The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical strategies used by elementary principals when interacting with parents. Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical framework for the study, and grounded theory was the methodology. On-site interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews were the primary data sources. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data as well as to generate theory grounded in the data.

Principals were found to have two types of interactions with parents: formal and informal. Each type of interaction has two subcategories, anticipated and unanticipated. Principals used four micropolitical strategies in their interactions with parents. The first, exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, involves all actions principals use to make parents feel welcome when entering the school or meeting with administration. The second, creating a climate of respect, involves two premises: giving and receiving basic respect. The third, establishing and maintaining communication, involves the manner and way in which principals stay in contact with parents. The final strategy, building relationships, involves the steps or actions principals take to establish a relationship with parents. Principals’ use of these strategies
influenced the resolution of any conflictual interaction. Three possible effects resulted from use of these strategies: finding a resolution, strengthening the relationship, and/or reaching an impasse. When successful resolution is achieved, the relationship between the school and home is usually strengthened. When the principal is unsuccessful in attempts to arrive at resolution, an impasse is reached. In this case, the parties either agree to walk away or the issue is referred higher up the chain of command.

A theoretical framework revealed by the study is also discussed. Implicit in the theoretical framework is the idea that principals effectively implement micropolitical strategies to reach successful resolution of conflict. In using micropolitical strategies identified in this study, principals sought to influence interactions to achieve positive resolutions of conflicts.

Implications for future research are discussed and include possibilities for investigation into nonverbal cues. Implications for practitioners, as well as for university personnel, are presented. Practitioners must be aware of types of parental interactions in which they engage and must also be conscious of micropolitical strategies they employ. University personnel should include a study of micropolitics in their preparatory programs so that principal candidates are knowledgeable in the use and effects of such conflict resolution strategies.

INDEX WORDS: Principal-parent interactions, Micropolitical strategies, Conflict resolution, Resolution
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ MICROPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON INTERACTIONS WITH PARENTS

by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A principal’s day is filled with interactions – interactions with students, teachers, parents, other administrators, and the community. Research conducted by Goldring and Shapira (1996) determined that the interactions between principals and parents are the product of processes exclusive to each school and are negotiated and routinized over time. The particular focus of this study was the principal-parent interaction.

Political interactions dominate organizations and require the use of power to retain or obtain control (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). Research about principal-teacher interactions revealed two strategies commonly used by principals in their interactions: control and protection (Blase, 1990). The micropolitical strategies used by principals are predicated on the use of power, both formal and informal. These strategies might also apply to principals’ interactions with parents.

Schools are inherently conflictual because lines of control do not and cannot remain well-defined (Ball, 1987). Each interaction between principal and parent is initiated with a goal in mind. The goal is determined by the originator of the interaction and may not match the goal of the other participant. The political actions which result from the interaction are based on the differences, real or perceived, between the parties (Blase, 1991b).

The decisions that a principal must make while engaged in any interaction with parents are part of a political process. This political process or micropolitical activity will entail conflict
While conflict is innate in micropolitical settings, it is not always ultimately destructive (Ball, 1987). Principals must involve parents in the process of identifying what is important to move toward resolution of the conflict.

This study examined the interactions between seven Georgia principals and parents in the respective schools. In addition to types of interactions, the study examined strategies used by principals while engaged in these interactions and the effects of applying such strategies. This chapter begins with a brief introduction which is followed by an overview of relevant literature. The third section of this chapter is a statement of the problem. The fourth section is a description of the study and includes the purpose of the study, the research questions, the assumptions made by the researcher, and the sample selection procedures. The fifth section outlines the research design and the sixth details the significance of the study. The seventh section addresses the limitations of the study. The final section provides an overview of the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

Literature Overview

The review of literature related to this study is divided into four categories: overview of micropolitics, studies addressing micropolitical strategies used by principals, non-micropolitical studies relating to parental involvement, and studies addressing interpersonal conflict. The study of micropolitics seeks to identify, delineate, and explore fundamentals of human behavior as they relate to power, influence, and conflict. The works of Bacharach and Lawler (1980), Ball (1987), Blase (1991a, 1991b), and Pfeffer (1981) are discussed. Other micropolitical studies pertaining to principals’ interactions are discussed with an emphasis on strategies employed by principals. Because micropolitical studies relating to principal-parent interactions are scarce, studies
focusing on parental involvement and interpersonal conflict are included in the review of the extant literature.

**Overview of Micropolitics**

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) asserted that power is a fundamental component of any political analysis of any organization. Three aspects of power include: relational, dependence, and sanctioning. Power is a method of interaction and is positioned within the interactive situation.

Ball (1987) wrote that micropolitics is conflictual in nature and emphasized the negative struggles that exist in the school setting. He focused his writings primarily on the organizational aspects of the school, particularly the meso-level, an intermediate level of analysis that focuses on interactions which occur between the individual and the group as a whole. Schools are arenas of struggle, rife with conflicts among members. The conflicts are both perceived and real.

Ball (1987) further asserted that power must be seen differently when viewed through the lens of micropolitics. Power leads to action and is based on performance, achievement, and struggle. It is an outcome. Decision-making, because it is not based on positional authority, cannot be determined by an organizational chart. Rather, it becomes a political process, a micropolitical activity.

Power should also be seen as a force. Pfeffer (1981) characterized power as something that has been legitimized over time. Rather than being based on positional authority, power transforms into authority. Power is specific to the relationship or the context of the interaction. Micropolitics, from Pfeffer’s perspective, is derived from those actions or behaviors through which power is developed. Power must be exercised to accomplish something political. Power may also be expanded through the application of micropolitics.
Pfeffer (1981) also found that power becomes even more prevalent when parties have differing goals. Conflict occurs when goals are inconsistent with each other. When conflict is present, power will be asserted. The degree of power depends on the scarcity of resources. When there is no scarcity, there is no decision to be made, and no use of power results.

Disparities exist regarding definitions of micropolitics with respect to the emphasis placed by the individual theorist on power, influence, goals, actions, needs, process and structure, and both conflictual and cooperative interactions (Blase, 1991b). Blase sought to incorporate the beliefs of prevailing theorists with his broad-based definition of micropolitics. “Micropolitics refers to the use of power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations…. [A]ctions result from perceived differences…coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect….any action…[that] may have political ‘significance’…. [C]ooperative and conflictive actions are part of micropolitics….” (Blase, 1991b).

Overview of Studies Addressing Micropolitical Strategies of Principals

Studies of the micropolitical interactions of principals and teachers are abundant while those of principal-parent interactions are scarce. Inferences from research about principals and teachers are relevant for this study. Nine micropolitical strategies differentiate micropolitics from mere management when used by principals in interactions with teachers. These strategies include exchange, dividing and ruling, cooptation, displacement, controlling information, controlling meetings, discretionary behavior, relying on the elements of the informal organization, and face saving (Cilo, 1994; Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980; Hoyle, 1999).

Blase (1990) studied the political behaviors used by school principals and found two prevalent strategies: control and protection. Control tactics were seen to be negative, non-
negotiable, and predetermined. Protection tactics were designed to reduce the principal’s vulnerability to external pressures.

Further studies by Blase (1991a, 1993) continued to investigate the impact of principal behaviors, identifying principals as closed or open. Closed principals are authoritarian and controlling while open principals appear to use a diplomatic, problem-solving approach. While being control-oriented and protective offers little to the principal seeking to enhance parental interactions, being open and effective may allow the principal to accomplish desired goals more successfully.

Greenfield (1991) argued that principal leadership relies more on moral influence than formal authority. He discussed a range of micropolitical strategies employed by a principal when dealing with teachers. These strategies include involving teachers in the decision-making process, availability of the principal, strategic hiring of staff, gathering information about staff opinions, soliciting staff opinions, reading teacher responses, and being a careful observer or listener. Several of these strategies do have significant implications when considered for interactions with parents. Furthermore, Greenfield’s study indicates that moral sources of influence are more likely to endure longer than other types of influence.

Malen’s (1994) research suggested that parents and principals interact in both formal and informal arenas. Parents could become contentious and mobilize when events suggest discrepancies between what parents want or expect and what schools provide. Principals manage conflict with parents through the use of four major strategies which seek to minimize conflict rather than equalize power. These strategies involve principals acting as leaders, passivists, placaters, and neutralizers.
Corbett (1991) determined that routine intervention by parents could be an effective strategy for prompting change. When principals seek to avoid conflict through inaction, they may actually allow parents to achieve a redistribution of power from the teachers to the parents. Only when there are opportunities to assert influence over others can power exist.

*Overview of Non-Micropolitical Studies Addressing Parental Involvement*

Even though studies of principal-parent interactions with a micropolitical focus are scarce, studies pertaining to parental involvement in schools are plentiful. No one clear definition of parental involvement exists but rather a multidimensional construct that typically involves parental aspirations, parental communications with their children, parental participation, parental communication with teachers, and parental supervision (Fan, 2001).

The research of Goldring and Shapira (1996) found that parents clearly influence school effectiveness. Parents impact student achievement, cognitive development, and advancement of the school’s mission. Two types of principal-parent interactions were revealed by the research to have significance: parents as supporters and parents as leaders. Results of their study also found that clear boundaries must be established with regard to the school community and parental involvement. This requires a balance between soliciting support and establishing the school as the educational authority.

Lawson (2003) researched teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of parental involvement. Two of the five themes discovered in his study have potential significance for principal-parent interactions. These are blocked pathways and changing times.

In studying the demise of parental involvement in school governance, Seitsinger and Zera (2002) determined parental involvement has the ability to shift power, influence, and authority.
According to their findings, parents assert perceived, actual, and potential influence and most parents are aware of this.

Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) studied parental involvement in schools with high numbers of migrant families. Their research found that meeting the needs of these families was one of the main criteria for parental involvement. Use of a single approach would not be sufficient. Schools experiencing success did so because they focused their efforts on meeting the needs of the families.

In studying parents’ social networks, Sheldon (2002) determined that size of parents’ social networks is a predictor of the degree to which parents are involved at home and at school. Parents with greater ties to other adults also reported higher levels of involvement with their children at home and at school.

While studies regarding parental involvement have much to offer, they do not address principal-parent interactions with any degree of specificity. The present study added to the knowledge base regarding principal-parent interactions and strategies used by principals during these interactions. Additionally, the study determined the effect of these strategies on interactions.

*Overview of Studies Addressing Interpersonal Conflict*

Many studies regarding conflict exist in the literature. One was found to have particular relevance for this study on principal-parent interactions. Zalman and Bryant’s (2002) study focused on behaviors exhibited by principals when interacting with parents. They categorized these behaviors into those that led to successful resolution and those that resulted in no successful resolution of the conflict.
Statement of the Problem

The micropolitical perspective underlying this study was that attributed to Blase (1991b). He stated that micropolitics is about power, conflict, competition, and cooperation. Micropolitics, according to Blase, is about how people use power to protect themselves and influence others while seeking to attain that which is important to them. Much if not all of the research relating to the micropolitical interactions of principals has focused on the interactions between principals and teachers (Blase, 1990, 1991a, 1993; Cilo, 1994; Corbett, 1991; Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980; Greenfield, 1991; Hoyle, 1999; Malen, 1994). While much is known about how micropolitics applies to the school as an organization and to the principal while interacting with teachers, little is known about how principals apply these same micropolitical activities to their interactions with parents. The lack of research on principal-parent interactions revealed a gap that could be partially filled with a study on how principals interact with parents, what strategies they employ during these interactions, and the effectiveness of such strategies. This study provided a more complete analysis of these interactions, strategies, and subsequent results.

Description of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies used by elementary level principals in their interactions with parents. The study was conducted from the perspective of the principal and involved seven elementary principals across four Georgia counties.
Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were open-ended and process-oriented, which is typical of grounded theory research:

1. What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?
2. What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?
3. What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents?

Assumptions

Assumptions made by the researcher for purposes of this study included the following:

1. The reputation of the principals as effective was accurate.
2. The participants had engaged in interactions with parents in and out of the school setting and some of the interactions had been contentious.
3. The participants employed micropolitical strategies.
4. The participants sought to use micropolitical strategies to achieve goals.

Sample Selection Process

Purposeful sampling was used to select the principal participants for this study. The researcher selected the sample based on reputation. By employing a homogeneous sample, the researcher was able to focus and streamline the data collection process by filtering data to identify common strategies used by participants.

Research Design

The focus of this qualitative study was micropolitical strategies employed by principals who are perceived as effective. The theoretical perspective informing the study was symbolic interactionism, defined by Blumer (1969) as “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (pp. 65-66). The research
process was guided by grounded theory methodology, from identification of participants through 
data collection and analysis, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In a study of this kind, 
theory is discovered from data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stern, 1994; Strauss & 
Corbin, 1994, 1998). Theory generated from data is much less likely to be contested or 
supplanted by another theory. “Since it is too intimately linked to data, [the theory] is destined to 
last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). Theory 
regarding use of particular strategies emerges as the density of recorded behaviors increases 
(Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 1992, 2003; Cresswell, 1998; Hodder, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 

**Data Sources**

Data sources included interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews. Notes 
and materials were organized in a research file for subsequent microanalysis.

