counselor." Mr. Sargent added to his description of Mr. Bennett:

> He was caring. He gave Tommy one of his books to read. It was the story of Bo Jackson, a famous athlete. He encouraged Tommy to read it while he was out of school. Mr. Benton separated Tommy from the problem, and he told Tommy he still believed in him, but he would not tolerate fighting in school. He asked him to come up with a plan to avoid fighting in the future. I think Mr. Bennett really cared about my son.

Mr. Sargent believed parents and the school must work together. He stated, "We are on the same team. Whatever it takes, I've got to work with the faculty and administration to get my child in the right direction." He described his responsibilities as a parent like this:

> I've got to do something to help Tommy develop some self-discipline. He can't make a good decision at school as far as his behavior and his academics. Tommy has to get his grades up and I am gonna stay on him about his grades and he is gonna have to improve. I am considering taking him totally out of football and let him watch from the sideline. He needs to realize football is secondary to academics and discipline. His time at home will not be a vacation. Tommy will do yard work and I will supervise him closely. I will also try to find a counselor to work with him. I know the divorce has had some impact. It has not been an easy time for him. I need to make sure he knows I love him and care about him too. Mr. Bennett cannot do everything that Tommy needs. I have to do my part.

The parent perspectives of the conference focused on the actions of the principal. Mr. Bennett informed the parent of the problem and the consequences. The parent was impressed that he talked to his son appropriately. Mr. Sargent believed Mr. Bennett cared about Tommy by showing disappointment, providing an additional source of help, sharing his personal book, and separating Tommy, the person, from the problem. Mr. Sargent described Mr. Bennett as informative, professional, and supportive. Mr. Sargent pointed to past experiences with Mr. Bennett, Tommy's former coach, as contributing to the quality of the conference. Mr. Bennett wanted his son "on track," focused on academics and developing self-discipline. Mr. Sargent believed it was important for the school and parent to work together as a team. Table 4.11 depicts the categories and

specific examples comprising this parent's perspectives of the principal-parent conference.

Table 4.11: Mr. Sargent's Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Expectations	To be informed of problem
Experiences	Former Coach
Actions	Informed parent, Talked calmly, Recommended counselor Separated student from problem, Shared personal book, Required plan from student
Values	Professionalism, Compassion, Support
Aspirations	Maturity, self-discipline, and Improved grades

Mr. Bennett described the conference as, "It was a very good conference." Mr. Bennett's perspective was influenced by his prior experiences with the father. Mr. Bennett explained:

I've known Mr. Sargent for a long time. I was Tommy's football coach for several years. His father thinks Tommy is going to be a great football player and has always been more interested in how he did on the football field than how he did in school.

Mr. Bennett and Mr. Sargent shared other experiences surrounding Tommy. Mr. Bennett explained:

This is not the first time I've had to deal with Tommy's behavior at school. I've called his father several times when Tommy was sent to the office for misbehaving in class. Tommy does not care about school. He is more interested

in looking tough to his friends. His father knows Tommy has problems and he is not happy about his grades.

Mr. Bennett focused on other actions that contributed to the success of the conference. "I told him about the fight and the suspension. He understood the suspension. I gave him the name of a counselor when he said he needed help with Tommy."

"Mr. Sargent trusts me," shared Mr. Bennett. "He knows I am here for the kids, and I am just doing my job."

Mr. Bennett's perspectives were based on his past experiences with the father. He expressed the relationship he had with Mr. Sargent as one of trust. Past experiences contributed to Mr. Bennett's understanding of Tommy and Tommy's relationship with his father. He offered to help by providing the name of a counselor. Table 4.12 illustrates the categories comprising Mr. Bennett's perspectives. Specific examples are given to support each category.

Table 4.12: Mr. Bennett's Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Past Experiences	Relationship of trust
Actions	Presented facts Provided suggestions for help

Mr. Bennett's profile of the parent represented a disconnect to the perspective of the parent (See Table 4.13). Mr. Sargent expressed the importance of academics and discipline as being secondary to football. Mr. Sargent also suggested taking Tommy out of football and having him watch from the sidelines. The principal presented a different

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profile of Mr. Sargent stating, "His father is more interested in athletic ability than on how he does in school." However, this disconnect did not influence the evaluation of the conference. Both the principal and parent indicated the conference was a success. Overriding factors contributing to the participants' evaluation included a relationship built on trust and concerted actions of the principal.

Table 4.13: Disconnect in Perspectives

Participant	Profile of Father
Assistant Principal	Father cares most about athletic ability
Father	Football secondary to academics and discipline

Case 3: Mary Banks

Mary Banks, a 57 year-old African-American, is the mother of 4 grown children and 8 grandchildren. Ms. Banks shares her home with her 37 year-old daughter and 2 grandchildren. Ms. Banks explained the relationship she has with these two grandchildren, "I support my grandkids all I can. Angie is 18 and is a senior here. Her brother, Brett, goes to the middle school. They have lived with me for six years."

Ms. Banks has been very active in the lives of Angie and Brett, and she shared:

I can't depend on their mother to do anything so I do it. The school calls her, but she won't come so I always give the school my phone numbers and tell them to call me if they need something. If the school calls for a conference, I always come.

Ms. Banks' role as grandmother has included attending many extra-curricular activities with her grandchildren, and she explained, "I go to football and basketball games. I used to go to PTA, but I work at night so now I can't go. Angie has been in school plays, and I always go to see them." Table 4.14 features a profile of Ms. Bank.

Table 4.14: Parent Profile, Mary Banks

Parent Role	Age	Living in Home	Ages
Grandmother	57	Daughter Angie Brett	37 18 Middle-school

Mary Banks was interviewed following a conference with Diane Arks, the assistant principal of the school. On this particular day Ms. Banks, as on so many other days, was assuming the responsibilities of a parent in the lives of her grandchildren. Her perspective focused first on the purpose of the conference, and Ms. Banks described the purpose in going to Mrs. Arks' office this way:

I didn't come to the school for a conference. I came to check Angie out of school. I didn't even know that I was going to meet with Mrs. Arks. I had already signed Angie out of school when Angie said I needed to go to Mrs. Arks' office and get her CD player. Angie told me she wouldn't give it to her because she was a student. So I went to Mrs. Arks' office to get the CD player.

The conference with Mrs. Arks is described below in Table 4.15 .

Table 4.15: Conference Format

Conference	Participants	Purpose
Unplanned	Mrs. Arks, Assistant Principal Ms. Banks, Grandmother Angie, Student	Free Lunch Card Check-ins

Responding to Angie's request, Ms. Banks headed to Mrs. Arks' office. Mrs. Arks asked her to come in and have a seat, and then introduced herself to Ms. Banks. According to Ms. Banks, the assistant principal said they needed to talk about Angie's free lunch and some recent "check-ins." (A check-in refers to the process of signing in to school late with a note from a parent explaining the reason for the tardiness.) Ms. Banks described her reaction to Mrs. Arks: "I had no idea what she was talking about so I just listened as she talked *to* me." Mrs. Arks continued to detail the problem:

Angie has been giving out her free lunch number to other students. That means other students have been eating free when they were suppose to pay for their food. The lunchroom ladies asked me to help. Angie's actions put our entire lunch program in jeopardy. She must stop doing this. We've also had some problems with Angie writing notes for other students to check-in. She will be disciplined if she does this again.

Angie, standing beside her grandmother, denied all of Mrs. Arks' accusations, and Angie responded:

I did not give my number out. I don't even eat lunch in the cafeteria. Maybe somebody got my number but I did not give it to them. And I have not written any

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notes for anyone to check in. Show me the signatures. I know my handwriting, and I know I didn't do that. You don't know what you are talking about.

Part of this parent's perspective focused on actions taken by the principal and the emotional response to these actions. Ms. Banks described some of the actions of the principal and her response to these actions:

> I didn't have no idea that she wanted to talk to me about anything. She was telling me all of this stuff. It caught me off guard. I was just gonna grab the CD player and leave. I was in shock. I was trying to see what was going on because I had never seen this side of Angie. Angie at home and the Angie she was talking about wasn't the same Angie that I know. She is real responsible. My whole family says she tries hard to do everything and anything to help out the family. She goes to church and sings in the choir. She always tries so hard.

Ms. Banks not only expressed shock, but she also talked about being "confused" and "speechless." Ms. Banks found it difficult to respond to Mrs. Arks. In fact, her only response came as a result of her granddaughter's talking back to Mrs. Arks. Ms. Banks explained:

> I couldn't say anything. I don't think I said a word except when Angie talked back to Mrs. Arks. Then I said, 'I don't believe that I am hearing this.' I didn't like what she said back to her because I taught her better than that. It's a matter of respect. Angie wanted to show her that she was not afraid of her but that is not the way that you do stuff. She got that from her mother. I respect people and the position they are in and that is what Angie should do. She could talk nice and still get her point across. That is what I try and teach her.

Other actions of the principal participant influenced the parent perspective. Ms. Banks described facial features exhibited by Mrs. Arks. Her description included comparing Mrs. Arks to herself. She said:

It don't cost anything to smile. I like people that smile 'cause' I smile all the time. Why shouldn't I? I know I get along with everybody and I smile all the time. I never seen Mrs. Arks smile when I talked to her yesterday. She was just like she was mad about something and I don't know why. I just met her yesterday as far as I know I never met her before. If I meet somebody and they never smile, I don't know if I want to meet them again or not.

This grandmother made suggestions that could have improved her conference. Ms. Banks said, "Mrs. Arks could have asked Angie did she do it instead of accusing her. Angie said that it was not her handwriting and that she didn't do it." According to Ms. Banks, the conference would have been better if Angie had not been a part of the interaction. Ms. Banks felt Angie had upset Mrs. Arks, and she described the situation like this:

I think Mrs. Arks got a little upset cause she said something about that is no way to be talking. I was in shock so I don't know exactly what she said. I think she said 'that is no way to talk. You don't talk to me in that tone of voice.' See Angie was talking down everything she was saying and me not saying anything. Angie was not going to let her say something when she said she didn't do it. Angie is going to speak her mind. I think that upset Mrs. Arks. If Angie had not been there we could have talked just like you and me are talking now.

Ms. Banks could only listen as Mrs. Arks addressed Angie's behavior.

When the conference ended, Ms. Banks left the school with Angie. She described the departure: "Angie cried all the way home. I really felt bad, but I didn't know nothing else to do. I was confused. And, Angie felt that I let her down."

Ms. Banks indicated that she would meet with this principal again. She explained:

I am going to have to come back and talk to her because she still has the CD player. She will have to give it back. She should have called me when she took it and I would have come got it.

Ms. Banks left the conference with another concern, and she shared:

Angie said somebody could have used her number, but she don't know who used it. Well, somebody better find out who used it so they can stop them. She should have called me as soon as the problem came up. We could have gotten to this before it got out of hand.

This issue was not resolved, and Ms. Banks expected to return to the school at a later date. She said, "I will come back. I will call and set up a conference if Mrs. Arks does not call me."

Ms. Banks did not feel good about the conference. In fact, she would not describe the exchange as a conference. She said, "I do not call what we had a conference. You are suppose to call me and ask me to come in if you want to talk to me. I never got a call from Ms. Arks."

This parent perspective comprised five categories: expectations, emotions, actions, participants, and values. These categories, with examples, are depicted in Table 4.16.

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Table 4.16: Mary Banks' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Expectations	request conference, solve problems
Emotions	shock, confused, speechless
Actions	No notice, No questions, No smile, Student included
Profiles	Angie was responsible, hard working, honest Mrs. Arks was mad and upset
Values	Respect

Mrs. Arks shared her perspectives of the conference. Mrs. Arks noted that she did not know Ms. Banks was coming to the school, and she said, "I was unprepared for the conference. I would have liked to had more preparation time." Mrs. Arks explained that the secretary called her office to tell her Ms. Banks was on her way to her office to pick up a CD player. (This was the only reference Mrs. Arks made to the CD player.)

Mrs. Arks took this opportunity to talk to Ms. Banks about some problems involving her granddaughter. Mrs. Arks explained, "Angie's mother lives in the home, but Angie's grandmother is in charge of everything that goes on, including her grandchildren." The main purpose of the interaction, according to Mrs. Arks, was "to inform the grandmother of problems we were having with Angie's free lunch card and of problems with Angie checking other students into school."

According to Mrs. Arks, when Angie and her grandmother appeared at her door, she introduced herself and asked if she could talk to Ms. Banks about some problems concerning Angie. Ms. Banks sat down and Mrs. Arks said, "I need to talk about Angie's free lunch. She's been giving out her number to other students. The lunchroom ladies

came to me for help." At this point, Angie interrupted me saying, "I have not." Mrs. Arks turned to Angie and responded, "That's not what I am hearing from the lunchroom ladies." Mrs. Arks continued to tell Ms. Banks about another problem, "Angie has also been writing notes for two of her friends to check in late to school." At this point in the conference, according to Mrs. Arks, Angie began to deny any involvement with either problem. Mrs. Arks reported that the student was "very rude, constantly interrupting her and making it difficult to talk with Ms. Banks." Mrs. Arks said, "Ms. Banks seemed appalled at the way Angie was speaking to me, but Angie acts this way all the time. Her grandmother's presence did not change Angie's response. It was a typical response." Mrs. Arks continued, "I've tried to talk with Angie outside of this office, but it's been hard to develop a relationship with her. She always seems angry. It may be racial, I don't know, but I have tried to interact with her in a positive way."

The conference was a success according to Mrs. Arks, and she elaborated: "I think I got my point across. The grandmother knows the seriousness of Angie's actions. She also knows these problems must stop, or Angie will be in trouble. I think she will talk to Angie."

The perspectives of the principal participant included references to a profile of the student, actions taken by the principal, reactions of the student, and an emotional response of the grandparent. Mrs. Arks' perspectives are revealed in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17: Mrs. Arks' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Student Profile	Rude, disrespectful, dishonest, always angry
Actions	Informed grandmother
Emotion	Grandmother appalled

There were obvious differences in the perspectives of the participants. Each difference reflected a disconnect in the perspectives of the parent and principal participants. The participants disagreed on the purpose of the interaction. Mrs. Arks based the conference on the need to provide information to the grandparent. However, Ms. Banks only intended to pick up a CD player that belonged to her granddaughter. Ms. Banks would not even acknowledge the exchange was a conference while Mrs. Arks thought it was a successful interaction. There were differences in how each participant profiled the student. The principal participant spoke of Ms. Banks as being appalled while Ms. Banks described her emotions as "shock," "confused" and "speechless." The differences in the perspectives may have contributed to the differences in the participants' evaluation of the conference. Ms. Arks felt good about the conference, whereas Ms. Banks was confused by the conference. Table 4.18 highlights the disconnects in the perspectives of the principal and the parent.

Table 4:18: Disconnects in Perspectives

Participant	Purpose	Emotion	Student Profile	Evaluation
Parent	Pick-up CD	Shock Speechless Confused	Responsible Honest Hard working	Not a conference
Assistant Principal	Inform	Grandmother appalled	Rude Disrespectful Always angry	Unplanned but productive

Disconnects in the perspectives of the parent and principal resulted in the parent not feeling good about the conference. The number of disconnects may have contributed to Ms. Banks' evaluation of the conference.

Case 4: Mr. Meadows

Mr. Meadows is the single parent of 14-year-old Devin. "Devin never knew his mother," shared Mr. Meadows, "she passed away when he was an infant. It's always just been him and me." He described his son as "basically a good kid," "but," he continued, "he dresses like a thug, and I don't like that. Because of the way he dresses, I think people form opinions about him that are not accurate."

Mr. Meadows is 39 years old and works as an electrician. He dropped out of high school at age 17 but eventually earned his GED and attended a local, technical school. Table 4.19. presents a profile of Mr. Meadows. Mr. Meadows reflected on this time in his life:

> I regret dropping out of high school, but I just never fit in. I probably would have
>
> dropped out sooner had it not been for one of the assistant principals in the school.
>
> I never got in much trouble but one time I did have to go to the office for getting
>
> in trouble in one of my classes.

Mr. Meadows' trip to the office offered more than punishment. Mr. Meadows shared:

> While I was there, the assistant principal told me I ought to go out for the school
> football team. I think he was trying to get me more interested in school so I
> wouldn't get in more trouble. Anyway, I did go out for football and made the
> team. I went to practices and got to play in games. I finally just got tired of
> football and quit. I guess part of the reason I quit was because my parents never
> came to see me play. My dad had to work a lot, and my mom always had to take
> care of my younger brothers and sisters. Anyway, it wasn't long before I just quit
> going to school too.

Table 4.19**:** Parent Profile, Mr. Meadows

Parent Role	Age	Marital Status	Children In Home	Education	Career
Father	39	Single	Devin (Age 14)	GED Technical School	Electrician

After high school, Mr. Meadows worked a job assisting an electrician, and he
reported, "I learned a lot from working with him and wanted to learn more so I attended
the technical school for awhile. The more I worked the more I learned. I finally knew
enough to do jobs on my own." Today, Mr. Meadows does electrical work for a local
building firm. He was, in fact, meeting with a contractor about a job assignment, when he
received a call from Susan Arks, the assistant principal. He reported, "I had just started to
talk about a new job with the contractor when Mrs. Arks called and asked if I could come
to the school. She said she was concerned about Devin's behavior in one of his classes.

She thought I needed to come get him." Mr. Meadows immediately left the meeting and went to the school to get Devin.

Devin was in the office with Mrs. Arks when his father arrived at the school. He came directly to her office and took a seat beside his son. Mrs. Arks thanked him for responding to her request. Mr. Meadow's personal past influenced his response to the call he received from the assistant principal. He explained, "my parents were never involved in my school. I never remember them going to a meeting with my teachers or with the principal. I want to be involved in Devin's life. I want to know how he is doing in school. If the school calls me, I am going to be there. That is real important to me and that is good for Devin." Table 4.20 describes the format of the conference.

Table 4.20: Conference Format

Requested by	Participants	Purpose
Assistant Principal	Mrs. Arks, Assistant Principal Mr. Meadows, Father Devin, Student	Student Behavior

Mr. Meadows commented on the actions of Mrs. Arks. According to Mr. Meadows, Mrs. Arks and the substitute teacher had "overreacted" to Devin's behavior in the classroom. He explained:

> Mrs. Arks called me at work and I left a meeting to come get Devin. I expected to find him acting irrationally, but that was not what I found. Devin was fine. He could talk to me and tell me what had happened. I think Mrs. Ark and the substitute overreacted, maybe because of his appearance. I don't approve of the way he dresses but, you know, you have to give them room to be themselves.

Anyway, I think the substitute saw Devin goofing off in the classroom and thought he might be on something, you know like under the influence of drugs or alcohol or something.

In the interview with Mr. Meadows, he described the interaction with Susan Arks as, "the conference went well." He talked of specific actions taken by Mrs. Arks in the conference:

She told me about the situation, she let Devin talk to me and let me ask Devin questions. After I talked with him, she listened to me and let me decide what to do with Devin. She told me what she expected of Devin, she told Devin too, and told us what we could expect from her, she would call again if he did not behave.

This parent expressed another factor bearing influence on his perspective of the conference, his expectations. Mr. Meadows said: "I expect Devin to behave and sometimes he doesn't." He added, "Devin must learn to make choices and he must learn to live with the consequences of his choices." Mr. Meadows spoke of expectations he had for the school: "We have to work together and I think we do. I think Devin will turn out all right if we work together." Mr. Meadows extended expectations to his role as Devin's father: "I have responsibilities too as Devin's father. I will continue to support the school and am here to help as much as I can. I will come back to the school if I have to and I will take him home if I have to." He spoke of other responsibilities: I probably don't spend enough time with Devin, but I do try to keep up with him and know what he is doing."

Mr. Meadows ended the interview with: "I liked the meeting, and I will continue to come when the school calls." The purpose of the conference, according to Mr. Meadows, was to address his son's "misbehavior in class." Reflecting on this interview,

the parent talked about his personal experience with the assistant principal who sought to involve him in the school's efforts to keep Devin out of trouble. He also focused on the actions of Assistant Principal Diane Arks. Mr. Meadows described Diane Arks' actions, namely that she talked to him, then listened to him, and allowed him to talk with Devin about the incident. Mrs. Arks also allowed Mr. Meadows to decide if his son needed to be removed from the school. Mr. Meadows believed he and Mrs. Arks had worked together to address Devin's misbehavior.

Mr. Meadows brought expectations to the conference with Mrs. Arks and Devin. These expectations were extended to his son, the school, and himself. He expected his son to behave, he expected the school to keep him informed, and as Devin's father, Mr. Meadows felt he should share in the responsibility of his son. Also, Mr. Meadows believed he should continue to support and work with the school. Table 4.21 depicts the key categories representing the perspectives of Mr. Meadows, namely experiences, expectations and actions. Each category is supported by specific examples of Mr. Meadows' perspectives of the principal-parent interaction.

Table 4.21: Mr. Meadows' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Experiences	Uninvolved parents
Expectations	Appropriate behavior of his son Keep him informed Share responsibility with school Continued support of the school
Actions	Talked to him Listened to him Allowed him to talk with his son Shared in decision-making

Mr. Meadow's description of the conference reflected his perspective of the conference. Comparing his description of the conference to that of the assistant principal added additional insights into this principal-parent interaction. Mrs. Arks' response, "I felt good about the conference," reflected her perspective of the principal-parent interaction. The following discussion was drawn from the interview with Diane Arks, the assistant principal. Of special note is that Mrs. Arks was the instigator of the conference. She called Mr. Meadows and requested he come to the school. Her interview provided a more detailed description of the purpose of the conference. Mrs. Arks responded to the probe, "Describe for me the conference you had with Mr. Meadows," by focusing first on the purpose of the conference. She shared:

> I called Mr. Meadows in because Devin was acting sorta strange in class with a substitute teacher. The substitute teacher had sent somebody up here and it was a substitute who had been here a lot. I also knew that Devin had a history of coming from psycho ed. in 6th grade and then he had been seen for drug issues last year. When Devin came in; I thought his speech was slurred. I searched his bag and didn't find anything. He assured me he had not taken anything at school but he had taken cough medicine that morning for a cold. I didn't know what was wrong with Devin, as I explained to the father on the phone, and I asked if he would come help me. And, my initial intent was for dad to take him home.

Mrs. Ark pointed to past experiences with Mr. Meadows, Devin, and the substitute teacher as having influenced her decision to ask for this parent's help. Mrs. Arks explained:

I had a history with the dad that was positive. He had been working to keep Devin on the right track. I was also aware that Devin had come from two special education classes to regular education classes and had been doing okay in the regular education classes. I knew the substitute had been in the room before, so she had experienced Devin's behavior in the classroom.

The conference began with Mrs. Ark explaining the situation to Mr. Meadows. He listened as she described the scene in the classroom:

The substitute teacher sent someone up here so I would come see what was going on. The teacher explained the students were taking a test when Devin got up from his desk and while walking to the front of the room fell on the floor. According to the teacher, there was nothing to cause him to fall. When he got up, he was waving his arms around. He looked up at the substitute and just started laughing and didn't stop for the longest time. He appeared to the substitute as out of control. He then went over and sat down at a desk away from the other students. By that time she sent someone to get me.

Following this account, Mr. Meadows asked Devin what had happened in the classroom. Mrs. Arks listened as Devin described the situation to his father. Devin said some kids were poking him with a pencil and he had waved them off, then got up and moved away. Devin said he tripped over the trashcan. Mrs. Arks explained Mr. Meadow's response to hearing both sides of the story:

His dad's take on all this initially was that Devin was sent to the office because of a discipline issue and his response was to tell Devin he should not be cutting up in the classroom. He did not think his behavior was bizarre. He felt like the

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substitute didn't really see anything and basically we were just counting on what other kids had said. I told him I wasn't investigating a discipline issue. And I said there's a difference in cutting up in class and bizarre, strange behavior.