In-depth interviews provided data about principals’ interactions with parents and 
strategies principals used during the interactions. Initial interviews were unstructured while 
follow-up interviews were structured based on analyzed data. After categories began to emerge, 
use of a more structured format in interviewing allowed categories to saturate. With participant 
agreement, all interviews were audio recorded to allow for transcription. Informed consent was 
obtained and confidentiality of participant data was guaranteed. Analysis and findings were 
reported to participants to confirm accuracy of interpretation.

Observation was also used as a means of saturating emerging data and subsequent 
categories as revealed through interviews and documents. Along with interview notes and 
transcriptions, notes from observations were microanalyzed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 1992,
Field notes and reflections were recorded in the research file and were coded along with other data. All data collected and analyzed were organized through use of the research file.

Document review was used as a data source. Official documents such as meeting agendas, parent letters, newsletters, handbooks, and other school related documents were collected and analyzed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

**Triangulation**

Use of these four data sources was intended to provide as complete an examination as possible to achieve validity through triangulation. Merriam (1998) defined triangulation as “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204). To ensure complete examination of data, use of multiple data sources was employed.

**Significance of the Study**

As stated, research centering on principal-teacher interactions is plentiful. However, research that focuses on principal-parent interactions is extremely limited. Very little practical knowledge exists about micropolitical strategies used by principals when interacting with parents. Given limited research relating to principal-parent interactions, results of this study have potential theoretical and practical significance.

**Theoretical Significance**

Results of this study significantly contribute to the limited knowledge base regarding principal-parent interactions. Because of the study’s in-depth focus on types of interactions and
strategies used by principals, its findings have theoretical significance. In the absence of sufficient literature addressing principal-parent interactions, this study provides an initial foundation for future studies. Furthermore, the findings suggest that principals use certain micropolitical strategies to achieve their goals during any interaction.

**Practical Significance**

Results of this study have practical significance for public schools and university preparatory programs. Its findings provide public school administrators with new knowledge concerning micropolitical strategies that will work well with parents. Educational leadership programs could use these findings to elucidate effective strategies used by principals as they interact with parents to seek resolution to conflicts.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitation of this study is its representativeness. By including only seven participants, selected participants might not have been representative of the entire principal population. Likewise, demographics of schools involved in the study might not have been representative of the State as a whole. To minimize impact of these limitations, the study included in-depth analysis of interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. With a larger sample, it would have been difficult to carry out such in-depth analysis.

**Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

The remaining chapters in this dissertation include Chapter Two, a review of literature; Chapter Three, methodology used; Chapter Four, findings of the study; and Chapter Five, summary, discussion, and implications.
Chapter Two reviews literature pertaining to both micropolitics and principal-parent interactions. Micropolitics is discussed from the vantage point of four main theorists. This discussion includes a summary of prominent points as well as their relevance to the study. Behaviors principals exhibit as they work with both teachers and parents are also reviewed.

Chapter Three provides a thorough description of methodology used in the study. This description includes a review of symbolic interactionism, more detailed information on participant selection, an overview of data collection processes, a discussion of grounded theory methodology, and an explanation of conditions used to increase credibility and reduce subjectivity.

Chapter Four presents the researcher’s findings from collected and analyzed data. It includes discussion of the core category and subsequent category set that emerged from data and incorporates the participants’ own words to support the findings.

Chapter Five, the final chapter, summarizes and discusses the most salient findings of this study in light of existing research and literature. It connects the category set to the core category, *resolution*. It also presents the theoretical framework that has emerged from and is supported by the data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications for future research and significance of findings.
Principals engage in numerous interactions throughout each day. Among these, interactions with parents figure prominently. Micropolitical strategies employed by principals significantly influence outcomes of these interactions. Despite this prominence, there is a significant absence of empirical research regarding interactions between principals and parents. Consequently, this literature review sets a limited context for understanding these micropolitical strategies and desired outcomes of principal-parent interactions.

This chapter contains four sections and a summary. The first section of Chapter Two is a brief overview of research and writings on micropolitics. The second section presents an overview of research addressing principals and micropolitical strategies they routinely use. Because very little empirical research regarding principal-parent interactions exists, the third section offers a review of the limited literature related to parental involvement, absent any relationship to micropolitics. The final section of Chapter Two provides a brief review of more salient research on interpersonal conflict and its implications for principals.

Overview of Micropolitics

The study of micropolitics, or the micropolitical perspective, seeks to identify, delineate, and explore fundamentals of human behavior:

Micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they
want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends. It is about what people in all social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is often unspoken and not easily observed. (Blase, 1991b, p. 1)

While the study of micropolitics is not new, early studies (Burns, 1961; Cyert & March, 1963; Pettigrew, 1973; Strauss, 1962) tended to focus primarily on a growing frustration with traditional theories related to public administration, management, and organizational politics. More recent theorists (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991a, 1991b; Mangham, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981) have seemingly embraced the idea that these earlier traditional-rational systems promoted, rather than sought to minimize, conflict and political interactions while also ignoring inherent individual differences among people. Furthermore, these more recent theorists believe that earlier theorists failed to acknowledge the impact of political actions of people and resulting organizational structures. More recent theorists also felt that earlier theorists ignored individual differences of members of a group with regard to “values, ideologies, choices, goals, interests, expertise, history, motivation, and interpretation – factors central to the micropolitical perspective” (Blase, 1991b, p. 3).

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) offered a paradigm of intraorganizational politics that sought to combine the social psychology of politics and the structural analysis of organizations. Underlying their work is the assumption, “Organizational life is dominated by political interactions; politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources” (p. 1). Therefore, power is a fundamental component of any political analysis of an organization.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) described three aspects of power: relational, dependence, and sanctioning. They stated that most noted definitions of power are based on the assumption that power is a method of interaction rather than a “characteristic that stands independent of and
in opposition to the actors engaged in the interaction” (p. 16). In this assumption, power is positioned within the interactive situation, presuming that individuals in the situation take into account each other, that one individual is attempting to direct or control the other, and that they are in the same or a common situation.

Consequently, according to Bacharach and Lawler (1980), power is entrenched in all social relationships, relationships are seen and depicted in terms of dependence, the dependence defines the parameters of the relationship, and the dependence relationship necessitates the identification and use of sanctions. The questions then become “When is power asserted?” and “When does it yield success?” They suggested that power struggles occur at all levels of an organization and that these struggles result in group-level coalitions, meaning “joint action by two or more interest groups against another subgroup in an organizational context” (p. 45).

Recalling that Bacharach and Lawler (1980) worked within a framework bound by the assumption that political interactions dominate organizations and require use of power to retain or obtain control of resources clarifies their assertion that organizational structure results from political competition/cooperation. They advocated viewing the organization as a composite of groups, making the units of analysis the subgroups within the organization rather than the organization itself. They offered the analysis of two intertwined occurrences – coalitions and bargaining – as the foundation of any study of organizational politics. Given that the influence of an individual is more limited than that of a group with a common goal, coalitions emerge based on shared objectives and seek to apply sanctions to achieve a successful outcome in the bargaining. As a political model, Bacharach and Lawler’s theories focus on group-level coalition politics with a clear emphasis on coalitions and bargaining.
Ball (1987) offered a micropolitical perspective that emphasizes the conflictual nature of micropolitics: the negative struggles that exist in the school setting. Ball identified an ongoing “failure to recognize the peculiar nature of schools as organizations,” which has consequently resulted in a failure to go directly to the source, to seek out the thoughts and opinions of those found within the schools (p. 7). This failure in turn dominoes into a “drastic lack of basic research into organizational aspects of school life” (p. 7).

Ball’s (1987) perspective is linked to three areas of organizational activity: (a) the interests of the actors, (b) the maintenance of organizational control, and (c) the conflict over policy. Ball asserted that the school is inherently conflictual:

[F]ields of control do not, indeed cannot, remain distinct. . . . The boundaries of control are continually being redrawn. . . . The changing pattern of control is not the product of abstract organizational systems; rather, it emerges from the confrontations and interactions between individuals and groups in the organization. (p. 10)

He stated that this conflict perspective underpins his micropolitical perspective and credited Baldridge (1971) for the main tenets of his own perspective:

1. Conflict theorists emphasize the fragmentation of social systems into interest groups, each with its own particular goals.

2. Conflict theorists study the interaction of these different interest groups and especially the conflict processes by which one group tries to gain advantage over another.

3. Interest groups cluster around divergent values, and the study of conflicting interests is a key part of the analysis.

4. The study of change is a central feature of the conflict approach, for change is to be expected if the social system is fragmented by divergent values and conflicting interest groups. (p. 18)

Ball (1987) indicated that these four tenets comprise what he referred to as micropolitics of the school. While other theorists have offered similar open and exhaustive definitions of micropolitics, Ball preferred to limit his with regard to these four tenets as well as his three key
areas of organizational activity. He regarded the following as his own agenda for the study of micropolitics and conflict within the school setting:

I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts. (Ball, 1987, p. 19, emphasis in original)

Ball (1987) took care, however, to recognize potential for schools to achieve consensus. “It should be recognized that where the grounds for conflict are specified, the conditions for the absence of conflict may also be determined” (Ball, 1987, p. 20). While conflict is innate in the micropolitical setting, it is not always ultimately destructive.

Also important is Ball’s (1987) claim that the assumption of authority, rather than the concept of power, is not helpful. He stated, “Power is a more active, penetrating and flexible concept in this context, but the concept of power employed here is a particular one. It does not involve reference to position or capacity as such but to performance, achievement and struggle. . . Power is to be taken as an outcome” (p. 25). In this view, authority ceases to be meaningful outside a particular position. Ball said, “Decision-making is not an abstract rational process which can be plotted on an organizational chart; it is a political process, it is the stuff of micropolitical activity” (p. 26). As a result, it will entail conflict.

Pfeffer (1981) offered a micropolitical perspective that recognizes politics and power as fundamental when examining organizational behavior when he indicated that power was specific to the context. Like Ball (1987), Pfeffer distinguished power from authority; however, whereas Ball saw power as more than authority, Pfeffer characterized authority as power that has been legitimized over time; power transforms into authority (p. 4). Consequently, power should be seen as a force:
If power is a force, a store of potential influence through which events can be affected, politics involves those activities or behaviors through which power is developed and used in organizational settings. Power is a property of the system at rest; politics is the study of power in action. . . . Politics involves the exercise of power to get something accomplished, as well as those activities which are undertaken to expand the power already possessed or the scope over which it can be exercised. (p. 7)

Furthermore, Pfeffer (1981) expanded his theory by identifying three conditions for use of power. The first, interdependence, provides a basis for conflict or interaction between the participants. Interdependence, according to Pfeffer, is a “situation in which what happens to one organizational actor affects what happens to others” (p. 68). This situation provides a connection between subgroups, or as Bacharach and Lawler (1980) posited, coalitions or interest groups. One group becomes concerned with what another does or acquires, either as the acquisition or act advances one group over the other or as one group is dependent on the work of the other to complete its own work.

The second condition of the use of power has to do with differing goals. When goals are inconsistent with each other, conflict results. When conflict is present, according to Pfeffer (1981), power will be asserted. Agreement is not inevitable in any organization, particularly when there is an absence of homogeneity in goals.

The third, and potentially most significant, condition of the use of power involves scarcity of resources. When there is no scarcity, there is no decision to be made and no use of power results:

To the extent that resources are insufficient to meet the various demands of organizational participants, choices have to be made concerning the allocation of those resources. The greater the scarcity as compared to the demand, the greater the power and the effort that will be expended in resolving the decision. (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 69)

Thus, conflict, according to Pfeffer (1981), is produced by the combination of scarcity, interdependence, and heterogeneous goals. Existence of interdependence and heterogeneous
goals alone, however, is not enough to create conflict. Scarcity must also be an issue. This amalgamation of the three in concert necessitates two additional conditions in use of power: (a) the degree of importance of the decision or the resource and (b) the distribution of power. If the resource or decision is trivial, then potential for conflict and the resulting use of power will be minimal. Pfeffer also posited, “When power is highly centralized, the centralized authority makes decisions using its own rules and values” (p. 70). If power is dispersed, then political activity, bargaining, and coalition formation can occur.

Pfeffer (1981) asserted that the political model “suggests that organizations are characterized by uncertainty and conflict;” accordingly, managers or administrators in the organization will need certain critical skills, including tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, ability to confront conflict, and ability to manage conflict and advocacy. As a result of uncertainty and conflict pervading an organization, Pfeffer suggested, “[B]argaining and negotiation are the primary decision-making modes, and analysis is seen as a tool in the power struggle rather than the way through which decisions are made” (p. 354). Viewing the decision-making process in this manner will have significant implications for any school administrator.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) advocated the need to view an organization as a composite of groups with an emphasis on coalitions and bargaining. Ball (1987) called attention to the conflictual nature of micropolitics. Pfeffer (1981) furthered the cause of power as a force that arises from interdependence, heterogeneous goals, and scarcity of resources. In developing his definition of micropolitics, Blase (1991b) incorporated beliefs espoused by Bacharach and Lawler (1980), Ball (1987), and Pfeffer (1981), among others. As previously stated, Blase (1991a) sought to develop a broad-based definition that would take into account disparities in beliefs of other theorists while avoiding potential for any limitations that might restrict future
research and subsequent implications. As a result, the micropolitical perspective put forth by Blase “presents practicing administrators and scholars alike with fresh and provocative ways to think about human behavior in schools” (pp. 1-2).

Recent micropolitical theories have sought to explore rationales underlying these individual differences and how said differences impact power and its use in an organization. Blase (1991b) developed a solid working definition of micropolitics based on his own research and his analysis of the conceptual work of the earlier theorists:

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political “significance” in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro- and micropolitics factors frequently interact. (p. 11)

This broad-based definition takes into account disparities in existing micropolitical perspectives. Disparities exist with respect to the emphasis placed by the individual theorists on power, influence, goals, actions, needs, process and structure, and both conflictive and cooperative interactions. The definition, according to Blase, is intentionally broad, seeking to avoid any limitations that “would artificially restrict conceptual and empirical work on organizational politics and would ignore important aspects of life in schools” (p. 12).

Overview of Studies

Addressing Micropolitical Strategies of Principals

Various micropolitical studies have been completed within the last two decades. These studies addressed a range of issues, particularly with regard to teacher-administrator interactions and relations. Unfortunately, none overtly addressed the principal-parent micropolitical
interactions that occur daily within a school. Some studies focused on increasing parental involvement, and at times, the role played by the administration was discussed. Studies reviewed herein are limited to those that focused on strategies employed by principals when interacting with teachers rather than those that addressed teacher strategies. This limitation should maintain applicability and transferability to the proposed study regarding principal-parent interactions. Rationale for this limitation may be found in Corbett’s (1991) claim that “superordinates rely on sources of power different from those that subordinates rely on to influence the behavior of others – primarily authority and endorsement in the former instance and primarily invisibility in the latter case” (p. 93).

Hoyle (1986) wrote extensively about relevant literature of micropolitics and determined that micropolitics consists of “strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of authority and influence to further their interests” (p. 126). He indicated that while its existence was widely recognized, micropolitics was not a widely researched aspect of schools. In his work, he attempted to synthesize available research and theory. Hoyle described his writing as “theoretically eclectic” and somewhat grounded in “conventional organizational theory,” but his purpose was to address the number of emerging perspectives which focused on “political and symbolic aspects of organizations” (p. 21).

Hoyle (1986) stated that it was the strategies that most clearly distinguished micropolitics from mere management and he identified six micropolitical strategies that, when employed by principals, evidenced this distinction (p. 127). These strategies included exchanges, dividing and ruling, cooptation, displacement, controlling information, and controlling meetings. They may be defined as follows:
1. Exchanges – both teachers and principals have “goods” that they exchange with each other.

2. Dividing and ruling – principals avoid full faculty meetings or treat them as purely informational and then make deals with individual teachers or departments about specific matters.

3. Cooptation – principals take in their competition rather than isolate them.

4. Displacement – principals disguise the real issue, which is often personal, with a legitimate, professional one.

5. Controlling information – principals practice the strategic acquisition, distribution, presentation, doctoring, and withholding of information.

6. Controlling meetings – principals seek to control the selection of agenda items, interpret “consensus,” pressure committee members, and massage the minutes. (Hoyle, 1986, pp. 135-148)

Hoyle (1986) considered two plausible reasons why schools would be especially open to micropolitical activities: the openness of schools which allows such activity to flourish and the competition in decision-making that can arise from formal power of the principal and grassroots power of the staff (p. 148). It would be, he asserted, through examination of micropolitical strategies evidenced in schools that one could come to understand fully that which goes on in schools.

Cilo (1994) constructed a study intended to focus on how principals worked to accomplish their goals in situations where authority and conventional methods were less than effective. The methodology used in his study was the critical incident technique and a set of general interview questions. Cilo’s sample included 30 Pennsylvania high school principals each with at least five years experience as a principal. In his study, he used Hoyle’s six strategies and an additional one identified by Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1980). This seventh strategy, discretionary behavior, afforded the principal the means to bend rules to fit the situation when resources are scarce (Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980). Cilo’s study revealed two additional
micropolitical strategies employed by principals: “relying on elements of the ‘informal organization,’ and face-saving” (p. 92).

According to Cilo (1994), the presence of micropolitical strategies is certain:

In the multifaceted reality of school administration, there is the authority of the principal, the autonomy and collegiality of the teachers, and the relatively scarce resources between them. This combination of factors means that the administration of the school depends on power and influence; if there are power and influence, then there is micropolitics to get the job done. (pp. 90-91)

Based on this assumption, Cilo conducted his study with the intent of determining if any micropolitical techniques were employed by principals to accomplish their jobs. He found that 80% of the principals indicated they did use at least one identifiable micropolitical strategy. The micropolitical strategies most frequently cited were exchanges, dividing and conquering, and informal networking. Cilo cautioned against employing manipulative micropolitical strategies aimed at pursuing individual interests and advocated instead those strategies and tactics aimed at maximizing the collective benefit.

Blase (1990) conducted a study examining politics in schools from the perspectives of teachers. Data collection and analysis were based on a symbolic interactionist approach. Use of an open-ended questionnaire allowed participants to respond freely regarding their perceptions of politics in schools. The original sample for this study was comprised of 902 teachers but was ultimately reduced to a sample size of 276 after initial responses were coded. Blase conducted the study and reported on political behaviors used by school principals.

Blase's (1990) study revealed two strategies: control and protection. Control tactics were seen as manipulative, coercive, forceful, stressful, punishing, deceptive, self-serving, narrowly conceived, highly proactive, and unilateral. He stated, “The direction of influence was from
principals to teachers and the ends were seen as predecided and nonnegotiable” (p. 734). Teachers responded to these control strategies in a largely negative manner.

In contrast, the protective strategy reflected greater reactivity on the part of the principals. These strategies were used by principals in an effort to reduce vulnerability of principal to external pressures. However, data revealed that a principal’s need to make use of protective strategies generally related strongly to the use of control tactics with teachers. When principals found themselves in need of protective strategies, they manifested these tactics through additional or enhanced control strategies with teachers.

Blase (1990) concluded that an overwhelming portion of data indicated that these control-oriented behaviors had a negative impact on teachers. Furthermore, he asserted, “Negative effects for qualitative school-wide involvement were associated with decreases in voluntary participation in programs” (p. 747).

Blase (1991a) continued to investigate the impact of principal behaviors by conducting a study aimed at teachers’ interactions with closed principals. His study used an exploratory approach grounded in the symbolic interactionist perspective. Data were obtained through use of an open-ended questionnaire and, consistent with grounded theory methodology, were analyzed through use of a comparative method for inductive analysis. The original sample of 770 teachers was reduced to a subsample of 366 after initial coding of responses, allowing the study to focus on respondents who specifically discussed political strategies they employed with closed principals.

Closed principals, according to Blase's (1991a) research, are authoritarian, controlling, directive, autocratic, dictatorial, inaccessible, unsupportive, inflexible, and inequitable. Both of
these studies by Blase (1990 and 1991a) have significant impact on principals as they seek to enhance their parental interactions.

In a later study, Blase (1993) described the “overall strategic orientation of open and effective principals toward teachers” (p. 155). For this study, data collection and analysis were grounded in a symbolic interactionist perspective. Making use of an open-ended questionnaire, Blase sought to answer the question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of the strategies that school principals use to influence them?” (p. 145). The sample included more than 1,200 respondents, 836 of whom identified their principals as open, effective, and participatory (p. 146). Blase then focused on this subsample in view of the study’s focus.

Blase (1993) used the term normative-instrumental leadership to describe this orientation of open and effective principals: normative because the strategies are normative and they are applied to normative goals, and instrumental because the use of the normative strategies and goals is pragmatically linked to attaining teacher compliance. In this study, Blase determined, based on the data, that “open and effective principals were seen as using a range of formal and informal, direct and indirect, public and private, and individually and group-targeted means to influence teachers” (p. 156). Additionally, open and effective principals appeared to use a diplomatic, problem-solving approach. They worked throughout the school to create opportunities to impact teacher performance.

Considering all three of these studies (Blase 1990, 1991a, 1993), it became apparent that being control oriented and protective offered little to a principal seeking to enhance principal-teacher interactions. Conversely, being open and effective allowed the principal to accomplish desired goals in a more open and receptive manner.
Greenfield (1991) conducted a study in an exploratory mode, the focus of which was to uncover ideas about what school leadership looks like on a daily basis. He based his study on theoretical perspectives of micropolitics and leadership. The study was conducted using a series of open-ended interviews and observations with the teachers and principal of an urban elementary school.

Greenfield (1991) found that “the principal’s commitment to achieve what is in the best interests of children is a central criterion shaping the principal’s orientation to teachers and, in turn, her capacity to influence teachers to adopt certain goals or to pursue certain lines of action” (p. 172). He argued that principal leadership relies more on moral influence than on formal authority. The principal in Greenfield’s study noted two problems faced in attempts to foster school leadership: resistance to change in general and an inability to work directly with teachers due to demands on her time and attention. To counteract these problems, the principal employed a variety of micropolitical strategies. These included shared governance, availability, strategic hiring, knowledge of teacher concerns, responsiveness to teachers, and observant listening (pp. 174-178).

Beyond these micropolitical strategies, Greenfield (1991) also stated that a principal must possess the sophistication necessary to exhibit “a considerable sociocultural adroitness in knowing which micropolitical tactic or strategy is most likely to work at a given time” (p. 178). Also important is his identification of the distinguishing characteristics of the professional school leader:

Such a leader reflects a style of influence that draws heavily upon moral and ideological sources of power that reside within the situation of the school itself and within the values and beliefs of the actors themselves, the teachers, and the school principal. It is a style that has an interpersonal quality in its reliance upon face-to-face interactions and expressive activities with teachers as the vehicle for influence, and it is a style that builds upon the natural potential for collaboration that characterizes the kind of work that
teaching and school administration entail. . . . The basis for influence . . . is rooted in an assumed obligation or duty on the part of teachers and the principal alike to do whatever is necessary to serve the best interests of children. (Greenfield, 1991, pp. 182-183)

Underlying these characteristics of the professional school leader is moral cooperation using moral sources of influence. According to Greenfield’s (1991) study, moral sources of influence are likely to endure longer than other types of influence. In schools where parental involvement is high or where school personnel are seeking to elevate parental involvement, such a statement has strong implications for active principals.

Malen (1994), in writing about micropolitics of education, attempted to provide an overview of the micropolitics of schools, synthesize pieces of research, and identify issues facing researchers (p. 147). She reported that parents and principals interact in both formal and informal arenas. While most interactions rest on the premise that schools make policy and parents should agree, Malen suggested that schools are well aware that the parents could become contentious at any time. She credited Iannaccone and Lutz’s (1970) work when she stated, “Parents tend to mobilize when events signal that discrepancies between community expectations and school operations exceed the ‘zone of tolerance’” (p. 149). Principals, according to Malen, typically manage these potential tensions through professional interactions reflective of traditional perceptions – perceptions in which principals are in charge and parents are for support (p. 149-150).

In her work, Malen (1994) cited Summerfield (1971) and credited him with identification of four major strategies used by principals to manage conflict with parents and communities. Principals act as leaders, seeking to secure and allocate resources to reinforce community support. Principals act as passivists, choosing not to seek resources when there is no demand for them and so avoid conflict. Principals act as symbol managers, placating parents with a denial of
real problems. Principals neutralize so that displeasure is not provoked, seeking instead to perpetuate the perception that the school is doing well. These strategies seek to minimize conflict rather than equalize power (Malen, 1994).

Malen (1994) also suggested that principals selectively enforce policies to minimize potential conflict, let certain infractions slide, and allow themselves to be influenced by parents through “private but poignant exchanges” (p. 153). These strategies suggest that “principals are not simply buffers that insulate the school from outside forces, but arbiters of disputes, negotiators of private compacts, and conduits for parent influence on programs and practices” (p. 153).

Corbett (1991) in writing about school politics and community influence based his work on events at a single high school. He collected data for a period of one year, making use of interviews, observations, and field notes. These data were compiled into a case study, and the findings determined that routine intervention by parents could be an effective strategy for prompting change. “As administrators attempt to protect the school from direct community intrusions, they can unwittingly serve as the conduits through which segments of the community indirectly influence school operations” (Corbett, 1991, p. 74). This indirect influence results in a perceived loss of power comparable to what teachers might feel had the initial intrusion been allowed. Thus, in avoiding conflict, a principal’s inaction can ultimately contribute to what he attempts to guard against: redistribution of power from teachers to parents. Corbett stated, “Power exists only where there are opportunities to exercise influence on others” (p. 74). In his study, even though the principal attempted to retain power by avoiding conflict, he ultimately relinquished power to parents through his passivity.
Overview of Non-Micropolitical Studies

Addressing Parental Involvement

While studies of principal-parent interactions with a micropolitical interest are scarce, studies pertaining to parental involvement in schools are not. Engvall (2002) stated, “One thing of which we can be certain is that disengaged parents are a problem, both for their children and for their children’s school” (p. 479). This section seeks to discuss studies that, while conducted for reasons other than an examination of micropolitical strategies used by principals, offer information that may be associated with principals’ micropolitical actions.