Mr. Meadows asked Mrs. Arks if she wanted him to have Devin drug tested. Mrs. Arks elaborated: "Dad said he would have Devin tested for drugs but he felt confident that everything was fine with Devin, nothing was going wrong and he felt he could leave him." Mrs. Arks agreed with Mr. Meadows but reinforced to Devin: "You are expected to behave for the rest of the day if you are going to stay at school. I will be looking for any misbehavior. Mr. Meadows followed with, "And I am going to support them. If you misbehave and they call me, I will come."

Mrs. Arks felt the conference ended on a positive, yet informative note. The parent and the student had been informed of expectations of the principal, "They knew I would call again if there were concerns," said Mrs. Arks. She extended this message to Mr. Meadows at the end of the conference in the following words: "I don't call lightly. I know you are at work and I know work is money. But, if I need you, I will call." She felt supported by Mr. Meadows' response: "If you call, I gotta come. I have a responsibility too as Devin's father, and if you think you need me, then I have to come."

The principal participant felt good about the conference. Key categories stood out in her description of the interaction. These categories are depicted in Table 4.22. The principal's perspectives were based on past experiences with the parent and knowledge of student history. The principal described actions taken by her, the parent and the student. She called the parent, she informed the parent, she listened to the parent and the student, and she allowed the parent to make the decision. Expectations of the principal were

revealed in the principal's description of the conference. These expectations were for the principal, the student, and the parent. The principal expected to continue to monitor student behavior, calling the parent if necessary. The principal extended expectations to the student—his behavior would improve, and to the father—she expected him to return to school if she called. Table 4.13 displays categories and examples of the principal's perspectives.

Table 4.22: Mrs. Arks' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Experiences	Past conferences Student history Knowledge of substitute
Expectations	Monitor student behavior Keep parent informed Student improve behavior Parent would respond
Actions	Called parent Listened to parent and student Talked with student Shared decision-making

Specific examples of each category are taken from the context of the principal interview.

The parent and the principal perspectives included past experiences, actions and expectations as important to the interaction; however, disconnects appeared in the perspectives of the principal and parent, namely in the purpose of conference and in the profile of student behavior. Mr. Meadows felt the conference resulted from the

overreaction of Mrs. Arks based on Devin's misbehavior. On the other hand, Mrs. Arks considered Devin's behavior to be irrational and from her perspective, called Mr. Meadows seeking his help. Disconnects in the principal perspectives and the parent perspectives are illustrated in Table 4.23.

Table 4.23: Disconnects in Perspectives

Participant	Purpose	Profile of Student
Parent	Overreaction of principal	Misbehaving
Assistant Principal	Needed help	Irrational

Disconnects did not impact the overall evaluation of the conference, however. Both participants described the interaction as "good."

Case 5: Mr. and Mrs. Bentley

The Bentleys' moved from another part of the state to this community seeking a quality education for their children. Mr. Bentley explained, "We moved because the school system and conditions became unacceptable. The schools were too crowded, class sizes were too big, and the growth pattern was not what we were looking for. We wanted a quality education for our boys. We moved up here for the schools."

Mr. Bentley owns a trim carpentry business. Mr. Bentley explained, "I work in the field and my wife runs the office." They have 3 boys, ages 11, 12 and 18. "Actually, I am the stepfather to our oldest son, Cale, but I treat him just like my other sons," said Mr. Bentley. These parents believe in being involved in the lives of their children. Mr. Bentley elaborated, " We are involved in the church, cub scouts, and boy scouts. She is a den leader in cub scouts, and I am the cub master. I am also on the children's advisory

committee. We are pretty active in everything." A profile of the Bentleys is featured in

Table 4.24. The table features information about the parents and the children in the home.

Table 4.24: Parent Profile, The Bentleys

Parent Role	# Children	Ages of children	Name of oldest child	Other Roles	Career
Stepfather Mother	3	18, 12, 11	Cale	Cub Master Den Leader	Owns carpentry business

The Bentleys came in for a conference at the request of Mr. Johnson. The day

before the conference, their 18 year-old son, Cale, had been sent to the office for

disrupting class. Mr. Johnson provided the background:

The problem started in Mrs. Bevel's class. Cale was constantly disrupting class.

Not only was his behavior interfering with the learning of others, he was also

failing the class with a 30. This is a senior that needs to pass the class in order to

graduate on time. I think he failed the same class at his other school. Anyway, he

was sent to the office for his behavior. When he came in the office, he decided he

would just check himself out. I called his stepfather and he said Cale was not to

leave the school. I had a conversation with Cale telling him he was not checking

out and he said he was leaving anyway. At this point, I told Cale if he left I would

suspend him. He did leave and I called his stepfather back and told him what had

happened. I told him Cale was suspended until a parent conference was held.

Mr. Bentley responded, "That would be great cause we would like to come up.

We have been having trouble with him too." The Bentleys, along with Cale, came in the

next day for a conference with Homer Johnson. Following the conference, I interviewed both parents. Table 4.25 describes the format for the Bentleys' conference.

Table 4.25: Conference Format

Request by	Participants	Purpose
Assistant Principal	Homer Johnson, Assistant Principal Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, Parents Cale, Student	Disruptive behavior Defiance

The perspectives of these parents were unveiled as they described the conference. Mr. Bentley described the purpose of the meeting. He said:

> We both know why we're here. We're here about Cale. He's just stupid some days. He had a choice and he made a bad choice and now he has to face the consequences of that choice. He wants to be an adult but he still acts like he's fifteen. He's 18 now and needs to learn to make his own decisions and take a few minutes and think about what he's going to do, what the consequences are gonna be.

Mr. Bentley focused on the responsibility of his stepson, Cale. As the parent, Mr. Bentley explained the need to place more responsibility on Cale. Mr. Bentley explained:

> We didn't come to bail Cale out. It's his problem and he needs to face it. Cale is gonna get mad one day and he is gonna leave. It's just a matter of when. The only thing we can do is give him the opportunity to make his choices and when he makes a mistake he is gonna have to abide by it. We came in for the conference because Mr. Johnson called. We did not come to make excuses for Cale. He did wrong and he will have to face the consequences.

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Mr. Bentley extended his description of the purpose of the meeting to include the role of the parents. Mr. Bentley said: "It's about us too, it's about how we raise our kids. We do the best we can and hope they turn out right. At this particular point in time, we're not sure how well we've done."

Mrs. Bentley compared the conference to conferences she experienced in the past. Mrs. Bentley shared, "In past meetings we've been in, it was different. When we walked in, you didn't feel like 'uh oh,' we're in here for something bad. He didn't make you feel that way. It was more, I'm glad to see you, no matter what the circumstance is."

Both parents liked the meeting agreeing that it was "good." Their judgment was based, in part, on the actions of Mr. Johnson. Mr. Bentley said, "I appreciate Mr. Johnson for making the effort to inform us. He had Cale's file on hand, and he went over it with us. He let us know what was going on. He kept the facts up front." Mr. Bentley continued, "Mr. Johnson was not intimidating or imposing or anything like that. He kept the meeting calm so no one got defensive. He was very factual about everything. I liked him. It was a good start to the meeting." Mrs. Bentley added, "Mr. Johnson was calm, collected, and answered every question."

Other actions taken by Mr. Johnson contributed to the success of the conference. According to Mrs. Bentley, Mr. Johnson did not exclude Cale. She elaborated:

> Mr. Johnson directed everything towards Cale. Other meetings, Cale would be there but they talked to us and excluded him. Cale's the one that needs to hear it. Cale's the one that needs to be directed, not us. He's the one who has to make the choices. I have a feeling that Cale feels people here want to work with him, that

he's included, and he has some choices to make. Before, Cale would think, 'what's the point, they don't even know I'm here.'

Mr. Bentley added to his wife's comments, "Right, Mr. Johnson was talking to Cale, interacting with him, asking him to make some choices, and telling him things. I was just sitting there. That will make a difference to Cale because he was recognized in there."

The strongest part of the conference, according to Mr. Bentley, focused on another action taken by Mr. Johnson. Mr. Bentley elaborated:

Mr. Johnson gave Cale appropriate options then let him know he would go to bat for him. Mr. Johnson showed he wanted to work with Cale. He changed his suspension from 5 days out of school to 3, giving him the option to come back and really try hard and not fail. He's wanting Cale to better himself and I saw that. That's gonna hold a lot of weight with Cale because right now he's right on that edge of saying to heck with it all and throwing it away. That may very well happen, but that's his choice but at least now he knows. He thought he was going to get suspended and that he was done with this quarter. But, now he's been offered the opportunity to come in here, work his butt off and get his credits.

Mrs. Bentley described her feelings about the conference. Mrs. Bentley said:

I feel more at ease about the school. I didn't know anything about it cause I hadn't been in here before. I hadn't met any of the teachers nor any of the administrators and I was really dreading it. But it was like calm waters walking in. He made me feel at ease before we even discussed anything. It was an awesome

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conference. You know, humility in life is so hard to find or to gain. I think Mr. Johnson showed humility toward Cale, and I think Cale will be more humble now.

The Bentleys' perspectives included expectations they had for the school. They expected the school to support their son, and they expected the school to provide "consequences for wrong choices." Mr. Bentley explained, "You gave him a chance. You worked with him. Cale chose to go in the wrong direction. You had no choice but to show him that you can't do that." Mr. Bentley expected support for what they were trying to teach him at home, and said:

> We are trying to prepare Cale for real life. Mr. Johnson reinforced that. He said 'everything is on Cale now. It is his actions, his choices, his reactions.' It is hard, but Cale is not a baby anymore. He needs to think about his actions now.

These parents will continue to be involved parents. Mr. Bentley closed the interview with these words: "We are in the same boat as you. We will continue to work with our kids, just like you. The only difference is, 'ya'll get paid for it, and we won't!' Whatever we can do to help, we will."

The following table (Table 4.26) illustrates perspectives of Mr. and Mrs. Bentley and provides examples of each of the perspectives of the Bentleys.

Table 4.26: The Bentleys' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Expectations	Support, consequences, extension of home
Experiences	Previous conferences
Emotions	Calm, at ease

Actions	Informed, included student, answered questions, provided choices, supported parents, changed suspension
Profiles	Student: kid wants to be an adult Principal: humble, collected, and informed

Mr. Johnson shared his perspectives surrounding the conference with the Bentleys, and he began by describing the purpose of the conference:

I called the conference because Cale had been totally defiant to a teacher and to me. Usually, I can talk to a parent over the phone unless a student has been totally defiant as was the case with Cale. I needed to inform the parents of the problems we were having and let them know what the discipline would be.

"I feel great about the conference with the Bentleys," stated Mr. Johnson. He pointed to the reasons the conference had been a success. "The mother and stepfather were in complete agreement," and Mr. Johnson said, "Cale could not use one parent against the other. Also, the parents were on the same page as we were." According to Mr. Johnson, the parents shared, "We are dealing with the same issues at home. He does not do what we ask him to do. He doesn't want to follow our rules." Mr. Johnson continued, "It wasn't that they came up here and defended him. It wasn't that they used excuses. They expected him to behave and follow instructions and follow rules. They were in total cooperation with us." In fact, according to Mr. Johnson, the parents were going to add more consequences. Mr. Johnson explained:

A lot of times parents will come up and talk and say they are going to do something and never do. Mr. Bentley said that Cale had already lost his car and

that he would not be driving to school. Mrs. Bentley was in total agreement with that. You could tell they were sincere and that it wasn't just talk.

The Bentleys expected their son to behave in school. According to Mr. Johnson, the parents had been looking at "pulling Cale out of school." Mr. Johnson shared the conversation he had with Mr. Bentley:

They said they were not going to tolerate his misbehavior. Mr. Bentley said they would just take him out of school and go get him a job. That he could move out. They said he would stay in the class and not be disruptive even if he was failing the class. We were all in agreement.