Fan (2001) conducted a study aimed at examining the effect of parental involvement on students’ academic growth. The researcher made use of exploratory factor analysis, multivariate analysis of covariance, and latent growth modeling analysis. The data source was the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, a large scale database. After reviewing a vast body of relevant literature, Fan asserted that there is no one clear definition of parental involvement. She suggested any or all of the following meanings:

1. Parental aspirations for their children’s academic achievement,
2. Parents’ communication with their children about education and school matters,
3. Parents’ participation in school activities,
4. Parents’ communication with teachers about their children, and/or
5. Parental supervision at home. (p. 29)

She concluded from review of the research, despite varied meanings, that it was clear that the meaning of parental involvement is “multidimensional in nature” (p. 29).
Seeking to provide empirical data that would corroborate prior suppositions regarding parent involvement, Fan (2001) conducted her study which led to the following four major findings:

1. Parental involvement has several relatively independent dimensions.

2. Once SES [socioeconomic status] was factored out, the degrees of parental involvement across the four major ethnic groups were comparable.

3. The only dimension to have a consistent and positive impact on student achievement was the parents’ educational aspirations for their children.

4. The effects, or lack of effects, of parental involvement on students’ academic growth were consistent. (pp. 56-57)

Most relevant for principals would be knowledge gained from Fan’s study regarding parents’ aspirations for their children. Principal-parent interactions could clearly be broadened, if not also strengthened, as a result of such knowledge.

Goldring and Shapira (1996) conducted four concurrent case studies in separate schools using a grounded theory methodology. The researchers’ intentions were to have findings arise from data and to examine processes typifying principal-parent relationships. Results revealed that “principal-parent interactions are the result of unique processes in each school and are negotiated and institutionalized over time” (p. 342).

Goldring and Shapira (1996) asserted that parents clearly influenced school effectiveness. Parents impacted student achievement and cognitive development as well as advancement of the school’s mission and sense of direction. According to Goldring and Shapira:

Principals try to attain relative certainty and stability for the internal functioning of the school, the teaching and learning processes, and simultaneously attempt to increase parent linkages which can contribute to the school’s goals. . . . The principal has a major role in leading the staff towards a parental involvement orientation. High expectations of teachers to involve parents will influence the extent to which the school will, in reality, have a community orientation. . . . The more principals believe that their teachers have
the necessary skills to involve parents, the more principals may open the school to parental involvement. (p. 344)

Goldring and Shapira posited that through high parent involvement, the principal was able to hear and respond to needs of individuals, both those who were vocal and those who were silent. “Effective schools, those with a cohesive, inclusive school community with widespread parental involvement, obviously greatly alter role relationships between principals and parents” (Goldring & Shapira, 1996, p. 345).

The case studies by Goldring and Shapira (1996) revealed two types of principal-parent interactions that have potential significance: parents as supporters and parents as leaders. In the first, parents are actively involved in the school and are seen as supporters of the principal. Principals guide parental involvement to enhance parents’ sense of contribution. The principal is still the leader and is seen by parents as the “school’s educational expert and administrative authority” (p. 347). In the second type of interaction, the parents are in control. Even though the principal has allowed some involvement, parents do not completely accept their roles as parents, and a clear conflict between them and the principal develops. In this case, parents become the “ideology and value system” rather than buying into the one proposed by the principal and teachers. A sense of community stronger than that proposed by the principal perpetuates the community’s ideology and leads to a demise of the principal’s role.

According to Goldring and Shapira (1996), the results of the study indicated that clear boundaries must be established so that “principals enjoy a more secure standing with parents and can more easily control the nature of the relationship, thus ensuring their own survival” (p. 356). Principals must therefore solicit support and, at the same time, establish the school as the educational authority. Parents must be involved in the process of identifying what is important for the principal to move ahead with increased and legitimate parental involvement.
Lawson (2003) conducted an extensive ethnography involving interviews, observations, and field notes over a two-year period at an elementary school. The study was aimed at understanding teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of parent involvement. Although his study focused entirely on teacher-parent interactions, many findings about parental perceptions may prove useful to principals. Parents’ responses to questions asked by Lawson centered around five themes or barriers: blocked pathways, changing times, teacher-parent communication, parents’ trust in children’s schooling, and parents’ aspirations for the school to become a community-serving institution. The study also provided outcomes based on teacher narratives. This review deliberately omits any discussion regarding the teacher findings, focusing only on the parental component.

The first of Lawson’s (2003) themes, blocked pathways, refers to perceptions of the parents that parent involvement meant helping the school and not a combination of how they helped the school while the school helped them. Parents needed involvement to start in the community and move into the school. Conversely, parental involvement espoused by the school started in the school and rarely moved into the community.

Lawson’s (2003) second theme, changing times, had much to do with changes in community conditions and how parents were affected by these changes. Conditions in the community forced all parents to work, and children were left unsupervised after school. Due to this lack of supervision, drug use and violence escalated. Consequently, parents believed that the school had to change its educational focus. Children were now seen as “objects needing to be controlled” (p. 95). This change also led, according to Lawson, to labeling of parents, which in turn gave rise to “the roots of an oppositional relationship between parents and teachers” (p. 96).
The third theme revealed by Lawson’s (2003) study was teacher-parent communication. He found that parents believed “poor communication between parents and teachers [was] the chief barrier” to the success of the children (p. 96). Parents also believed lack of communication was the responsibility of the school; therefore, the school should have initiated more collaboration with parents about their concerns. Parents in the study expressed concern over the school seeing itself as the expert and discounting opinions and knowledge of parents.

This sense of powerlessness on the part of parents led to the fourth theme in Lawson’s (2003) study: parents’ trust in their children’s schooling. Parents having negative experiences with the school shared them with others and the knowledge spread. This sharing of negative experiences led to an erosion in trust in the school which led to problems with the manner in which parents approached parent-teacher interactions. In turn, this influenced how children perceived their parents’ involvement in the school. Lawson stated, “When negative teacher-parent interactions occur regularly, children associate parent involvement as an indication of negative student behavior” (p. 100). Because children began to associate parental involvement with negative student behavior, they unintentionally sabotaged the school’s efforts, discarding flyers and memos before arriving home, leaving many parents unaware of the school’s offerings.

Lawson’s (2003) final theme, the school as a community-serving institution, centered on the need for the school to create an “environment in which parents and children can learn together” (p. 102). Creating such an environment would serve to meet the needs of parents as well as allow children to see that parents are successful in the school setting.

The most salient of Lawson’s (2003) findings was the idea that although many parents felt disenfranchised from the school for reasons illuminated previously, they desperately wanted the school to play a central role in renewing their community. They had not given up on the
school and the community working in tandem to meet the needs of everyone involved. This has significant implications for principals seeking to elevate parental involvement.

Seitsinger and Zera (2002) conducted a study intended to investigate the demise of parental involvement in school governance. From a critical theory perspective, they examined two sites using a case study format and a naturalist methodology that included semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, and document reviews. They found that “parent involvement in schools has the ability to shift power, influence, and authority in various directions at both personal and organizational levels” (p. 342). Seitsinger and Zera found that parents exerted perceived, actual, and potential influence and that most parents believed they exerted perceived influence.

Over the course of their study, Seitsinger and Zera (2002) sought to review ways in which parents were involved in school, the manner in which parents exerted their influence, and whether it made a difference when existence of the decision-making body was voluntary or involuntary. Through their study, they found that parent participation changed the way in which parents who were active viewed school problems, that socioeconomic status defined participation, and that parents could be intimidated by the school (pp. 349-358).

While Seitsinger and Zera’s (2002) study focused on school based decision-making, implications of the findings have significance for parental involvement in other arenas as well. Principals should be concerned with how parent power is defined and derived, what parts of the school parents can and will impact, what the socioeconomic status of parents indicates, and how to minimize potential intimidation.

Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) conducted a study of parental involvement in four schools that were deemed to be effective and that contained a significant population of
migrant students. They sought to identify effective involvement strategies and practices that could be implemented in other sites with similar demographics. The study was largely qualitative in methodology, using observations, interviews, and document reviews as data sources. The findings of their study suggest the following:

The main criterion for successful parent involvement programs is an unwavering commitment to meet the multiple needs of migrant families above all other considerations. . . . Before any type of substantive “involvement” could be expected of parents, [the school district and school] needed to address the social, economic, and physical needs of migrant families. (p. 261)

Lopez et al. indicated that schools should create an awareness of migrant family needs, make home visits, provide continuous interaction with families, make a commitment to meeting family needs, place priorities on families with more urgent needs, establish relational bonds with families, invest in families, and empower parents to get involved in their children’s education.

Lopez et al. (2001) further suggested using strategic methods to get parents involved and that a single method or approach would not be sufficient. Schools should provide a welcome environment for parents and affirm parents and families when they do choose to become involved. Lopez et al. also advocated offering parental educational services. Above all else, they concluded, their study suggests that “these schools were successful primarily because they focused their energies on meeting multiple needs of migrant families above all other involvement considerations” (p. 279). While Lopez et al. focused their study on schools impacted by migrant populations, their findings have strong implications for any principal seeking to enhance principal-parent interactions, whether their student population is significantly migrant or predominantly indigenous.

Sheldon (2002) studied parental involvement as it relates to parents’ social networks and belief systems. He surveyed parents in two elementary schools and analyzed the results using
multiple regression analyses. As a result of his analysis, he found that size of the parents’ social network was a predictor of the degree to which parents were involved with their children at home or at school. He also found that parents with more ties to other adults reported higher levels of involvement at home with their children, and parents who interacted with other parents at their children’s school tended to be more involved in the school. Parents who had no social network of other parents were at a disadvantage in helping their children. Consequently, Sheldon concluded that networks matter.

To be of value, a network does not need to be large. Sheldon (2002) found that most viable networks had on average only two parents. Linking an unconnected parent with only one or two other parents provided a positive return for the school. Currently, most parental involvement focuses on enhancing parent-teacher relationships. How principals recognize and assist in development of these networks is important in promoting parent involvement.

Overview of Studies Addressing Interpersonal Conflict

The conflict perspective, as defined by Ball (1987), refers to the need to take into account the many different preferences, objectives, interests, and ideologies present among an organization’s participants (p. 18). It is, he asserted, these differences that result in “contest or struggle for control of the organization” (p. 18). It is this struggle among interest groups that results in conflict. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) stated that conflict may be resolved through education or communication. It is through these two activities that opposing interest groups can see their common interests and visualize the negative results of conflict, thus resolving to work in cooperation rather than in conflict. There is an abundance of literature on conflict, but only the
study by Zalman and Bryant (2002) appeared to have salience for this study on principal-parent interactions and is discussed in this section.

School administrators are often called upon to find resolutions for conflict, making conflict resolution a routine part of the daily professional experience for school principals. Zalman and Bryant (2002) stated, “In an environment full of competing demands monitored by an administrator with a constant barrage of events needing attention, conflict is inevitable” (p. 4).

Zalman and Bryant (2002) conducted a qualitative study aimed at identifying behaviors of school administrators pertinent to how they handled conflictual situations. Zalman and Bryant used the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to facilitate gathering descriptive data through interviews and observations. The structure and logic of the CIT, by focusing on the tails of a normal distribution, differ from more conventional statistical approaches that seek to identify commonalities or measures of central tendency. In doing so, the researchers sought to capture the very unusual rather than the repetitive or that which fell within central portions of a normal distribution. The sample for the study included 32 elementary principals, with 58 usable incidents collected from the sample.

Zalman and Bryant (2002) focused their study on behaviors of principals when conflict resolution was handled well and led to a positive outcome and behaviors of the principals when conflict resolution was not handled well and led to a negative outcome. Zalman and Bryant’s study revealed that conflictual incidents described by the participants fell into three categories: conflicts with students, conflicts with parents, and conflicts with staff (p. 6). For purposes of this study, discussion is limited to conflicts with parents.

Four areas of conflict with parents emerged from their data: parents acting in support of their child, parents who disagree with policy, parents versus teachers, and angry parents
Successful resolution was reached when principals exhibited certain behaviors. Attempts to reach resolution were unsuccessful when principals exhibited other less desirable behaviors. Table 2.1 depicts these strategies. The personality of the principal often seemed to impact the outcome of the conflict. Many unresolved conflictual interactions could have been resolved successfully had the principal chosen to make use of a strategy in a positive manner rather than using that strategy in a negative manner.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors Resulting in Successful Resolution</th>
<th>Behaviors Resulting in Unsuccessful Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering or providing information</td>
<td>Making incorrect assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional choice for meeting location</td>
<td>Inappropriate location – talking with parties in hall rather than in office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive or welcoming physical or verbal gestures</td>
<td>Emotional reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy or law reminders</td>
<td>Failure to set any guidelines for meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following up, either with an additional meeting or a letter</td>
<td>Unsuitable meetings – choosing to handle something on phone rather than face to face or failing to have all relevant parties present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing the positive</td>
<td>Ineffective use of time/lack of focus – allowed discussion to go on too long, failed to intervene, did not focus on meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with individuals and groups as needed</td>
<td>Failure to listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing – willing to delay making a decision or providing a consequence, allowing time to gather information</td>
<td>Using unwise communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening attentively</td>
<td>Making one-sided decisions – acting too authoritatively, taking too strong a stand, failing to involve outside agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering others such as asking parents for their input</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also of note was Zalman and Bryant’s (2002) finding that “while a principal may be handling a conflict perfectly, the end result may still not be successful, and when a principal
happens to handle a conflict poorly, there still may be a successful result” (p. 18). This, the
principals believed, was because conflict often takes on a life of its own. Implications from this
study included the concept that conflict is to be expected, and a principal who monitors his or her
behaviors when interacting with parents is much more likely to have a successful resolution to
conflict than a principal who fails to do such self-monitoring.

Summary

The literature demonstrates clearly that micropolitical strategies are prevalent in schools.
Research has focused primarily on strategies used by principals and teachers as they interacted
across interest groups consisting of like personnel (Blase, 1990, 1991a, 1993; Cilo, 1994;
Corbett, 1991; Greenfield, 1991; Hoyle, 1999; Malen, 1994). Little research has addressed
strategies used by principals and parents as they interacted with each other. However,
micropolitical perspectives suggest reasons for using particular strategies and how these
strategies impact the work of schools (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991a,

Research also indicates a clear need for increased parental involvement in schools (Fan,
2001; Goldring & Shapira, 1996; Lawson, 2003; Lopez et al., 2001; Seitsinger & Zera, 2002;
Sheldon, 2002). Studies indicated areas of importance for principals and teachers as they seek to
elevate parental roles in schools and in their children’s education.

Clearly, conflict exists in all organizations (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987). Behaviors used by principals to resolve these conflicts will impact the success of attempted resolutions.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical strategies employed by effective elementary principals as they interacted with parents. The methodological approach of this study allowed concepts and ideas to emerge from data collected. Instead of asking principals to define or describe their interactions with parents by using predetermined categories and ideas, much like a survey would, the design of this study allowed for promulgation of general categories and properties. Further, it allowed for integration of concepts through actual words and actions of the principals who participated in the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The research questions were broad-based to allow for emergence of data that were important to the participants. The questions also allowed participants to bring their own experiences into play so they could explore with the researcher meanings of their interactions with parents.

This chapter includes seven sections and a summary that explain the methodology used in the study. The first section, the theoretical framework, presents a description of symbolic interactionism which was used to guide the study and the interpretation of subsequent findings. The second section presents comprehensive information regarding the sample selection process, and the third profiles actual participants. The fourth section offers a detailed explanation of the four data sources: interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews. The fifth section presents a detailed discussion of grounded theory methodology, including stages and components.
of constant comparative analysis. The sixth section presents credibility criteria used in this study, and the seventh discusses the researcher’s subjectivity.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical framework for this qualitative study on micropolitical strategies employed by effective elementary school principals when interacting with parents. Symbolic interactionism is an approach most closely associated with the seminal works of Cooley (1902), Park (1915), Dewey (1930), Thomas (1931), and Mead (1934). Blumer (1969), a follower of Mead, effectively integrated writings of these men and applied an astute analysis of practices of interaction to daily life. As defined by Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (pp. 65-66).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) asserted that “objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own meaning; rather meaning is conferred on them” (p. 36). Mead (1934) argued that actions of humans were the result of a continuous process of adjustment as they regularly interacted with others around them. As humans encounter similarities and differences when looking through the lens of their own beliefs at beliefs espoused by others, they actively make adjustments as they deem necessary (Mead, 1934). Thus, the continuous process of adjustment allows humans to define reality by the manner in which they define the world around them. Individuals interpret reality through the help of those with whom they interact. Through such ongoing interaction, the individual constructs his own version of meaning and his own interpretation. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stated:
The meaning people give to their experience and their process of interpretation is essential and constitutive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is. To understand behavior, we must understand definitions and the process by which they are manufactured. Human beings are actively engaged in creating their world; understanding the intersection of biography and society is essential (Gerth & Mills, 1953). People act, not on the basis of predetermined responses to predefined objects, but rather as interpreting, defining symbolic animals whose behavior can only be understood by having the researcher enter into the defining process through such methods as participant observer. (p. 36)

In addition, Mead (1934) asserted that humans are most easily understood through their actions and that, as a result, studies of humans should take into consideration both thoughts and actions if they are to be comprehensive. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) confirmed this when they stated, “It is not the rules, regulations, norms, or whatever that are crucial in understanding behavior, but how these are defined and used in specific situations” (p. 37). The manner in which individuals define a situation or event and its subparts determines their actions.

Blumer (1969) articulated three fundamental premises of symbolic interactionism: (a) individuals act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things hold for them; (b) the meaning of things or objects emerges from the social interaction an individual has with others; and (c) individuals use an interpretive process to develop and modify the meanings of things in their environments.

With regard to the first premise, Blumer (1969) held that individuals were not submissive to the environment, waiting to be enlightened. Instead, they actively conferred meaning on objects, situations, events, and people they encountered. Based on meanings they hold or perceive, new meanings are derived in these encounters. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) confirmed this with their assertion that individuals bestowed meaning with purpose and planning. Similarly, Blumer (1969) defined meaning as an interpretation of a social act or action through some sort of social interaction.
Blumer’s (1969) second premise, that meaning emerges from social interaction, rests on a belief that objects have no meaning unless an individual assigns meaning. Charon (1995) discussed and referred to objects as social objects, defined as objects that are useful to an individual in a particular situation. Social objects may include, but are not limited to, physical objects, animals, humans, symbols, ideas, and emotions (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1995). Meaning does not emanate directly from the object but rather from the way individuals interact with the object. Such interaction usually recognizes social expectations, boundaries, or values as conditions or consequences of interpretation, but these ethical considerations will not ultimately determine the outcome or action taken. Instead, interpretation of ethics by individuals determines the resulting behaviors (Blumer, 1969).

Blumer’s (1969) third premise states that individuals use an interpretive process to develop and modify meanings of things in their environments. How individuals interpret social objects is strongly influenced by their social interactions. Blumer identified a two-step process through which meaning is generated:

First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to point out to himself the things that have meaning. The making of such indications is an internalized social process in that the actor is interacting with himself. This interaction with himself is something other than an interplay of psychological elements; it is an instance of the person engaging in a process of communication with himself. Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meaning. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. (p. 5)

Consequently, an individual communicates with himself to distinguish which objects have meaning. Then, based on his current situation, the individual interprets these meanings by selecting, checking, suspending, regrouping, or transforming them. This is a constant and continual process, necessary for moving from situation to situation as well as operating within a
single situation. As a result, meanings and interpretations of meanings are evolutionary, changing as situations change (Blumer, 1969). Interactions only have meaning when individuals interpret and apply meaning to them.

Profound emphasis is placed on the importance of meaning and interpretation; hence people must create shared meanings through the course of their common interactions so that these meanings become their reality (Patton, 1990). Charon (1995) suggested this applies to an individual’s interactions within himself as well as the interactions he experiences with those he encounters. Symbolic interactionism takes for granted that reality is socially constructed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

To summarize, symbolic interactionism asserts that behavior of an individual or a group of individuals has at its foundation meanings attributed to social objects and other individuals. These meanings make manifest the social interactions experienced by individuals and the interpretive process used by those individuals.

Relationship of Symbolic Interactionism to this Study

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) offered the following questions to clarify research interests of the symbolic interactionist:

1. How do people define themselves, others, their settings, and their activities?
2. How do people’s definitions and perspectives develop and change?
3. What is the fit between different perspectives held by different people?
4. What is the fit between people’s perspectives and their activities?
5. How do people deal with the discrepancy between their perspectives and activities? (pp. 147-148)

Patton (1990) stated, “The symbolic interactionist asks: ‘What common set of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to people’s interactions?’” (p. 75). This study, in
keeping with the framework of symbolic interactionism, identified and examined micropolitical strategies effective principals use in their interactions with parents. Inherent in symbolic interactionism is the recognition that individuals, in interacting with other individuals and situations, develop shared meanings and act accordingly. Symbolic interactionists believe these shared meanings are products of social interactions, human action is deliberate and purposeful, and meanings are altered through the interpretive process. This study identified micropolitical strategies behind the production of those shared meanings and resulting actions.

Sample Selection Process

**Sampling**

In this study, purposeful sampling was the general method used for selecting research participants. The underlying assumption in using purposeful sampling is that the researcher “wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). It is most logical to choose a sample that is “information rich. . . . Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Furthermore, purposeful sampling permitted the researcher to choose participants who were believed to be able to enhance or expand the developing theory; the researcher could subsequently maximize collection of data by ensuring information rich cases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

**Strategies**

Three purposeful sampling strategies were used in this study. As identified by Cresswell (1998), they included: (a) criteria – all subjects met established criteria; (b) theory based – all
subjects were examples of a theoretical construct, thereby allowing the researcher to elaborate on and examine said theory; and (c) homogeneous – selection of similar subjects allowed data collection to be more focused and simplified.

Specific criteria used to select principals were based on reputation. The researcher sought third year or higher principals who were highly regarded. Leading professionals in the chosen geographic area were asked for recommendations. The researcher asked these professionals to consider perceived effectiveness, level of parental involvement, and overall sense of respect. Use of these criteria in the selection process worked to ensure that participants had the reputation of being effective principals.

Participants were also selected based on their ability to contribute to the evolving theory (Cresswell, 1998). As part of a homogenous sample, participating principals were expected to “facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp. 71-72). All participants were principals, all participants were deemed effective, and all participants were in schools that evidenced high parental involvement. The researcher was able to focus and streamline the data collection process and filter data to identify common strategies used by participants (Bogdan & Biklen).

Participant Profiles

Through the use of purposeful sampling, seven principals were selected for participation. All names of participants and their respective schools were changed to pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The researcher talked to personal contacts in four Georgia counties and acquired suggestions of principals who met this study’s criteria: currently serving as a principal, consistently deemed to be effective, and currently in a school evidencing high parental
involvement. The researcher was provided names of seven principals and contacted each to confirm that he or she was willing to participate in the study and would be able to offer information that would further the research. During this initial conversation, the researcher explained the study’s purpose and scheduled initial interview sessions.

The participants of this study were all principals in four small to mid-sized counties in middle and northeastern Georgia. One system is considered to be in a metropolitan area, one is becoming less rural and more metropolitan, one is considered rural, and one is in close proximity to a university town. In all four counties, each principal was authorized to participate without notification of district personnel. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (See Appendix A).

Of the participants, two were male and five were female. All were white. The average time spent as a principal at the time of the study was 9.57 years, with time ranging from 3 to 18 years. Of the candidates, one held a doctoral degree and six held specialist degrees. Table 3.1 represents an overview of each participant.
Table 3.1

Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Christy</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Marcie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff County</td>
<td>Ethan County</td>
<td>Ethan County</td>
<td>South County</td>
<td>South County</td>
<td>North County</td>
<td>North County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff County Primary</td>
<td>Ethan County Primary</td>
<td>Ethan County Elementary</td>
<td>Shoals Elementary</td>
<td>Little River Elementary</td>
<td>Stone Elementary</td>
<td>Granite Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>PK-2</td>
<td>PK-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years as Principal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years as Principal in Current School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>Middle to Lower Middle</td>
<td>Lower Middle and Upper Middle</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Descriptor</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Transitioning from Rural to Suburban</td>
<td>Transitioning from Rural to Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

James is principal of a small primary school comprised of grades PK – 2 located about an hour outside a metropolitan area. His school, Jeff County Primary, is located in a predominantly rural area with a high degree of residential stability. In a school system with an enrollment of 2040, there are approximately 586 students in his school, 32% minority, 58% white, and 10% other. Socioeconomic status (SES) is very low and the school is designated as a Title I school based on the high number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch status. Jeff County
Primary has an active Parent Teacher Organization and an active Local School Council. James has been a principal for 15 years, three of which have been at Jeff County Primary School.

Jack is principal of Ethan County Primary School which houses the County’s students for grades PK – 2. It is located about 45 minutes outside a metropolitan area. In a county with an enrollment of approximately 3200, Ethan County Primary School has an approximate enrollment of 750, made up of 32% minority, 63% white, and 5% other. Jack has been a principal for 18 years, all of which have been at Ethan County Primary. During the past ten years, Ethan County has undergone a major change in demographics. As more and more residents moved out of a metropolitan area, Ethan County became a new location for many of them. Transitioning from a primarily rural area into a suburb of a metropolitan area, Ethan County changed from a lower middle class to more upper middle class SES. Ethan County Primary has an active Parent Teacher Organization and an active Local School Council.

Amelia is principal of the elementary school in Ethan County. She has been a principal for nine years, all of which have been at Ethan County Elementary School. The school consists of grades 3 – 5 and has an enrollment of approximately 690, comprised of 32% minority, 64% white, and 4% other. The SES is upper middle class and the majority of parents hold at least undergraduate degrees. Ethan County Elementary has an active Parent Teacher Organization and Local School Council.

Christy is principal of Shoals Elementary, a school with approximately 775 students located in South County. Comprised of grades PK – 5, Shoals Elementary is located in a small to mid-sized suburban system with an approximate system enrollment of 16,000. Shoals Elementary’s enrollment consists of 37% minority, 56% white, and 7% other. The SES is considered average to low average, and the school receives some Title I funds but is not
designated a Title I school. Christy has been principal for four years, all of which have been at Shoals Elementary. As more and more residents from a metro area moved into what was once primarily a rural area within the county, the demographics of the school changed significantly over the past five years. New residential construction is abundant and has resulted in a dramatic increase in enrollment. Shoals Elementary has an active Parent Teacher Organization and Local School Council.