Mr. Johnson described a conversation he had with Cale during the conference. He said:

I told Cale a lot of consequences would come his way if he continued the same kind of actions. I told him not to give up but to realize that part of becoming an adult is being able to deal with the consequences. I tried to give him encouragement by telling him if he would come back and work hard he could get some credits from the semester. Cale told me he was sorry but I think he did that because he had gotten caught. He also told me he did regret leaving school when he got home. I can only hope he will come back and try to get something out of the semester. I gave him a chance.

This was the first time Mr. Johnson had met with these parents. Mr. Johnson said he felt "great" when the conference ended. Mr. Johnson felt the parents understood and supported the actions he had taken. His perspectives closely matched the perspectives of the parents. Both principal and parents recognized the problem, both felt they worked together for the good of the student, both wanted Cale to make appropriate choices, both

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recognized the value of consequences for bad choices, and both principal and parents felt

good about the conference. Table 4.27 below illustrates the categories and examples

influencing Mr. Johnson's perspectives of this conference.

Table 4.27: Mr. Johnson's Perspectives

Category	Specific Example
Expectations	Appropriate student behavior
Experiences	Parents offering excuses Parents divided
Actions	Parents: extended consequences, supported principal, cooperated with each other
Profiles	Parents: very sincere Student: not sincere

There were no disconnects evident between the principal and parents' perspectives. Both

principal and parent participants felt supported in the conference. The perspectives of the

principal and parents were closely matched adding to the similarity in the overall

evaluation.

Case 6: Mr. Moots

Mr. Moots, a single parent, is the father of two sons. Brian, the youngest son, is a

14-year-old 9th grader at Middle Brook High School. Mr. Moots has another son, Taylor,

who is two years older than Brian. He explained his situation:

My ex-wife has custody of both boys but keeping the two boys together is no

good. They just clash heads. The boys are complete opposites. We had to separate

them. Taylor has been with his mother for the last nine months, but he visits me from time-to-time. Brian lives with me even though his mother still has custody. Brian's mother lives in the same county but in a different school zone. Mr. Moots described Brian's relationship with his mother:

Brian, for the longest time, would not see his mom. Now he's starting to see her more. It is a treat for him to go over there cause I am the bad guy and she is the good guy. I have to discipline him and tell him 'No.' I have to stay on him about doing homework. She doesn't have to deal with any of that.

Life at home has been difficult for this single parent. He described the home environment like this:

Having a teenage son in the home is hard. For me, it's like living in a prison. I've got locks on the bedroom door and the attic door. I've got five locked boxes, boxes that I put my stuff in and lock it up. That is no way to live, but it is the only way I can live right now.

Table 4.28, based on the parent perspective, displays a profile of the home for the Moots:

Table 4.28: Mr. Moots' Profile of Home

Parent	Marital Status	Children in Home	Description of Home
Father	Single	Brian (Age 14)	A Prison

Mr. Moots did not trust Brian. Mr. Moots described a recent incident at the home while he was out-of-town. This incident contributed to his distrust of his son and his feeling that he lived in a prison. Mr. Moots shared:

I left Brian with his mother while I was away. He and his brother came to the

house without permission and had a party. When I returned, I found my house

trashed. Things were broken and somebody had gone through all my closets and

drawers. I had a gun hidden in the closet, and it was gone. I was pretty upset. I

had to call the law and report the gun missing. A deputy had to come to the house

to fill out a report. I even called the parents of some of the boys, but that didn't do

any good. I have to leave the house sometimes, and now I worry about it every

time I do. I don't like living like this.

Mr. Moots attempted to discipline his son for wrongdoings, and shared a glimpse

of his discipline measures: "I have taken everything away from Brian. I have taken his

television and all of his video games. He doesn't even like to go home now. There is

nothing there for him now. He has nothing to play or do. He just sits there."

The challenge of parenting Brian did not end at home. Mr. Moots shared that

Brian also had troubles at school, and said: "It's a good day if the school does not call me

and tell me Brian is in trouble. This is his first year at this school and I've already had

conferences with all of the assistant principals." Focusing on his most recent conference

with assistant principal Homer Johnson, Mr. Moots said:

When Mr. Johnson called and asked me to come in for a conference, I didn't

know what to expect. I didn't know if it was everybody against Brian, a kinda

Brian bashing. I have had that in the past, you know. I have been to conferences

with Brian's teachers and listened to how bad Brian is. That gets us nowhere.

The format of this principal-parent conference is illustrated in Table 4.29.

Table 4.29: Conference Format

Requested by	Participants	Purpose
Assistant Principal	Homer Johnson, Assistant Principal Mr. Moots, Parent Brian, Student	Disruptive behavior

Past conferences influenced Mr. Moots' expectations for the conference with assistant principal Johnson. "I thought it was gonna be a negative conference," he shared. Continuing, Mr. Moots said, " I didn't want to sit there and go through that again. We all know how bad Brian is or we wouldn't be here." Mr. Moots desired a more "positive approach" in dealing with Brian's problems at school, and he said, "There is hope for Brian. Let's work on what is good about him. I know we can get that to come out."

The 7:45 AM conference was scheduled so Brian could attend the conference with his father. Mr. Moots explained: "Mr. Johnson wanted Brian in on the conference so we scheduled it before school." Mr. Moots was concerned about including Brian, and he said:

> I get turned off right away when people start putting Brian down, especially in front of him. He already has a low self-esteem. He thinks 'I am a bad kid, so I will be a bad kid.' I know he can do better if someone is not jerking him around.

> Mr. Johnson called for a conference because Brian was being disruptive in class.

"I've heard that many times before so I was not surprised to hear it again," said Mr. Moots. The conference, however, held some surprises for this father, and he related:

I think the conference was very productive. Mr. Johnson was not judgmental about Brian. He was more the middle mediator concerned about Brian and his success in school. He did two really good things. He explained the problem and laid down the discipline. But, he gave Brian a reward system as well. He told Brian if he would stay out of trouble, he would take him out to dinner. Brian liked that and really listened to him after that. He also told Brian if he needed to talk to someone during the day, he could come see him. That meant a lot to Brian, to see how concerned Mr. Johnson was for him. As a single parent, that meant a lot to me too.

The sincerity and concern displayed by Mr. Johnson surprised Mr. Moots. There were other elements of the conference that met with this parent's approval, and Mr. Moots shared:

I liked the tone of voice Mr. Johnson used with Brian. It was strong, laying down the line for Brian, but he didn't do it with disrespect. He spoke to him as an adult. He didn't speak to him wild or holler at him. There was no anger in his voice. He told him, 'this is the way it is' and that was that. Brian responded by respecting what he said. Now, whatever Mr. Johnson says, Brian really takes to heart.

The number of participants in the conference contributed to Mr. Moots' description of a "productive conference:"

I thought the conference was very personal with just the three of us in here speaking rather than having a group of teachers sitting there and hearing from all of them. At least in my experience, that is not the way it always happens. I had to write a letter to the principal at the middle school telling him what I thought about

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having a conference with all Brian's teachers. I really had to fight with the school

to stop that from happening. I was never comfortable meeting with all Brian's

teachers at one time.

Mr. Moots shared expectations he had following the conference. These expectations

involved assistant principal Johnson and this parent's desire for his son to stay out of

trouble. Mr. Moots said:

I know Mr. Johnson has a big school to run and he can't follow each student

individually. But, I hope he will keep an eye on Brian and talk to him throughout

the day, at least a couple times a week. If he would just take him aside or put him

in his office and talk to him about staying on the right path and not wait till he is

in trouble, I think that will help.

At this point in the interview, Mr. Moots began to cry, and the researcher turned the tape

player off to allow time for him to regain his composure. Several minutes later, Mr.

Moots assured me he was fine and would like to continue the interview. Mr. Moots began

by explaining his emotional response:

I have tears but the tears are of joy. I have been so worried about my son. I don't

know how to help him and he seems to be fighting me in every way. I am so

moved by the concern and sincerity of Mr. Johnson. I believe he can and will help

me with Brian. Brian and I need that so badly.

The interview ended with Mr. Moots saying, "I thought it was a good conference,

a very good conference." The conference resulted in Mr. Moots feeling as though he had

a partner that would join him in reaching out to his son. He was moved to tears and

valued this relationship. Mr. Johnson had been instrumental in building a sense of trust

with this parent. Mr. Moots explained, "If Mr. Johnson called me again, I would be back within the hour. He is here to help. I think he has been excellent."

Table 4.30 reveals a breakdown of key categories in the perspectives of the parent, and each category is supported by specific examples.

Table 4.30: Mr. Moots' Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Expectations	Counsel son Partner with parent
Past Experiences	Negative conferences
Emotions	Tearful Worried Trusting
Aspirations	Son stay out of trouble
Actions	Included son Showed respect Used positive approach Provided discipline
Profiles	Principal: concerned, consistent, helpful Son: low self esteem, bad kid

According to Mr. Johnson, Brian Moots had been acting out in class, disrupting other students and taking the teacher off task. The purpose of the conference was to inform Brian and his father that this would "not be tolerated." He explained to Brian, with his father listening:

If you are just going to be here and not do anything, we can get along with that, but when your behavior becomes disruptive and you keep 25 or 30 other students from doing their work and take the teacher off task, then we have a problem.

Mr. Johnson offered a different perspective of Brian and his father. His provided a

detailed description of these participants as he experienced it:

>Brian comes from divorced parents. He has been bounced around, living with his
>
>daddy and sometimes with his mama. His father has a drinking problem. I know
>
>that because we had to have him removed from a ballgame one night. He was
>
>intoxicated. Daddy is not worrying with Brian. He is no support for his son. Dad
>
>is still young. He has a girlfriend and is interested in having his fun. I don't know
>
>that he has any parenting skills. I don't know that he wants any parenting skills.

The principal offered a contrasting profile of this parent. Table 4.31 lists the

principal's description of the parent participant along with examples that support the

description.

Table 4.31: Assistant Principal's Profile of Mr. Moots

DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Alcoholic	Intoxicated at ballgame
Young	Interested in having fun
Pursues the single life	Has a girlfriend
Uninvolved parent	Never home, lacks parenting skills
Emotional	Disciplines when mad

Mr. Johnson continued his profile to include Brian:

>Brian has no one to really give him that father figure he needs. He is real
>
>immature as a ninth grader. He doesn't have a lot of friends and kinda acts out to
>
>draw attention to himself. Brain has basically a terrible home situation. School is

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not that important to him. He needs someone at home to really care about him.

Brian doesn't have that. Why should he go to school, why should he do anything? According to Mr. Johnson, "Brian is not the brightest kid in the world, but he is not the dumbest." "He can pass classes," and Mr. Johnson explained, "He just needs some motivation." Mr. Johnson, "trying to find out what was going to motivate Brian to try harder in school," mentioned Brian's mother in the conference. Brian responded, "I don't want Mother to know about this cause she will say she will not see me." Mr. Johnson elaborated:

> I struck a nerve in Brian when I mentioned his mama. Brian cares about his
> mama. He cares about seeing her. I think he would like to live with her, but I
> think that has been tried and he didn't follow her rules so he is back with Daddy.
> He knows that if he doesn't do what he is suppose to do then she isn't going to
> have anything to do with him.

Table 4.32 profiles Brian according to the principal's perspectives. The principal's profile of Brian includes characteristics of the student and the principal's interpretation of Brian's needs.

Table 4.32: Assistant Principal's Perspective of Brian

Characteristics	Immature	Average Intelligence	Unmotivated	Bounced Around	Few Friends
Needs	Consistency	Counseling	Discipline	Involvement of both parents	Someone to care

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Mr. Johnson acknowledged he could have talked with Mr. Moots "over the phone," but he had specific reasons for requesting a parent conference. Mr. Johnson shared his reasoning:

> I could have done the same thing over the phone but I wanted to have a face-to-face meeting. It's much easier for a parent to say yes or no over the phone than to come in and face you with the kid sitting here. The father can say, 'you know I been working with my son, trying to do all these things.' He can't say that with his kid sitting here cause his kid knows different. He knows his daddy has not been working with him and doing things. Sometimes face-to-face, they can't tell you things that try to make them look better. For instance, Daddy tried to correct Brian during the conference and Brian responded, 'why are you hollering at me. You know you don't at home.' That tells me Brian doesn't get disciplined at home, and when he does, it is not consistent. I think Dad only disciplines when he is mad and you can't do that. You have to have some consistency.