Laura’s school, with grades PK – 5, is located in the same suburban system as Christy’s. Laura has been principal for three years, all at Little River Elementary, which has an approximate enrollment of 675. Located within the city limits of this suburban system, her enrollment has remained fairly stable and is comprised of two dynamics – upper middle class in-town residents and lower class government subsidized housing project residents. The school has a growing number of students who come from backgrounds where a language other than English is spoken as the primary language in the home. Little River’s enrollment is comprised of 32% minority, 50% white, and 18% other. The school receives some Title I funding but not a sufficient amount to qualify as a Title I school. Little River has an active Parent Teacher Organization and Local School Council.

Emily has been principal for three years, all of which have been at Stone Elementary, located in North School System about an hour outside a metropolitan area and in close proximity to a major university town. The county is small with a total enrollment of approximately 5800 students. Stone Elementary, a relatively new school with grades K – 5, opened within the past 5 years. It has an enrollment of approximately 470 students, representing 5% minority, 88% white, and 7% other. The SES of Stone Elementary is high and the school receives no Title I funding.
The vast majority of parents have a minimum of an undergraduate education with a large number having graduate degrees. It has an active Parent Teacher Organization and Local School Council.

Marcie has been a principal for 15 years, the past nine of which have been spent as principal of Granite Elementary, also located in North School System. Granite Elementary is an older school consisting of grades K – 5 and has an approximate enrollment of 531, which is comprised of 4% minority, 89% white, and 7% other. Like other schools in this system, the SES is high average and most parents have undergraduate or graduate degrees. The school receives no Title I funding. Granite Elementary has an active Parent Teacher Organization and Local School Council.

Data Collection Sources

Four data sources were selected for this study: (a) interviews, (b) observations, (c) field notes, and (d) document reviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). These sources were selected to ensure that the process of discovery was embedded in the study. “Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (Patton, 1990, p. 244). The use of all four types allowed the researcher to validate and crosscheck findings and consequently to enhance the validity of findings because strengths of one format would compensate for weaknesses of another (Patton, 1990). Data collection was guided by the three research questions: (a) What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents? (b) What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents? and (c) What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents? The types of data sources used were consistent with the study’s purpose.
Interviews

Interviews served as the primary data source for this study. Kvale (1996) stated that “interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understandings, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (p. 105). This elucidates the appropriateness of using interviews as the primary data source.

Seidman (1998) indicated that questions can provide great impact in an in-depth interview when the researcher allows subsequent questions to arise from a participant’s answers: “It is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories” (p. 66). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested treating the person being interviewed as an expert, an approach that serves several purposes. First, it involves the respondent directly, indicating that the study hinges on expert information he or she has to offer. Secondly, it affords the participant being interviewed an opportunity to teach and inform the researcher. Third, it creates an inherent sense of respect, encouraging the participant to share more than the facts involved and to include ideas and observations.

All interviews took place in participants’ schools and at times convenient for each participant. Interviews allowed the researcher to collect data in the participant’s own words so that the researcher could “develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 94). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that use of an unstructured format is valuable when the interviewer “does not know what he or she doesn’t know and must therefore rely on the respondent to tell him or her” (p. 269). Seidman (1998) asserted, “The interview structure is cumulative. One interview establishes the context for the next” (p. 66).
With these premises in mind, initial interviews, lasting approximately an hour each, were conducted in the fall of 2004 with an unstructured approach. Interviews began casually to develop rapport and initiate a positive relationship (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Informal conversation about mutual acquaintances helped develop rapport between the researcher and the participant and provide a basis for discussing micropolitical interactions with parents.

After establishing rapport, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the general process for data collection and analysis, and specific interview procedures. The researcher also reviewed consent information in detail and obtained informed consent from all seven participants. Permission to tape record each interview was granted to preserve what the participant said while allowing the researcher to concentrate on the conversation (Merriam, 1998).

The initial interview then moved to Seidman’s (1998) open-ended format of questioning with the researcher avoiding questions that solicited only “yes” or “no” responses and using more probative questions instead. At the heart of any interview should be an attempt to understand how the person being interviewed thinks (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researcher conducted interviews that ascertained thought processes of participants. Initial interviews focused on the first two research questions: (a) What kinds of interactions did these principals have with parents? and (b) What micropolitical strategies did they employ when interacting with parents? As expected, responses of the participants varied in length. Some required little prompting from the researcher while others had to be encouraged to reconstruct interactions with parents. The researcher used open-ended questions such as “Tell me more about…” or “Describe that situation in more detail…” to solicit richer detail.
These in-depth interviews provided an understanding of participants’ perspectives of their interactions with parents as expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). As participants became more comfortable with the researcher, their responses naturally became more detailed. This was enhanced as the researcher became more effective at probing for a response, resulting in more detailed explanations, often linked to a specific example.

The initial interviews were transcribed within one week of each session and each was coded immediately after transcription so incidents and emerging categories could be used to drive subsequent interviews. This created a continuous cycle of obtaining data, analyzing data, and comparing data to ensure emergence of pertinent and consistent categories and themes. The researcher spent approximately one hour coding data from each transcription for a total of seven hours.

Prior to follow-up interviews in the spring of 2005, the researcher reviewed transcriptions of each initial interview, listened to the recordings again, and made additional notes in a research journal regarding specific matters that needed explanation, clarification, elaboration, or even illustration. Furthermore, a semi-structured guide was developed to correlate with emerging categories (See Appendices B and C). The guide was comprised of questions that focused on categories of micropolitical strategies that had begun to emerge from initial interviews. Use of progressive questioning in a series of interviews was consistent with grounded theory methodology and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Even with the use of the guide, open-ended questions rather than leading questions were employed (Seidman, 1998). Use of open-ended questions allowed the researcher to delve deeper into emerging categories to understand better strategies being used by each participant.
A second interview, lasting approximately 90 minutes, was conducted with each participant to saturate the categories and to make use of member checking (Merriam, 1998). In addition to the semi-structured guide, participants were also able to provide any new or additional information regarding their interactions with parents.

These follow-up interviews were transcribed within one week of each session and each was coded immediately after transcription so that incidents could be compared to prior incidents and emerging categories. This reinforced the continuous cycle of obtaining data, analyzing data, and comparing data discussed previously. The researcher spent approximately one hour coding data from each transcription and comparing it to previously collected data for a total of seven hours.

After analysis of the data, it became evident that some information provided by the other six participants was missing from Emily’s interviews. Gaps in development of categories did not appear overtly evident in any other case. A structured interview was beneficial when the researcher had analyzed emerging categories, had determined which were not yet saturated, knew what information was missing, and consequently, could frame questions to yield the necessary information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A follow-up structured interview was needed with only one participant, Emily. The researcher conducted a third interview with her to obtain consistent data and ensure saturation of data (See Appendix D).

Throughout and at the end of the data collection and analysis process, the researcher provided the participants with information about resulting data and emerging categories. Each participant was afforded an opportunity to provide additional thoughts or comments after each interview. All but two participants replied each time and no additional categories or themes were revealed through this follow-up.
Observations

The second source of data came from observations. Becker and Geer (1970) stated, “Participant observation can . . . provide us with a yardstick against which to measure the completeness of data gathered in other ways, a model which can serve to let us know what orders of information escape us when we use other methods” (p. 133). Time spent in observation afforded the researcher an opportunity to observe elements and strategies that might have been omitted, whether consciously or not, from interviews.

Though often used in isolation, observation may be fully and successfully integrated with interviewing, according to Patton (1990):

Becoming a skilled observer is essential even if you concentrate primarily on interviewing because every face-to-face interview also involves and requires observation. The skilled interviewer is thus also a skilled observer, able to read nonverbal messages, sensitive to how the interview setting can affect what is said, and carefully attuned to the nuances of the interviewer-interviewee interaction and relationship. (p. 32)

Observation also takes place during an interview, and the researcher must record his or her observations about the interview (Patton, 1990). This researcher accomplished this through the use of field notes.

Observations were used to compliment and enrich data collected through the interview process. Observations were conducted on site in circumstances determined appropriate by the researcher and each participant. Data obtained during observations were subjected to the same microanalysis as that collected during interviews and were used in developing and saturating emerging categories of micropolitical strategies.

Each participant was observed two times – first in a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting and second in a Local School Council (LSC) meeting. The only exceptions were Jack, who was observed during an IEP meeting and a PTO meeting, and James, who was observed
during a parent conference, a PTO meeting, and an LSC meeting. These exceptions were due to scheduling conflicts. Each observation lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The PTO meetings, comprised of large groups of parents as well as teachers, allowed the researcher to observe principals interacting informally. No significant difference existed in the number of parents present at each school’s PTO meeting. Table 3.2 depicts the number and percentage of parents present at each meeting. It should be noted, however, that computations of percentages did not take into account that one child equaled one count in the school enrollment and parent counts did not separate out the number of parents present for a single child or for multiple children in one family. While this meant the numbers might have been inflated, they were consistently inflated because this was true of all computations for all meetings. Percentage of parents present was not a consideration of this study and was included only for comparison purposes to demonstrate consistent levels of parent involvement.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Christy</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Marcie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Enrollment</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Present at Meeting</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Student Body</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To avoid hindering participants’ interactions, minimal notes were taken during the observations of PTO meetings. More extensive field notes were written immediately after PTO observations in an effort to capture accurately the essence of the observations.
Use of the Local School Council (LSC) as a second source for observation allowed the researcher to observe each participant in a more formal setting. Each LSC was chaired by the principal and was comprised of two parents, two businessmen, and two teachers. The principal had a more formal role, which allowed for a different type of observation than that afforded at the PTO meetings. With the meeting conducted with an agenda and clear rules of order, each interaction was very limited and very structured. Although each principal portrayed a largely informal demeanor, meetings were clearly business oriented. LSC meetings were all tape recorded by the researcher with verbal consent of committee members and were then transcribed in the same manner as the interviews. Transcriptions of the observations were supplemented with corresponding field notes and the researcher spent approximately one hour coding each transcription. Participants were again afforded an opportunity to review data obtained from observations and to provide feedback. All but one participant replied and all replies were simply acknowledgements of receipt of data with no suggested changes or additions.

Field notes

As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), field notes the researcher generates after an interview or observation become the “written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data” (p. 74). Due to the auditory nature of tape recorded interviews, field notes were necessary to capture the participants’ facial expressions, body language, and gestures. This also applied to LSC and PTO observations since few notes were taken to minimize the impact of the researcher’s presence. In all cases, the researcher was able to note interpretations relevant to participants’ attitudes and demeanors during observations and interviews through use of field notes.
Field notes also allowed the researcher to record commonalities among interviews as statements made by an individual participant sparked ideas or thoughts prevalent from other interviews or observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Furthermore, use of field notes allowed the researcher to make observations and record thoughts, perceptions, and interpretations after each interview and observation. This provided a record of the researcher’s own perceptions about what she thought she heard, in terms of emerging categories, prior to beginning the coding process. Field notes were coded in the same format as interviews and observations and were included in data sent to participants for review. By examining field notes in conjunction with interview and observation transcripts, the researcher was able to deepen analysis of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Use of field notes, as stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), provided the researcher an opportunity to be reflective as data were collected. The researcher made notations of any questions or responses that produced more meaningful or richer data as well as those which were deemed to be less effective for framing questions for subsequent interviews and observations. The researcher wrote field notes immediately after each interview or observation so impressions and reflections were not affected by extraneous events. Field notes also provided context for deriving meaning from data. Field notes were kept in a research file.

Document Review

In addition to interviews and observations, pertinent documents regarding principal-parent interactions were collected and reviewed (See Appendix E). Any written, visual, or physical material designed to communicate information is considered to be a document (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) emphasized dual purposes in reviewing documents:
1. They are a basic source of information about program decisions and background, or activities and processes.

2. They can give the evaluator ideas about important questions to pursue through more direct observations and interviewing. (p. 233)

Use of document review provided the researcher a deeper, “behind the scenes look” at behaviors exhibited by participants that “may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through the documents” (Patton, 1990, p. 245).

While unobtrusive in nature, review of documents yielded data abundant in descriptive detail. Care was given, however, to realizing and remaining true to the intent of the document. “Meaning does not reside in text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different contexts, it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded” (Hodder, 2000, p. 704). Therefore, it was important for the researcher to pay close attention to the context of conditions under which documents were produced.

A review of documents also afforded the researcher the opportunity to note that which did not occur when principals interacted effectively with parents. There was merit in noting that which did not occur, and Patton (1990) offered two conditions under which this kind of observation would be appropriate. First, if something was supposed to happen and did not, then it was appropriate to note that it did not occur. Second, if the absence of something was noteworthy in the researcher’s judgment, then it was noted. If principals suggested that they used particular micropolitical strategies, and while under observation, these strategies were not readily apparent, the researcher made note of each absence. If principals in the study never or rarely used particular strategies, the researcher also considered this to be noteworthy.
Review of documents added little to emerging categories and themes since each document was unique to a particular principal and school. Most documents simply provided limited insight into communication styles of participants. Some commonalities emerged through review of documents, but these commonalities were also clearly evident through interviews and observations.

Research File

In addition to the four sources of data, a research file was maintained throughout the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The schedule for observations and interviews was kept in the research file along with field notes taken after each interaction with participants. Coding memos and the summary template, which are discussed later in this chapter, were also kept in the research file.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Underlying the research process of this study was grounded theory methodology. Glaser and Strauss (1967) categorized this methodology as discovery of theory from data that have been systematically obtained. Cresswell (1998) explained that grounded theory is used to produce theory that relates to a specific event or process in which “individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon” (p. 56). Theory ultimately emerges from data; it is not forced or contrived (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory was determined to be most appropriate for this study because the study specifically focused on micropolitical interactions between principals and parents, an area of research largely unexplored. Stern (1994) stated, “The strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in an investigation of relatively uncharted waters, or to gain a fresh perspective in a
familiar situation” (p. 116). This study was designed to explore interactions between principals and parents based on micropolitical strategies employed by principals.

Central to grounded theory methodology, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), is constant comparative analysis, “a strategic method for generating theory” that rests on a constant comparison of new data to data previously collected and analyzed (p. 21). In keeping with this, the researcher compared each new piece of data to data previously collected. All subsequent data collection was guided by emerging themes, and categories began to emerge as data were compared. By analyzing data as they were received, categories were allowed to emerge naturally from the research. Further collection and comparison were done with existing data as reference points, causing a more thorough examination of the emerging theoretical ideas. Categories were made dense and emerging ideas were validated through collection of additional data (Charmaz, 1994).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to this process of constant comparison as “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). Use of this inductive process for interpreting and analyzing data required the researcher to make use of coding, category development, and property assignment. Ultimately, this inductive process exposed emerging themes in data.

Coding, the initial phase of constant comparative analysis, is the process of sorting and labeling the data (Patton, 1990). Charmaz (1994) explained, “Codes then serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data” (p. 97, emphasis in original text). Coding of data has two phases: open coding and selective coding. Glaser (1992) defined open coding as the initial activity of the researcher, a time during which the researcher worked with no
preconceived ideas regarding codes or categories. During this phase, the researcher was open to all possible codes, conducting line by line review of data to assign codes (Glaser, 1992).

Selective coding, according to Glaser (1992), is the second phase of the coding process. Corbin and Strauss (1998) defined selective coding as “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (p. 143). The researcher made use of selective coding once a core category was identified (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (1994) explicated the purpose of selective coding: “The purpose of focused coding is to build and clarify a category by examining all the data it covers and variations from it” (p. 103). Using categories resulting from data, the researcher sought to form a theoretical explanation of data obtained from participants. This process, like other parts of data collection and analysis, was fluid, constant, and cyclic. All processes melded toward generating a framework consistent with the tenets of grounded theory.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), two basic forms of theory may be generated through constant comparative analysis: substantive and formal. Substantive theory is substantive or empirical in its area of sociological inquiry and is developed for a particular situation or context, such as education, hospitals, or retention rates. Formal theory, conversely, is developed for a formal or conceptual area of inquiry and usually develops within a study that addresses multiple situational contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Both theories are grounded in data that have been systematically analyzed.

Using grounded theory methodology allowed the researcher to generate three types of findings: descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this study, the researcher focused on data-based descriptive findings as related to the three guiding research questions.
Ultimately, Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasized the fundamental aspect of generating theory. For research to be sound, collection, coding, and analysis must be conducted as joint endeavors or in a fluid manner. Generation of theory must be coupled with the process of theory, and all three facets must be intertwined to the fullest extent possible. Theories will be generated most effectively when collecting, coding, and analyzing data are accomplished as simultaneously as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The four stages of constant comparative analysis were used to analyze data. These are comparing incidents, integrating categories and properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. These stages are discussed in greater detail in subsequent subsections of this chapter. Also included is further description of the four components of constant comparative analysis: theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical pacing.

*Four Stages of Constant Comparative Analysis*

The purpose of constant comparative analysis, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), is to use a joint method of coding and analysis so that theory is generated more systematically:

The constant comparative method is designed to aid the analyst who possesses [the skills and sensitivities required] in generating a theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data – and at the same time is in a form clear enough to be readily, if only partially, operationalized for testing in quantitative research. (p. 103)

The constant comparative analytical approach focuses on generating and suggesting categories, properties, and hypotheses but is not confined to any provisional testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The hypotheses result when data are interpreted and relationships are generalized.

As stated, there are four stages of constant comparative analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) described these as: (a) comparing incidents, (b) integrating categories and their properties, (c) delimiting the theory, and (d) writing the theory. Glaser and Strauss cautioned that although each stage flows naturally into the next, each stage also remains in operation concurrently
throughout the analysis, continuing to augment the emerging theory until the analysis is complete or terminated. The researcher worked methodically with these stages so the theoretical ideas that began to emerge were grounded in data.

The first stage, comparing incidents, allowed the researcher to code incidents described by participants. The incidents were depictions of what actually occurred in the research setting. The use of a coding system in this study afforded the researcher a methodology for organizing data collected from interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) proposed the following steps in developing a coding system:

1. Search the data for regularities and patterns as well as topics.
2. Identify coding categories based on the words and phrases written down to represent the topics and patterns.
3. Develop a list of coding categories.
4. Sort the data under the coding categories. (p. 161)

Use of these steps provided a framework for the researcher as she began to code the data.

As incidents were coded, they were grouped and identified into as many different categories as possible. New incidents revealed through subsequent interviews and observations were compared with prior incidents and coded accordingly. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified this process as the basic, defining rule for the constant comparative method: “While coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (p. 106). This constant comparison began to generate theoretical properties of each emerging category, and categories were labeled as similar data were grouped together in this initial stage of constant comparative analysis.

Each interview and observation was transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft Word® and was then coded by hand in a line-by-line analysis. During this process, 65 codes
were generated (See Appendices F and G). Each incident was compared to prior incidents as codes were generated. This open coding of data ensured that the researcher generated codes grounded in data. Open coding allowed the researcher to guard against the potential for any preconceived opinions to infiltrate data during coding. As a result, constant comparison of emerging codes ensured development of categories that truly described the data. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 depict the most commonly occurring codes used in coding initial data collected from all sources. It should be noted that within the tables, codes are already grouped into the final categories for ease of viewing. (Refer to Appendices F and G for a complete listing of all codes generated during this comparison process.)

Table 3.3

*Common Codes Emerging from the Data in Relation to Research Question # 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal interactions</th>
<th>Formal interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Informal Interactions</td>
<td>Anticipated Formal Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraiser events</td>
<td>Academic conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTO programs</td>
<td>Discipline conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall festivals</td>
<td>IEP meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring flings</td>
<td>Home visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic nights</td>
<td>Complaints about teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book fairs</td>
<td>Drop-in visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Unanticipated Informal Interactions | \[ \text{Informal chats when parents are in building} \] | Academic conferences |
| \[ \text{Grocery store chats} \] | \[ \text{IEP meetings} \] | Complaints about teachers |
| \[ \text{Drop-in visits} \] | \[ \text{Home visits} \] | Fundraiser meetings |
| \[ \text{Academic conferences} \] | \[ \text{Discipline conferences} \] | Local School Council meetings |
| | | PTO meetings |
Table 3.4

**Common Codes Emerging from the Data in Relation to Research Question # 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives held by Participants</th>
<th>Participants’ Ways of Thinking about People and Objects</th>
<th>Behaviors Exhibited by Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having common ground</td>
<td>Needing relationships</td>
<td>Being informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being accessible</td>
<td>Wanting good communication</td>
<td>Exhibiting a non-threatening attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking resolution</td>
<td>Having or taking ownership of problem</td>
<td>Being collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing respect</td>
<td>Demonstrating responsibility</td>
<td>Wanting resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing trust</td>
<td>Showing support</td>
<td>Diffusing a situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being visible and accessible</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being diplomatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Validating concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having a welcoming attitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the process of joint data collection and analysis continued, commonalities were uncovered among incidents, the smallest units of data capable of explaining what was happening in the data (Glaser & Straus, 1967). As incidents were clustered into groups, two types of initial categories emerged: (a) those the researcher has developed himself and (b) those that are the result of the language of the research situation itself (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

As data were analyzed, it became apparent to the researcher that they could be compared and consequently coded in multiple ways. This realization led to a need for the researcher to make use of memos. Glaser (1978) described research memos as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about categories and their relationships as they strike the researcher while coding” (p. 83). According to Charmaz (1994), “Memo writing connects the barebones analytic framework that coding provides with the polished ideas of the finished draft” (p. 106). For the researcher, memos served to aid in preparing for follow-up interviews, in clarifying her own thoughts and perceptions, in drawing parallels between interviews and observations, and in coding data. Memos, held in the research file, were subsequently coded and integrated with all other data (Charmaz, 1994). Memos were necessary to capture adequately the researcher’s thoughts.
throughout the coding process. They were also critical aids in developing ideas related to the categories.

The second stage in the constant comparative method is integrating categories and their properties. This integration involved construction of relationships between incidents in different categories. In addition to comparing incident to incident, the researcher also compared properties of the resulting category to other categories and their properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Consequently, as categories and their properties were compared, integrations began to emerge that forced the researcher to attempt to make theoretical sense of the comparisons, thus allowing theory to develop more fully in relation to the core category of resolution. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explicated this integration: “…constant comparison causes the accumulated knowledge pertaining to a property of the category to readily start to become integrated; that is, related in many different ways, resulting in a unified whole” (p. 109). Glaser (1994) later expounded on this when he said, “[T]he theory develops, as different categories and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparisons that force the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison” (p. 189).

This stage of comparison shifted the focus from comparing incident to incident to comparing incidents to categories. This allowed the researcher to begin to reduce data so that it represented various aspects of a concept or strategy within the category. This exercise of reducing data through the coding process was done initially after the first interview and observation and resulted in a preliminary interpretation of each participant’s micropolitical strategies. When completed after the second interview, it allowed for further reduction of data through key concept selection, coding, and category formation. This inductive analysis required constant comparison. During this cyclic comparison of data, initial categories were more fully
developed and more clearly defined as data were reduced. Incidents observed or related in subsequent interactions were not compared to other incidents but instead were compared with the total accumulation of knowledge contained in each category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 3.5 depicts the definition of each category and its connection to two of the original research questions. As additional data were collected, they were analyzed, coded, and assigned to appropriate categories. As data were reduced, interpretive analysis was enhanced.
Table 3.5

*Category Correlation to Research Questions #1 and 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?</td>
<td>a. Informal Interactions</td>
<td>a. Anticipated and unanticipated interactions that are more social in nature without any structure or potential conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Formal Interactions</td>
<td>b. Anticipated and unanticipated interactions that are structured and require action on the part of the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?</td>
<td>a. Availability</td>
<td>a. Principal establishes climate of being available or accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Shared Objective</td>
<td>b. Parents and principals have a common goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Attitude</td>
<td>c. Characteristics or elements of the attitude displayed by the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Respect</td>
<td>d. Respect is mutual – principal demonstrates it and expects it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Informing</td>
<td>e. Principal seeks to keep parents informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Communication</td>
<td>f. Style of how the principal communicates with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Skills</td>
<td>g. Skills principal exhibits to build or further the relationship between the principal and the parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h. Validation</td>
<td>h. How the principal validates the parent in and throughout the interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Knowledge of Parents</td>
<td>i. Ways in which the principal makes it personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>j. Acquiring Information</td>
<td>j. Principal seeks facts and works from them rather than simply from perceptions or impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k. Seeking Solution</td>
<td>k. Goal is to resolve situation when interaction is conflictual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher developed a summary template to remain consistent while recording information for each code. The summary template, contained in the research file, was initially comprised of three sections: definition, description, and examples. Later in the research process a fourth section, link to the relevant literature, was added. Use of this template provided the researcher with a master document in which all data were ultimately recorded. In addition to making the plethora of data more manageable, accumulation of information in one document made developing properties of each category less cumbersome for the researcher. It also became more readily apparent how all categories ultimately connected to a central core category.

The third stage of the constant comparative method, delimiting the theory, occurred on two levels: theory and categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, the theory began to solidify so significant modifications became less necessary. Subsequent modifications focused primarily on cleanup. The properties of the categories were subjected to reduction, meaning “that the analyst may discover underlying uniformities, [which will allow the researcher to] formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts” (p. 110). Categories that no longer fit within the boundaries of the emerging theory were discarded. The researcher also became more discriminating in coding and analyzing incidents.

Terminology and text were delimited. Through this reduction of terminology the researcher was able to generalize, thus meeting the two tenets of theory development as required by the constant comparison method. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified these two requirements as parsimony of variables and formulation and scope in the applicability of the theory to a wide range of situations.

The second level of delimitation reduced the list of categories for coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the theory evolved, reduction was applied, and the researcher became more
committed to the theory. The list of categories was streamlined, and analysis of incidents became more selective and more focused on emerging theory. Data became theoretically saturated, and if additional data were needed, theoretical sampling was employed as a collection strategy. In joint collection and analysis, subsequent questions were intended to “guide the collection of data to fill in gaps and to extend the theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 109). Tables 3.6 and 3.7 demonstrate how the researcher reduced the categories for coding according to boundaries of developing theory.