Mr. Johnson pointed to one example in this conference, however, that did not fit his foreclusion. Mr. Moots was not, according to Mr. Johnson, completely truthful when describing a recent incident involving his son. He elaborated:

> During the conference, Daddy said something about leaving Brian with his mother while he was out of town and leaving his niece to baby-sit his house. Well, he didn't leave Brian with his mother. He just left him at the house with no supervision, and he had a huge party. Busted the house up and all kind of stuff. I had already heard about it.

Another reason for requiring the conference was directed at inconveniencing the

father while simultaneously inconveniencing the administrator. Mr. Johnson explained:

> I wanted to inconvenience the father, I wanted to send out a message that his son
> was his responsibility and he needed to come to school to help us with his son. I
> troubled him a little bit this morning. He shed a few tears but he has a 14-year old
> kid. Where were those parenting skills before? How did we get to this point? I
> don't think being a parent can just be turned on and off. I wanted him to have to
> think about that too.

Mr. Johnson talked about inconveniencing the parent, but he also talked about
"inconveniencing himself." Mr. Johnson offered an explanation:

> I wanted to send out a message that I was concerned enough for Brian to
> inconvenience myself. It was an inconvenience to sit in here but I did it out of
> concern for Brian. It would have been easy to suspend Brian but he needed to
> come in and help us work out something. I wanted Brian and Mr. Moots to
> understand we are gonna come up with solutions and that we are all gonna be
> involved in it. It is easier to do if everyone is sitting down and working together.

Other factors influenced Mr. Johnson's decision to require the conference. Mr.
Johnson shared: "A lot of times when you meet face-to-face with people, you can judge
their sincerity. Facial expressions and the way people act help you know if they are being
truthful with you." Mr. Johnson did form some opinions of Brian's father during the
conference. Mr. Johnson shared, "I do think he loves Brian, else he would not have been
here. I don't think he will be any help though. He mumbled something about being at
work but he is not at work. He is out drinking and having a good time with his
girlfriend."

The conference helped Mr. Johnson understand Brian and the relationship between Brian and his father. Mr. Johnson shared, "I think this father has thrown up his hands, thinking he can't do anything with Brian. " Mr. Johnson's biggest concern was for Brian, and his words reflected his concern:

> I don't think Brian can make it on his own. I don't think he has the support he needs in the home. He is only with us eight hours. When he goes home he is totally on his own. He has no expectations, no rules, no one to see that his homework is done. Most of the time he is there by himself. I would like to be able to take this kid home and say I am going to give you support cause I am going to make something out of you. He is not a bad kid but he has no home situation or nothing that is going to help him there. Hopefully, he will mature some and decide for himself that he wants to make it in school. If not, he will probably dropout. We will lose him.

The conference helped Mr. Johnson understand what he could expect from Brian's father:

> I understand that there is no help in the home. I know if I call this father again, the father is not going to be any help. We are going to have to seek solutions elsewhere. In the future, I will call Mr. Moots but only as a courtesy. I have no real expectations of help.

Mr. Johnson indicated a desire to find solutions that would benefit the student. Information gleamed from the conference prompted this administrator to seek alternative solutions for Brian. Mr. Johnson shared thoughts on additional avenues of support for Brian:

Our counselors need to counsel with Brian. They can provide some of the support

he is missing in the home. They know how to help kids like Brian. The

counselors may be able to connect Brian and his father with other places or

agencies that could offer help outside the school.

The conference was described as a "positive one" by Mr. Johnson. "Sometimes it's best

to leave some things unsaid" as Mr. Johnson explained:

What could I say to make that father change? There is nothing that I can say. I

could have said, 'okay, you are a sorry daddy,' and basically that is what he is.

But, if I say that to him, he will not want to talk to me anymore. And he will tell

everybody in the world how sorry we are up here. Whereas now he goes out of

here and believes we are trying to help him and his son. It is a little positive thing

that can go along way.

Mr. Johnson's perspectives are highlighted in Table 4.33. Each perspective is supported

by specific examples.

Table 4.33: Mr. Johnson's Perspectives

Category	Specific Examples
Expectations	No help from father
Actions	Inconvenienced father
Aspirations	Brian will mature
Purpose of Conference	Promote parent involvement Promote honesty in father Stress parent responsibility

This principal-parent conference highlighted different perspectives regarding the

role of the parent and the principal in the life of the student. Both participants emphasized

concern for the child. The parent expressed his concern by attending the conference and supporting the principal. Mr. Moots admitted he did not know how to help his son. Conversely, the principal, sensing a lack of parenting skills and a lack of parent involvement, expressed his concern by taking a more active role in providing support for the student. The profile of the father reflected another disconnect between the principal and the parent. Mr. Moots profiled himself as needing and wanting help from Mr. Johnson while Mr. Johnson portrayed this father as not being interested in his son. Another disconnect was evident in each participant's expectations. Mr. Moots expected Mr. Johnson to become his partner in helping Brian. However, Mr. Johnson expected no help from Mr. Moots. A final disconnect appeared in the participants' profile of Brian. Mr. Moots described Brian as a "bad kid with a low self esteem." Mr. Johnson profiled Brian as immature and lacking motivation with no support in the home. Table 4.34 highlights disconnects in the perspectives of the parent and the principal.

Table 4.34: Disconnects in the Perspectives of Mr. Moots and Mr. Johnson

Participants	Profile of Father	Expectations	Profile of Brian
Mr. Moots, Parent	Wanted help	Mr. Johnson as partner	Bad kid with low self esteem
Mr. Johnson, Assistant Principal	No interest in child	Mr. Moots no help	Immature kid with no support in home

For the parent, the conference promoted a trusting relationship with the principal. The father viewed the principal as his partner, a partner who would help him with his son. The conference provided an opportunity for the principal to show concern for the student. For the principal, the conference promoted honesty and involvement from the parent. The principal's expectation of parent involvement diminished as a result of the conference.

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The principal was more concerned with locating additional resources for the student, with no expectations of help from the parent.

Common Themes

Data from six principal-parent conferences have been presented as individual cases. Each case focused on the perspectives of the interaction for the meaning each participant attached to the conference. Categories, drawn from the data, were developed to frame each case as a story. These categories included: expectations, experiences, emotions, actions, values, aspirations, and profiles. Table 4.35 reveals the categories framing each case. These categories represent parent perspectives of the conference they had with the principal.

Table 4.35: Categories of Parent Perspectives

Expectations	Experiences	Emotions	Actions	Values	Aspirations	Profiles

To further discern the participants' perspectives, the researcher examined these categories across cases to find common themes. Table 4.36 provides the names of the parent participants and the parent responses for each category. Total parent responses for each category are included in the final row.

Table 4.36: Reponses of Parent Participants by Category

Participants	Expectations	Experiences	Emotions	Actions	Values	Aspirations	Profiles
Mrs. Brown	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tom Sargent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mary Banks	X	X	X	X	X		X
Mr. Meadows	X	X		X			X
Mr.& Mrs. Bentley	X	X	X	X		X	X
Mr. Moots	X	X	X	X		X	X
Total	6	6	5	6	3	4	6

The data revealed the variance of categories that comprised the parent perspectives. Four categories were present in the perspectives of all parent participants, namely, expectations, experiences, actions, and profiles. Parent participants maintained expectations for their children, namely student behavior would improve. Parent perspectives of all parent participants included references to experiences (e.g., former conferences, past associations with principal, memories of their childhood). The actions taken by the principal comprised the perspectives of the seven parent participants (e.g., informing, listening, answering questions). All seven parents included a profile of the principal participants (e.g., concerned, caring, upset, mad).

The less prevalent categories represented in the parent perspectives included emotional responses (e.g., anger, worry, confusion). Parents referenced values (e.g.,

honesty, respect, professionalism) and aspirations for their children (e.g., success, graduate high school, mature). The data revealed parents focused on various elements of the principal parent conference in describing the parent perspective. These categories not only provided a framework for the story presentation, but the categories also provided a framework for further analysis.

Examination of these categories yielded areas in which findings will be framed and then analyzed. Themes emerged from the actions of the principal, from the purposes of the conferences, and from disconnects between parent and principal perspectives. Themes emerging from these areas included: issues of control, issues of treatment, and issues of missed opportunities. The issue of control will begin the discussion.

Issues of Control

Parent perspectives focused on actions taken by the principal during the conference. Examining specific examples of actions referenced in parent interviews revealed issues of control surrounding the principal-parent conferences. Principals controlled most of the actions taken in the conferences.

Principals scheduled the conferences and controlled the amount of time given to the parents. The conferences were scheduled during school hours. Parents took time away from work to attend the conferences. Mr. Meadows illustrated, "I had just started to talk about a new job with the contractor when Mrs. Arks called and asked if I could come to the school." The Bentleys' left their family run-business to attend their conference. Mrs. Brown scheduled time away from her office to attend the meeting with Dr. Tap. The principals started each conference (at the scheduled time) and ended each conference at their discretion. Parents did not leave conferences until the principals signaled the end of

the conference. Fieldnotes indicated that at the end of the conference, principals "stood up," "extended a hand to parents," and "thanked them for coming in."

The principals controlled the type and amount of information given to the parents in the conference. Parents spoke of being "informed" by the principal. The information included identifying the problem (e.g., irrational behavior, defiance, disruptive behavior, misuse of free lunch card, fighting) and describing the consequences (e.g., out-of-school suspensions, calling parents back for another conference, removing student from class). The problems focused predominately on student behavior. Parents asked questions based on the information given them by the principals. Mrs. Brown asked when her son would receive his make up work. Mr. Sargent asked what lead up to the fight, and Mr. Meadows asked for a description of his son's behavior in class.

The decision to include the student or others in the conference was controlled by the principal. One parent did not think this was a good idea. Mrs. Banks stated, "If Angie had not been there we could have talked just like you and me are talking now." Mrs. Brown thought it was appropriate to include son, Jimmy. She stated, "I thought it was a good decision."

The principals controlled the discipline of the students. For example, Mr. Bennett suspended Tommy for five days, and Mr. Johnson changed Cale's discipline from five to three days' suspension. The principals were also in control of the identification of the problem. Principals identified problems in relation to student behavior (e.g., disrupting class, fighting, defiance, misuse of free lunch card). Based on parent descriptions of the principal-parent interaction, Table 4.37 reveals the controlling actions of the principal. The composite of actions reflect conferences dominated by principal control.

Table 4.37: Controlling Actions of the Principals

Controlling Actions of the Principals	
Scheduled conference	Disciplined student firmly
Provided sufficient time	Listened to parent
Informed parent	Included others
Included student	Allowed parent to talk to student
Answered questions	Stated purpose

Controlling actions of the principals influenced responses of the parents. Parent perspectives revealed emotional responses to the principal-parent interaction. Mrs. Brown referenced "anger turning to hope." Mrs. Banks shared feelings of "shock and confusion" as her response to the conference with principal Arks. Mr. Moots and Mr. Sargent responded "tearfully" to their principal-parent conference. Each emotion was in response to the actions of the principals (e.g., including students, showing "concern," "informing parent"). The actions controlled by the principal influenced the emotional responses of parents.

Parents participated in conferences as a result of a problem. The principal defined the problem and treated the problem by implementing consequences. Most of problems involved student behavior. Mr. Meadows reported his son, Devin, was acting up in class. Mary Banks' conference focused on inappropriate behaviors exhibited by her granddaughter, namely the sharing of a free lunch card and writing notes for other students to check in late to school. Mr. Moots' conference focused on his son's continued misbehavior in class. Mr. Sargent, conferencing with Mr. Bennett, was informed that his

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son had been in a fight and was being suspended. The Bentleys' were also called in for a conference because of their son's disruptive behavior and defiance of authority.

The problems were addressed with each student being disciplined by the principal. Identifying the problem and determining appropriate discipline were actions controlled by the principals. Identification of the problem and the treatment of the problem across the six cases provided the foundation for another common theme found in the data, issues of treatment. The issues of treatment frame the following discussion.

Issues of Treatment

Parents were informed of the student problem and of the student discipline by the principals. The problems, according to the principals, were identified as dealing with "student behavior." The discipline, decided by the principals, addressed the inappropriate behavior. Treatment of the problem, the discipline, included suspensions, removal of students from class, and requiring a parent conference. The problems were identified and treated by the principals with a disciplinary measure.

The interviews for this study were conducted between August 2002 and January 2003. In March, two months following the completion of the interviews, the researcher examined student records for the current status of students represented in each case. The data indicated problems, identified by the principals and reported to the parents in the principal-parent conferences, continued to occur in half of the cases. The recurring problems lead to one student being assigned to another school (an alternative school for students with chronic or severe behavior problems), another student receiving an additional 5-day suspension, and one student dropping out of school. The data indicates the possibility of the principal's treatment of a symptom rather than treatment of the

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problem. Inappropriate behavior exhibited by the students could have been symptomatic of a bigger problem such as the home life. For example, data revealed Brian, disciplined by Assistant Principal Homer Johnson for inappropriate behavior, lived in a home described by Brian's father as a "prison." Table 4.38 lists the status of students (since the conference). The information, identified by the original case numbers, includes the problems (identified by the principal) and disciplines applied to the problems.

Table 4.38: Student Infractions Following Conferences

Case #	Problem	Discipline	Current status (Additional discipline)
Jimmy	Irresponsibility	Given make-up work	Dropped out of school
Tommy	Fighting	Suspended 5 days	Fighting-2nd Offense (suspended 5 more days)
Angie	Free lunch and check-ins	Warning	No more infractions
Devin	Irrational behavior	Return to class	No more infractions
Cale	Disruptive behavior Defiance	Suspended 3 days	No more infractions
Brian	Disruptive behavior	Suspended 1 day	Two more infractions of class disruption (Assigned to alternative school)

Inappropriate behavior exhibited by the students may have been a shield for some bigger problem. Continual problems with behavior may be a signal to administrators and parents that the problem has yet to be identified and treated.

Interpretation of the data revealed disconnects (or differences) between parent and principal perspectives. An analysis of disconnects in the data lead to the discovery of the final theme, issues of missed opportunities. The discussion begins with a summary of disconnects appearing across the cases (Disconnects were not reported between the Bentleys' and Homer Johnson). Table 4.39 summarizes disconnects by categories. Disconnects are identified by individual cases, along with the number of responses (by case) to each category. The total number of responses across cases concludes the table presentation.

Table 4.39: Summary of Disconnects

Participants	Purpose	Problem	Profiles	Emotions	Expectation	Evaluation
Mrs. Brown and Dr. Tap		X				
Tom Sargent and Mr. Bennett			X			
Mary Banks and Mrs. Arks	X		X	X		X
Mr. Meadows and Mrs. Arks	X		X			
Mr. Moots and Homer Johnson			X		X	
Total	2	1	4	1	1	1

Interviews with the principal participants proved valuable in uncovering differences in the principals' and parents' perspectives. The differences or disconnects in perspectives indicated missed opportunities for principal participants possibly to: (1) gain increased understanding of the parents or the students, (2) build a partnership with parents, (3) improve emotional responses of parents, (4) promote a positive evaluation of the conference, or, finally (5) identify a problem manifested in student behavior.

Table 4.39 indicated a majority of disconnects in the profiles of participants. Examining disconnects in individual case profiles, the researcher discovered missed opportunities for principals to increase parent involvement beyond dealing with behavior problems of students.

Mr. Bennett missed an opportunity to help Mr. Sawyer enforce the value of academics and discipline with Tommy. Principal Bennett believed the parent was "more interested in his son's athletic ability than anything else." Mr. Sawyer, on the other hand, revealed, "I considered taking Tommy out of football altogether." Mr. Bennett could have been a resource to Mr. Sawyer by discussing the issue with this concerned father. As a former coach and educator, Mr. Bennett could have addressed the merits of being involved in the sport. Sharing his knowledge with the parent could have assisted the parent in making an appropriate decision for his son.

Mrs. Arks missed opportunities to promote a positive relationship with Angie's grandmother, Mary Banks. Ms. Banks, "on her way to pick up her granddaughter's CD player," was surprised to find herself in a conference with the assistant principal. The "shock and confusion" Ms. Banks felt left her "speechless." Whereas Mrs. Arks thought she was being informative, Mrs. Banks focused on the body language of the administrator

stating, "It don't cost anything to smile." Ms. Banks believed Mrs. Arks was "mad" and "upset" in the conference. The experience was anything but positive for Ms. Banks. She said, "I do not call what we had a conference." The opportunity to increase involvement of this extended family member was lost in, according to Mrs. Arks' words, "this productive meeting." Ms. Banks who, "supports my grandkids all I can," could be a valuable resource to the school. The interaction between Mrs. Arks and Mary Banks, filled with disconnects, missed this opportunity for involvement.

Dr. Tap, in his meeting with Mrs. Brown, missed an opportunity to extend involvement to Jimmy's grandmother. Fieldnotes taken during the conference indicated little involvement by Jimmy's grandmother, other than support for Mrs. Brown. Dr. Tap missed another opportunity in his conference with Mrs. Brown. The parent indicated her son had "continually struggled with schoolwork" and he had "even considered dropping out of school." Dr. Tap, focused on Jimmy's "irresponsibility toward his schoolwork," missed valuable knowledge presented by this mother. The opportunity to examine Jimmy's struggle with academics gave way to the issue of skipping school and getting makeup work. A problem, much larger than the issues addressed, may have gone undetected, along with an opportunity to find a solution that may have prevented Jimmy from eventually dropping out of school.

Homer Johnson may have been blinded by his perspective of Mr. Moots (e.g., more interested in having fun, uninvolved, never home) and missed an opportunity to build a partnership with Mr. Moots, a partnership that could benefit Brian. Mr. Moots was moved to "tears of joy" thinking he had found a "partner to help him with his son." On the contrary, Mr. Johnson considered this father as "no help." The father recognized

he was at a loss on how to help his son. Mr. Johnson missed an opportunity to reach out to this father and to help him become an effective parent.

This study examined the perspectives of parents and principals in regard to the conferences they had with each other. Analyzing the results of the study, the researcher discovered three common themes: (1) issues of control, (2) issues of treatment, and (3) issues of missed opportunities. The results indicated that principals dominate conferences and often times treat symptoms rather than problems. Evidence revealed the problems, left untreated, repeat themselves or worse, drive students away from school. And, finally, principals missed opportunities, afforded them in conferences, to increase parent involvement. The following words highlight the analysis of the data:

Principals listen, but don't hear

Principals see, but are often blinded by *their* eyes

Principals are in the know, but have much they could learn from parents.

If principals seek to serve the children that fill their schools, then involving parents holds great potential for helping principals serve the children even better.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, ANALYSIS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between parents and principals in principal-parent conferences in a high school setting. The study featured an in-depth inquiry designed to explore the perspectives of both parents and administrators who had participated in a recent principal-parent conference. The study focused on the perspectives of the interaction for the meaning each participant attached to the conference, and the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the purpose of parent-principal conferences?

2. What are parent's perspectives of the conferences?

3. What are the principal's perspectives of the conference?

This chapter presents a summary of the study. The major findings from the study are discussed, including implications and recommendations for school systems with high schools and for further research.

Summary of Study

A qualitative case study research design and methods were used to explore interactions between parents and principals in principal-parent conferences in a high school setting from the perspectives of both the parents and the principals. This research featured in-depth interviews with parents and principals in a suburban high school in northeast Georgia. Data collection and analysis focused on the generation of descriptive data gleaned from the participants' perspectives from six principal-parent conferences.

Data collection, began in August of the 2002 and continued through January of the 2003 school year. Transcriptions of twelve taped interviews, the primary data source for this study, were supported by other data sources, including fieldnotes from observations, journal writings, and archival data (student files) from the school site.

This study, designed to explore principal-parent interactions from the perspectives of parents and principals, was grounded in symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism maintains a focus on interpersonal interaction (Blumer,1969). This inquiry required the researcher to put self in the place of the participants, seeing things from their perspectives. The symbolic interactionist's perspective values understanding events, situations, roles, etc. from the perspectives of the participants. Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation focused on the use of participants' own words to capture their particular perspectives and reflections on the conferences they had with each other.

The study focused on the perspectives of the interaction and the meaning each participant attached to the conference. The researcher sought to organize participant's accounts into a story, one that focused on the participants' words and reflected truth as they reported their experiences. The stories, drawn from six principal-parent conferences, were presented as six clearly defined cases. Each case included the perspectives of the parent(s) participant and the perspectives of the principal participant.

Two levels of findings were reported and discussed in Chapter 4. These two levels included individual cases and common themes across cases. Across one level, findings included seven categories, and these findings provided the framework for reporting conferences as individual cases. The seven categories included in principal and parent

perspectives were: expectations, experiences, emotions, actions, values, aspirations, and profiles.

On a second level, data were examined across cases and common themes emerged, allowing for a deeper analysis of the data. Three common themes, representing second level findings, were established and included: issues of control, issues of treatment, and issues of missed opportunities.

Previous Research

Parent involvement has long been emphasized in the literature. Research has provided studies on the history of parent involvement (DeMoss, 1998; Toffler, 1980), theoretical perspectives surrounding parent involvement (Bronfengrenner, 1986; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978; Lindle, 1992; Powell, 1991), and reform efforts focused on parent involvement (Crotta, 1994; Drake, 2000; Epstein, 1995; Nakagawa, 2000). Parent involvement literature has brought focus on relationships between parents and school personnel (Baugh & Goldring, 1996; Davies, 2000; Lindle, 1992); however, the principal-parent relationship has limited exposure in the literature.

Principal-parent conferences are a part of the fabric of school, but the principal-parent conference is typically a private affair, taking place behind closed doors. As parents seek greater involvement in schools, the principal-parent interaction could be influential in promoting parent involvement in schools. This study highlights the importance of principal-parent conferences and addresses a gap in the literature on parent involvement, namely principal-parent interactions.

Current literature on parent involvement promotes partnerships between educators and parents (Davies, 2000; Elmore, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Lindle, 1992). Findings from this study point to the presence of obstacles that hinder building partnerships with parents. Examining interactions in principal-parent conferences, data revealed differences in perspectives of principal participants and parent participants. These disconnects served to build a divide between the participants rather than promote the idea of principal and parents as partners.

The data revealed principals dominated conferences with parents. Parents were summoned to conferences and were expected to sit and listen to the principal. The principal informed parents by stating the charges against their child, relegating the consequences, and at times, offering assistance (e.g., naming a counselor or sharing a book). Parents' presence in the conferences promoted the active participation of the principal while elevating the inactive status of the parent(s). Partnerships might flourish with the active participation of all participants.

Initiatives taken by parents resulted in turmoil, emotional stress, and the need to seek assistance from higher sources. Mrs. Brown described the anger and frustration she experienced when the assistant principal refused to meet with her mother-in-law. Again, the administrator controlled the action taken. Mrs. Brown sought involvement from her mother-in-law, the involvement was denied by Mrs. Arks, and Mrs. Brown felt compelled to seek help from outside sources, the Board of Education and the State Department of Education. Controlling actions of the assistant principal did not promote a sense of partnership between the school and the parent.

Partnerships signal a spirit of teamwork. Principal participants did not respond to parents as members of a team working together for the good of the child. Principal participants appeared to listen to parents, and the parents even reported that principals listened to them. Yet, principals missed opportunities to identify problems and to promote partnerships by not hearing the parents. Findings from this study provided support for work by Henry (1996) who reported, "The intimate knowledge mothers and fathers gain in the course of rearing their children is valuable knowledge that is often neither respected nor utilized in the school setting" (p. 84). Mrs. Brown projected her son as struggling with academics, but Dr. Tap did not respond to this information. Dr. Tap responded to a different problem, the irresponsibility of Jimmy. Dr. Tap missed an opportunity to partner with Mrs. Brown, as a team member with valuable information, to explore solutions to problems Jimmy was experiencing with his schoolwork.

Working to build partnerships, according to Epstein (1996), schools can involve parents in a variety of ways. Epstein created a framework supporting parent involvement and partnerships with parents. Type One involvement encouraged focus on parenting and providing help for families in establishing a home environment that supports the child as student. Homer Johnson, much in control of his conference with Mr. Moots, missed an opportunity to respond to Mr. Moots' stated need for help with parenting skills. This parent's desire for a partner was not felt nor heard by Mr. Johnson, the assistant principal. By contrast, Mr. Johnson interpreted the interaction as a sign of "no help" from the parent. Mr. Johnson framed the conference in terms of how Mr. Moots might help the school in improving the behavior of Brian. Findings indicated a need for Mr. Johnson to reframe his interpretation of the conference to include how the school might help the

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parent develop more effective parenting skills. The conference depicted a difference in perspectives and resulted in a parent reaching out to a principal who reacted by closing the door on the opportunity to form a partnership by extending Type One involvement to the parent.

According to Drake (2000), "the challenges that students in America's public schools face cannot be solved by educators alone; nor can these problems be solved by parents or families alone" (p. 34). Drake's call for more collaboration between school and home reinforced the essential need for educator's, like Mr. Johnson, to realize how critical it is for parents and principals to work together, to do otherwise could jeopardize the success of the children.

Partnerships promote positive relationships with parents. Mrs. Arks' conference with Mary Banks left this grandmother confused and speechless. Mrs. Arks did not recognize the negative impact the conference had on Mrs. Banks. The "productive conference" referenced by Mrs. Arks was described as "not a conference" by Mary Banks. Mrs. Arks did not notice Ms. Banks' silence or "shock" in the conference. Mary Banks never returned to the school to pick up the CD player even though she repeatedly said she would. The negative impact of the conference promoted an obstacle to building a partnership between the school and with this extended family member.

Mary Banks' focus on the facial expression of Mrs. Arks revealed another obstacle to building a partnership with this grandmother. Ms. Banks described Mrs. Arks as seemingly "mad" or "upset" in the conference. A smile from Mrs. Arks could have paved the way for a more favorable response from Ms. Banks. "It don't cost anything to smile," (according to Ms. Banks), and a smile could have opened the door and promoted

an opportunity to create a valuable partnership with this grandmother. Focus on presentation supported work by Dodd and Konzal (2000), who emphasized smiles and pleasant greetings as contributing factors to the success of collaborative efforts of schools.

Baugh and Goldring (1999) cautioned, "Little can be expected by way of parent involvement by"… increasing opportunities for parents to be involved. Parent involvement appears to depend more on the attitudes of teachers" (p. 18). Findings from this study extended the work of Baugh and Goldring to include parents' perspectives on the attitudes of the principal influences the involvement of the parent participant. Mary Banks hardly spoke in the conference with assistant principal Diane Arks. Ms. Banks described Mrs. Arks as "mad" and "upset." Ms. Banks stressed that a "smile" from Mrs. Arks would have promoted communication.

Abrams and Gibbs (2000) suggested lack of time paves the way for conflicts as schools seek to implement greater parent involvement. This study highlighted other aspects of time impacting parent involvement. Principals controlled the amount of time given to parents and controlled how the time was spent. In conferences with parents, principals spent most of the time informing parents of problems with behavior and the consequences for the behavior. The principal's use of time proved to be an obstacle to partnership building. Findings emphasized the use of time as an important factor in principal-parent conferences.

This study extended Epstein's (1996) work by focusing on one-on-one communication as a valuable means of communication with parents. However, the findings highlighted communication in principal-parent conferences as controlled by the

principal participants with focus on providing information to parents. Opportunities for more intricate communication between principal and parents were neither sought nor encouraged by the principals in this study. In fact, principals often missed opportunities to identify problems, to seek appropriate solutions, or to interact with parents outside the realm of student behavior and consequences.

Much of the literature on parental involvement is focused on teacher-parent relationships. This study contributed to a limited field by focusing on the principal-parent relationship. However, an even more overlooked area in the research is the principal-student relationship. Students were included in the conferences based on the decision of the principal participants. Parents supported the decision to include the students but, based on fieldnotes taken during participant observations, students participated by listening, not engaging in the interaction. Angie, the most vocal student, sought to deny charges brought against her by Mrs. Arks. Angie's protests were heard by her grandmother but ignored by the assistant principal. Angie left angry and later blamed her grandmother for not intervening in her defense. Devin convinced his father, Mr. Meadows, that he was not behaving irrationally in class. He failed to influence Mrs. Arks but was allowed to stay at school. Tommy's aggressive behavior (fighting) in the classroom was the focus of the conference between Tom Sargent and Mr. Bennett. Tommy's only response in the conference was to hang his head. He uttered not a single word. Brian lashed out at his father in the conference with Homer Johnson and his father, Mr. Moots. Brian pointed out to those present in the conference that his father never disciplined him at home so "why bother to raise his voice in the conference." Jimmy was included in the conference with his mother and grandmother and listened to Dr. Tap

reinforce his responsibility for coming to school and his responsibility in completing his makeup. No effort was made to engage Jimmy in conversation that sought his perspectives on not completing work or reasons for not attending school.

Cale sat silently throughout most of the conference with Homer Johnson and his parents, the Bentleys'. He listened as his parents agreed with the discipline handed out by Mr. Johnson. Fieldnotes taken during the conference indicated Cale apologized to Mr. Johnson for his inappropriate behavior. Mr. Johnson later shared, "Cale apologized but he didn't mean it. He only apologized because his parents were present in the room." The students were never asked to share their views in the conferences.

The principals missed opportunities to engage the students in a discussion that may have contributed to solving the identified problems. The students may have been instrumental in redefining the problem. The conference could have been an opportunity to build an understanding of the student and school and an understanding of the student and his parents. This study was limited to examining the perspectives of the principals and the parents in regards to the conference. The perspectives of the students could have offered another dimension to understanding the conferences.

Additionally, there are structural issues that need to be discussed in relation to the findings of this study. Missing from the examination of the context of this study and the work of the principals at Middle Brook High School are issues relative to the busy and frenetic days of the principals. The four administrators serve a student population of 1540 students. The administrators are faced with many challenges arising from the large student body. The construct of time becomes a valuable commodity in the principals' days and bears influence on every action taken by each administrator.

The principal-parent interactions occurred in response to student problems. The focus of the conference was on student problems and bore influence on the interactions. Another structural issue surrounding the conferences was the lack of any teacher's presence, even though the student problems occurred in the classroom. Principals reported incidents to parents, not the classroom teachers. The difference in years of experience among the administrative team varied vastly with Dr. Tap having 31 years of experience, Mrs. Arks 3 years experience, Homer Johnson 5 years experience, and Mr. Bennett with less than 1 year experience. Each of these structural issues possibly influenced findings of the study.

Implications for Further Research

No formulas should, or could possibly exist for the interactions between parents and principals. The subject is too context dependant; however, this study offered much in the way of understanding principal-parent conferences at the high school level. More qualitative studies are needed to provide an in-depth look at the day-to-day life of practicing educators relative to their interactions with parents. As in this study, each case was different, but each case offered some understanding of the real life of schools. Additional studies could contribute to a database that promotes understanding of principal and parent interactions in a high school setting.

The literature boasts a call for building partnerships with parents. Building partnerships may prove to be a challenging endeavor for educators. This study pointed to the need for studies that address how effective partnerships are formed related to the interactions of principals and parents. Examining the perspectives of parents and principals could provide a beginning framework for building effective partnerships.

Teachers and principals could benefit from research focused on how to build partnerships with parents.

Studies are needed that focus on building relationships with not only parents, but also with students. The study was limited to examining perspectives of parents and principals. Student perspectives could have provided additional insights into understanding conferences while promoting factors contributing to building effective relationships with students. Examining principal-student interactions could fill a void in the literature on principal-student relationships.

Research focused on interactions could strengthen the literature on parent involvement. Epstein's (1996) framework for involving parents might be expanded to include a sixth sphere focused on communication at a deeper level than merely passing out information to parents. Engaging educators and parents in communication that seeks to identify and to find solutions to problems holds promise for building partnerships for student success.

Principals and teachers could benefit from studies that serve to emphasize the importance of perspectives of all stakeholders relative to building effective partnerships. Findings from this study indicated disconnects present between principals and parents. Disconnects surfaced as obstacles to successful conferences. Building an awareness of perspectives could encourage educators to step outside of self and seek to view the world from the perspectives of the parent. This may be an important step in building an effective partnership with parents.

Studies are needed that point to the necessity of reframing the role of the principal in parent involvement. Principals need to do more than inform parents. Given the

elevated voice of parents (e.g., Local School Councils) and the emphasis on accountability (e.g., *No Child Left Behind*), principals are challenged to find resources and avenues that promote success for students. In keeping with Drake (2000), schools can no longer address the challenges of educating youth as a lone endeavor. Principals need parents' help and support to meet the needs of students. As student populations become more diverse, principals may feel inadequate to serve their student bodies. Parents offer an opportunity to provide valuable insights into their diverse cultures. Studies are needed that promote vigilance in educators to build partnerships with parents from all cultures to build for success of all students.

Implications for School Systems with High Schools

Principal participants approached parent involvement by requesting parent conferences and using the time spent in the conferences informing parents of problems and consequences for inappropriate student behavior. The actions exhibited by the principals in this study revealed the need for more training in the benefits of involving parents in the education of students. Staff development could be designed to educate principals on the many benefits of parent involvement.

Principal participants could benefit from a more intricate definition of parent involvement. Parent involvement is comprised of much more than providing information to parents. Staff development focused on creating a more extensive definition of parent involvement could build a stronger foundation for building principals interacting with parents. Such a staff development could explore the meaning of the term parent to include other adults in the life of the child.

Communication skills were highlighted in this study. Principals could benefit from staff development that focused on improving communication skills. This study revealed principals missed opportunities to interact with parents on a level that could address larger issues than misbehavior of students. Communication involves actively listening. Principals listened to parents speak, but they failed to hear what the parents were saying. Training in communication could improve this critical skill for principals and result in more productive conferences with parents.

School systems need to employ leaders who actively promote parent involvement in the school setting. Principals bear great influence in promoting parent involvement in all aspects of school life. Potential principals should be screened for a strong belief that parents are vital partners in the education of children.

School systems should have a plan for parent involvement in place in all schools in the system. In-service should be provided that allows for discussion on the progress and results of implementing such a plan. The plan should be revised annually to accommodate student needs.

School systems should provide mentoring to novice administrators in the realm of managing the myriad tasks of being a building principal. Included in this mentoring program should be strategies to enhance conferencing skills with parents and team building strategies to enhance partnerships with parents.

Research, periodicals, and books focused on parent involvement should be available to building principals. The system should promote exploration of these materials by spending a portion of staff meetings engaging principals in discussions focused on developments in parent involvement.

<u>Implications for Higher Education.</u>

Each one of these principals graduated from a formal university training program in educational leadership. As such, principal preparation programs need to include as part of the curriculum, strategies that promote effective communications with parents. Moreover, based on the findings of this study, principal preparation programs should provide formal training in the strategies that build partnerships between the school and the families served by the schools. Sorely lacking was any sensitivity toward the family structure in which the children were being reared (e.g., grandparents raising children, single parent families, and blended family structures). Higher education can assist prospective and in-service administrators in recognizing and dealing with the issues of modern day parental involvement.

<u>Final Comments</u>

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between parents and principals in principal-parent conferences in a high school setting. The study explored the perspectives of both parents and administrators for the meaning each participant attached to the conference. The findings are drawn from one high school's administrative team featuring the building principal and three assistant principals. Although limited in scope, the study offered an in-depth look into a vital part of high school life—the principal-parent conference. Findings from the study revealed principal-parent interactions provide a valuable source of knowledge surrounding principal-parent conferences. The focus on perspectives enabled the researcher to report differences in the meanings principals and parents attached to the same conference. At times, these differences blocked partnership building between parent and principal participants.

Findings from the study emphasized the importance of understanding meanings parents attach to interactions with principals. This kind of knowledge could contribute to building more effective relationships with parents. The study also points to the need for more research that could help principals implement strategies for building partnerships with parents for the benefit of all students.

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APPENDIX A

OPENING SCRIPT

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia. Under the direction of Dr. Sally Zepeda, I am conducting research to fulfill requirements for a doctorate degree from the University of Georgia. For this project, I will be taking fieldnotes and audio taping meetings. Following your meeting with the principal, I may contact you for an interview. The purpose of this research is to contribute to the understanding of principal-parent interactions.

You are invited to participate in this project by allowing me to collect data during your meeting with the principal. Data collected will be used as part of my dissertation research at the University of Georgia. All information obtained will be treated confidentially. Names of participants, location, and dates will be changed to conceal identities. Your participation is entirely voluntary; you can withdraw your consent at any time. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping data collected in a locked file cabinet in my home. Data will be kept indefinitely for future research.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance with this study. As a parent, you are a valuable source of information for understanding the relationship between the principal and parents. The more insight we acquire into this relationship, the more equipped we may be in developing effective strategies that promote parent involvement in our schools.

Please read and sign both copies of the consent form, if you are willing to participate in this study. Keep one copy and return the other to me.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at (770) 800-1234.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research project: When Parents Meet with a High School Principal,

which is being conducted by Jackie B. Adams, 0711 Bill Rd., Ell, GA 30114, phone: (770) 800-1234,

under the direction of Dr. Sally Zepeda, faculty advisor, Department of Educational Leadership, (770) 800-

4321. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time

without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine,

returned to me, removed from the research or destroyed. Any information the researcher obtains about me

as a participant in this study, including identity, will be held confidential. My identity will be changed, and

all data will be kept in a secure location. My identity will not be revealed in any publication of this

research. Audiotapes (labeled with a pseudonym) will be secured in a locked file with access limited to the

researcher, Jackie B. Adams. The researcher will answer any future questions about the research, now or

during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: (770) 800-1234.

Signing this statement indicates:

1. You give me permission to take notes in the meeting between you and the principal.
2. You give me permission to audiotape an interview with you. The interview will begin with,

"Describe for me, in as much detail as possible, the interaction you had with the principal."

If you agree to participate, please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the
researcher.

**Declining to participate will have no effect on the relationship between you and the principal or the
school.**

_____
Signature of Researcher   Date

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional
Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to the
Institutional Review Board; Office of V.P. for Research; the University of Georgia; 606A Graduate Studies
Research Center; Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514. Email Address: IRB@uga.edu.
_____

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT PORTRAIT MEMO

At the age of 55, Dr. Tap has served as Principal of Middle Brook High since it opened fifteen years ago. Located in a suburban area of a large southeastern city, Middle Brook High serves over 1500 students. Dr. Tap has seen the enrollment of his school increase yearly.

Dr. Tap is openly committed to serving the needs of students. He is perceived in the community as a strong leader. He has acquired a reputation of care and concern for all students. His friendly, candid leadership style has built positive relationships with teachers and parents. Much of the success of Middle Brook High rests with the philosophy of its leader. "My job is to hire good people with good ideas," attests Dr. Tap. He goes on to say:

> I treat others as professionals, giving them responsibility and autonomy. I believe in collective powers. I have great respect for the opinions of others. Successful change initiatives evolve from others working together. I contribute to this process by offering encouragement, and professional insight. Coordination and facilitation of staff development are crucial to the livelihood of the school. I feel it is my responsibility to encourage continual growth of the faculty.

Dr. Tap believes in decentralization of authority. He stresses the need for schools to have freedom to address their specific student needs.

Fifteen years after opening the doors to Middle Brook High School, Dr. Tap faces many challenges. Overcrowded conditions plague his school. Last year the board

approved the construction of two new high schools. New schools will eventually bring

relief to this problem. However, the new schools will not open for another year. In the

meantime, Dr. Tap must attend to the steady increase in student population.

Dr. Tap must find creative solutions to classroom assignments. Many of his

teachers will move from one classroom to another throughout the day. Teachers will not

be able to spend planning periods in their classrooms. Dr. Tap is concerned about the

effects this situation will have on teacher morale.

New teaching positions and additional administrative help must be added to

accommodate increased student needs. New programs must be implemented to satisfy

elective requirements for students. Dr. Tap must also address the needs of an increasing

culturally diverse student body. The ESOL population is expected to increase by ten

percent in the next year.

The Sunday edition of the local paper headlined a recent controversy at Middle

Brook High. Parents speaking out and quotes from the school principal set the stage for

the inquiry. Twelve photographs, two news articles, and two editorials bring Middle

Brook High and its principal to the forefront of public scrutiny. The following statement,

taken from an article in the local paper, highlights Dr. Tap's message to the public:

"Middle Brook High School will do a better job communicating with its students and

parents." This edition of the local paper has become an archive into the life of Dr. Tap

and his school. Who is this man and what guides his path as leader of one of the

community's largest high schools?

The story of Monty Roberts, The Man Who Listens To Horses, is a valuable

resource in understanding Dr. Tap. Both men profess a strong belief in the power of

communication rooted in respect. Referring to a world-class champion horse, Monty Roberts says:

> I have not so much trained him as created an environment in which he has wanted to learn. Inflicting pain does not work. Everyone has the right to fail and to succeed and to be rewarded. No one has the right to say, 'you must.' Letting one have this right is a mark of respect. With respect comes trust. With trust the doors of communication open.

Monty Roberts has achieved world fame with his gentle technique for training horses. As a young boy, he discovered the power of communication in working with mustangs out in the wild. He developed a technique that was counter to the violent methods used by horse trainers in that day. His technique focuses on the quality of work and not how fast it is accomplished. He stresses the importance of making it "pleasant for the horse to be near you." Monty Roberts has spent a lifetime seeking change in the way horses are taught and disciplined. His efforts have resulted in dramatic change in North America as witnessed in this 1993 headline in The New York Times: "Broncobusters Try New Tack: Tenderness." Monty Robert's life reflects the adage, "first you show the world, then you change the world."

According to Dr. Tap, the story of Monty Roberts impacted his life: "I have used a lot of lessons learned from this book in dealing with horses and people." Dr. Tap's response to the recent controversy at his school reflects some of this influence; "Middle Brook High School will do a better job of communicating with students and parent." Building trust was key to effective communication in the story of Monty Roberts. Archival data reveals Dr. Tap's desire to build a climate of trust in his school. Messages

from the principal promote a mission of developing student potential and fostering positive interpersonal relationships. Home and school partnerships are encouraged with student welfare as a goal.

Parent newsletters include parent surveys. In a letter to parents of future students, suggestions, comments, and concerns are sought. Dr. Tap always acknowledges the importance of support and encouragement from parents. Letters from Dr. Tap include recognition of accomplishments of students and teachers. Teachers and students are not only congratulated for their accomplishments, but also reminded of their contribution to the quality of the school. Clubs, speakers, Partners-in-Education, parents, members of the community, and students are the recipients of letters of gratitude from Dr. Tap. Other correspondence includes letters of recommendation. Some letters inform parents of decisions made by the principal.

Correspondences from the principal reflect respect and a positive attitude:

We look forward to seeing you…

Thank you for…

We wish all of you success…

Please feel free to call…

We are proud…

It is my pleasure…

We look forward to…

Please visit us…

I can, without reservation, highly recommend… .

At twelve years of age, Monty Roberts discovered a better way of training horses. He spent a lifetime advocating this more gentle method. Monty's words, "First you show the world, then you change the world," have become a reality. Dr. Tap's gentle approach to people may bring a lesson to the world of future school administrators. Dr. Tap underlined one sentence in Monty Robert's book that may have significance for him: "But just as trust has to be won with a horse, so must it be won between people and the organizations that employ them." The story of the man who listens to horses ends with Monty Robert's abiding goal, a goal adopted by Dr. Tap: "My goal is to leave the world a better place, for horses and people, than I found it."

APPENDIX D

SUBJECTIVITIES STATEMENT

We cannot rid ourselves of this subjectivity, nor should we
wish to; but we ought, perhaps, to pay it very much more
attention. . . . .(1987, p. 172)

A. P. Cheater

Prior to delving into a study of qualitative research, I had taken two quantitative

research courses in my graduate work. I worked extremely hard to master the elements of

quantitative methods. Yet, I never felt comfortable with this realm of research. My

response to qualitative research was quite different. From the onset, this field of

endeavor awed me. As I read and sought to understand qualitative research, I became

more and more enthusiastic about the venture. Every new discovery seemed like a breath

of new life for me. I knew qualitative research was for me. Throughout the course of

study, I wondered why I felt so comfortable with this non-positivist perspective.

My journey through qualitative research has included a greater awareness of self.

I thought of the cliché, "to thine own self be true" as I struggled to come to terms with

my subjectivities. Several factors surfaced that significantly impacted my non-positivist

stance. First, as a young person, the adults in my church, family and community guided

me in my development. These adults seemed to believe in seeing the world through

narrow lenses. I was taught there was one way to see things, the American way.   These

adults believed there was one truth and things were clearly right or wrong from their

perspective. As I grew older, I struggled with this definitive outlook. I could, and felt

more comfortable, looking at life from many different perspectives. Knowledge seemed

ever changing and the line between right and wrong was not always so clearly defined. I liken my struggle with quantitative research to the struggle I had with this definitive perspective. It did not fit me.

It seems society places less and less value on life. Recently, I watched a documentary in which people insisted pictures of their loved ones accompany reports of their horrific deaths. These people believed that simply reporting numbers had no impact on the listening audience. For them, putting faces on the numbers and sharing information about their personal lives sent forth a much stronger message. I believe qualitative research has the potential to impact our world with much stronger messages. Qualitative research provides as opportunity to present things in our world, in depth and in a way that quantitative research cannot. In "Looking for Patterns: A Conversation with Carl W. Peters," Charles Movalli (1977) shares an artist perspective that can be applied to qualitative research. Movalli writes:

> Don't look back: look forward. Don't think about something you've
> done before. Sometimes you do your best work because you're
> involved in what's going on. (p. 81)

Qualitative research offers the opportunity to portray an emic perspective adding to the strength of the work and allowing one to "paint the world as it is." (Movalli, 1977)

I bring to my research a strong Constructivist perspective. This perspective reflects my journey through life. As a child, I was one of five children. I had the advantage of a stay-at-home mom while my father struggled to start his own business. A limited income provided for few luxuries. Friends would talk about travels to faraway places that I could only dream about. I had an insatiable desire to learn about my world. I listened to their stories with great interest. I longed for similar experiences. I turned to

the only resource available to me, books. I developed a passion for reading. I could travel the world and quench my desire for knowledge through the printed word. My desire to understand my world is as strong today as it was over 40 years ago.

I took a course in qualitative research and along the way I came to better understand myself. What an incredible journey it has been! I took a course in qualitative research and opened a door of discovery. I took a course in qualitative research and learned the importance of being me. I took a course in qualitative research that forced me to come to terms with my personhood. And, my journey through qualitative research reaffirmed my belief that it is okay to see the world through different lenses.   Qualitative research is a journey that has no end. Qualitative research is a journey that holds many possibilities for great adventures ahead.