Table 3.6

Reduction of Categories for Research Question # 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Categories</th>
<th>Reduced Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Informal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>Formal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>Anticipated interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP meetings</td>
<td>Unanticipated interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraiser meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal chats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local School Council meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTO meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7

Reduction of Categories for Research Question # 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Categories</th>
<th>Reduced Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being available</td>
<td>Exhibiting a welcoming demeanor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having common goals</td>
<td>Creating a climate of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an appropriate attitude</td>
<td>Establishing and maintaining communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being respectful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using appropriate communication avenues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a productive communication style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the researcher became confident with emerging categories, follow up interviews were scheduled and conducted. The purpose for these interviews was to develop more fully those categories which were not yet saturated. In addition, the second interviews served to provide preliminary confirmation for the researcher’s emerging theory. In sharing theoretical ideas with
participants, their perceptions were incorporated into ongoing analysis. These follow-up interviews served to improve emerging theoretical ideas by providing both additional data and member checks (Merriam, 1998).

The fourth stage of the constant comparative method is writing the theory, which commences with summations, or memos, of each category. When the researcher had collected, coded, and analyzed the data, further analysis of memos and templates was done to create an analytic framework for possible theory. Once the researcher was convinced that the framework would support a systematic substantive theory, that the framework was based on an accurate depiction of the participants’ perspectives of their interactions with parents and the strategies they employed in these interactions, and that the framework was in a form usable for others, writing commenced (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The constant comparisons required or forced the researcher to consider and address diversity in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher viewed category development both internally and comparatively. Data now served as evidence for conclusions drawn by the researcher as theory was written. Typically, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theory that emerged from data and that was based on data could not readily be contradicted by more data or another theory. Saturation of categories further ensured that data could not be contradicted easily by additional data collection.

Beginning with the analytic framework, the researcher began to organize memos, aligning them to the framework. The code memos, along with the summary template, contained all the information needed for writing a preliminary draft. Refinement of the draft consisted of selecting quotes most representative of the findings and general editing. Throughout the writing, a system of checks and balances was employed to ensure findings being presented actually
answered the research questions originally posed. This system also ensured that the categories were appropriately defined, described, and explicated with sufficient detail.

As a result of the constant comparative analysis of the data, the researcher identified several substantive categories in response to the first two research questions: (a) What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents? and (b) What kinds of micropolitical strategies do they employ in interacting with parents? Table 3.8 depicts these categories. According to Glaser (1978), the identification of substantive categories comprises “the empirical substance of the area of research” (p. 55). It was through the analysis of data pertaining to research questions one and two that effects of micropolitics on principal-parent interaction became evident, and consequently, the third research question – What effect does micropolitics have on principals’ interactions with parents? – is addressed in greater detail in Chapters Four and Five.

Table 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Substantive Categories for Research Questions # 1 and 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question # 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Informal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Formal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four Components of Constant Comparative Analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified three components of the constant comparative method: (a) theoretical sampling, (b) theoretical saturation, and (c) theoretical sensitivity. Working alone, Glaser (1978) added a fourth component – theoretical pacing. While they are four distinct components, they operate simultaneously in a study and complement each other. Together, these four components result in integrated and solid theory.
The first component of constant comparative analysis is theoretical sampling. As defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), it is “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). This process allowed data collection to be controlled by emerging theory so the researcher was better able to guide data collection and to pursue emerging theory. As data were collected and coded, analogous incidents emerged. Theoretical sampling also allowed the researcher to develop concepts and categories when collecting data and to compare new data with data already collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a result, the researcher’s sampling became more selective as theory evolved, which necessitated the structured interview format previously described.

Data collected through interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews were analyzed. The researcher began to see categories and patterns emerge, moving her toward development of a framework for a theory. According to Glaser (1978), “The data must control the emerging theory” (p. 18). The researcher consistently reviewed collected data, questioned what had been found, and compared it to different theories to verify or disprove any potential fit between theory and data collected.

The second component of constant comparative analysis is theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss defined saturation as the condition or time when there were no additional data being identified that might have led the researcher to develop further properties of the category. Use of theoretical sampling did not allow the researcher to predetermine the number of interactions she would have with participants throughout the study. Furthermore, the researcher often moved between new and old groups of data and consequently had to judge when she had sampled enough groups to validate her theoretical point (Glaser &
This process of judging was based on a category’s theoretical saturation. Saturation aided in determining the core category and corresponding category set. Saturation was attained through joint collection and analysis of data. Time spent on less relevant categories would have rendered the more relevant categories underdeveloped. Once the researcher began to see the same or similar instances repeatedly and found that prior gaps in the theory or in a category were closed, she concluded that categories were theoretically saturated and ended data collection.

The third component of the constant comparative method as identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is theoretical sensitivity. They defined this as the researcher’s ability to know her own data well enough to give meaning to it and to formulate a theory as it emerged from data. Data took on meaning as a result of the researcher’s coding and analysis. The researcher needed to have an innate understanding of data that enhanced her ability to analyze them, to conceptualize categories, and to move data and categories into theory.

Theoretical sensitivity was ongoing and pervasive throughout the entire study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than ignoring her own experiences with principal-parent interactions, the researcher instead followed the advice of Glaser and Strauss who suggested that the researcher use her own insights to promulgate theory.

The researcher’s position as a principal enhanced her rapport with participants. Furthermore, her experiences provided unique insights that allowed for a heightened sensitivity to data that were more relevant to the study’s focus on micropolitical strategies employed by other principals as they interacted with parents. Familiarity with literature on micropolitics and parental interactions also increased the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity. This understanding of the literature enhanced the researcher’s ability to see correlations in data and to generate theoretical ideas from analysis of these correlations. However, as mandated by Glaser (1978),
precedence was given to insights gained from actual research over that of the researcher’s own insights. The researcher’s own position as principal and knowledge of literature relevant to this study merely served to enhance her theoretical sensitivity.

The fourth component of constant comparative analysis is theoretical pacing. Glaser (1978), working without Strauss, stressed it as an additional area of importance. Theoretical pacing refers to the necessary balance the researcher must establish between data collection and analysis and includes two stages: input and saturation (Glaser). Grounded theory methodology calls for these two processes to be joint in nature and operation; therefore, Glaser cautioned against collecting too much data prior to analyzation. Input refers to collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data through construction of written memos. Saturation, as previously identified, refers to the time when all ideas appear to have been developed completely and new data offers little if any additional insight.

To ensure theoretical pacing, the researcher planned interviews and observations to allow transcription, coding, and analysis to occur in a timely manner. Fifteen interviews and fifteen observations were conducted over a six month period. In addition to time spent in interaction with participants, eight to ten hours per week were spent analyzing data, writing memos, and adding to the summary template over a ten month period.

Grounded theory methodology, with all its facets and components, was appropriate for this study. The limited amount of research pertaining to principal-parent interactions focused primarily on enhancing parental involvement. Cresswell (1998) asserted that “the intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory . . . that relates to a particular situation . . . [in which] individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a
phenomenon” (pp. 55-56). This study’s intent was potentially to generate theory regarding the micropolitical strategies employed by principals in effective principal-parent interactions.

The researcher used grounded theory methodology to allow themes to emerge from conceptual categories derived from analysis of data. Instead of attempting to validate preconceived theories or perceptions with data, the grounded theory method allowed a framework within which data could yield these themes. The application of constant comparative analysis to the emerging categories furthered the revelation of any pertinent themes.

Ultimately, Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasized the fundamental aspect of generating theory. For research to be sound, collection, coding, and analysis must be conducted in a fluid manner as joint endeavors. Generation of a theory must be coupled with the process of theory, and all three facets must be intertwined to the fullest extent possible.

Credibility

Credibility, as defined by Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; and Strauss and Corbin, 1998, refers to trustworthiness of the research process and the corresponding theory generated from the process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established a goal for any study: demonstrability that the study is conducted in such a way as to ensure accurate identification of categories and description of data. The test, according to them, lies in how well findings of the study represent realities of participants. Strauss and Corbin (1998) corroborated this when they stated, “The real merit of a substantive theory lies in its ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply them back to them” (p. 267).
Inherent in the methodology of grounded theory are criteria that are used to augment a study’s credibility. Use of constant comparative analysis allowed the researcher to permeate the study with built-in checks and balances as she sought to make credible connections between categories and properties. These checks and balances included procedural elements that grounded theorists employ to ensure credibility: theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical saturation, and theoretical pacing (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Furthermore, use of joint data collection and analysis guarantees the fit, work, and relevance of data collected when measured against emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Fit, Work, and Relevance**

Glaser (1978) contended that fitness refers to the fact that categories were derived directly from data. The researcher did not begin with preconceived categories and force theory into those categories. Instead, categories were derived from data and were reflective of what participants themselves considered to be of importance in their interactions.

Work requires that the theory generated explains or interprets what was actually happening in the research environment (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because the researcher derived categories from participants’ own descriptions, data were reflective of those behaviors and had meaning for participants. This was further enhanced when participants verified emerging categories.

Relevance refers to the fact that the categories were meaningful to the research environment and meaningful when they emerged from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser (1978) stated, “Grounded theory arrives at relevance because it allows core problems and processes to emerge” (p. 5). Again, because categories were derived directly from data, they
were relevant to the specific research setting. Furthermore, data were not forced into any predetermined categories, which further enhanced the relevance of the categories.

A theory will work if its categories fit and if it has relevance (Glaser, 1978). By allowing the categories to emerge naturally from data, and through use of the constant comparative method, the researcher was able to ensure the fit, work, and relevance of data collected in this study.

Reliability

In quantitative studies, reliability means that two independent researchers conducting the same study under the same conditions and with the same methodology will produce the same results and formulate the same conclusions. Qualitative researchers, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), work by a different standard: “In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data” (p. 36). Reliability, as posited by Bogdan and Biklen, is seen as the fit between data recorded and events that actually occur in the research setting, not consistency across different observations. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) cautioned, “A qualitative study is not an impressionistic, off-the-cuff analysis based on a superficial look at a setting or people. It is a piece of systematic research conducted with demanding, though not necessarily standardized, procedures” (p. 9). Furthermore, they maintained that it is simply not possible to “achieve perfect reliability if we are to produce meaningful studies of the real world” (p. 9). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the term reliability is a misfit when applied to qualitative research; instead, the qualitative researcher should strive for dependability and consistency of data and results. According to Merriam (1998):
Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. (p. 206, emphasis in original text)

In this study, the collection of data across a variety of formats helped test reliability of data as did comparison of categories and emergent theory to those in existing literature. The reliability in this study was enhanced by use of open-ended questions, observations, and feedback from participants.

Validity

Janesick (2000) stressed that validity, in the qualitative realm, has to do with “description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description” (p. 393). She further asserted that within a qualitative study, there is no one way to interpret events; rather, there may be many correct interpretations. For this study, initial coding was completed using actual words or phrases articulated by each participant. The same initial open-ended questions were asked of each participant (See Appendix H). Frequently during the interview process, the same question was asked several times during one session in an effort to afford the participant an opportunity to add depth or richness of detail to the description. By allowing participants to describe in detail and in their own words their interactions with parents, the validity of the study was reinforced. Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggested that qualitative researchers must identify clearly and adequately boundaries of the study because parameters of setting, population, and theoretical framework formulate the basis of validity. “An in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 143).
Strategies for Enhancing Credibility

Three strategies were used in this study to enhance credibility: triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checks. Marshall and Rossman (1995) defined triangulation as “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p. 144). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined it as the use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm emerging hypotheses and elucidate findings. However, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) advised against using triangulation as a term. They supported simply identifying methods that will be used without the confusion inherent in the term triangulation. To that end and to avoid potential confusion, this study used multiple data collecting techniques (interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews) as well as multiple sources (seven principals). This process served to embed precepts of triangulation into the study.

The second strategy used to enhance credibility was prolonged engagement. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined this as the amount of time the researcher spent engaged in the research setting. It presumes a sufficient amount of time and sufficient engagement in the setting to learn the context, to build and sustain rapport and consequently trust with the participants, and to minimize potential for any misconceptions.

The length of time spent in interviews and observations resulted in prolonged engagement. For this study, the researcher was involved with participants in their respective settings for a period of six months (Fall 2004 – Spring 2005). Each participant was interviewed and observed twice in situ, which allowed the researcher to familiarize herself with their respective schools. (One participant – James – was observed in three interactions.) Each interview of at least 60 minutes and each observation of at least 90 minutes resulted in over five
hours spent with each participant. In addition to this, time was also spent in follow-up emails and phone calls when seeking confirmation on emerging data.

The third strategy used to enhance credibility was what Merriam (1998) identified as member checks, which means “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p. 205). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that member checks are the most critical or crucial aspect of establishing credibility. Member checks were continual throughout the study and followed several formats: (a) summary of the interview presented to the participant for confirmation, correction, and/or additions; (b) insights gained from data from one participant being used in subsequent interviews with other participants and vice versa; and (c) discussion with individual participants regarding categories and emerging theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested these methods to involve the participants in establishing credibility. By establishing them jointly throughout collection of data, the researcher was able to enhance further the study’s credibility.

Subjectivity Statement

Qualitative researchers struggle with concerns regarding the effect their own subjectivity may have on data and subsequent findings of their research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). There is no question that life experiences have an impact on every aspect of people’s lives. These experiences shape the way people view the world, as well as their likes and dislikes, and ultimately their way of thinking. Qualitative researchers, however, attempt to examine objectively the perceptions of participants in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Researchers do this through the methods they use during the study. The considerable amount of time spent collecting data, the thorough review of data, and the actual quantity of data work together to
counteract any biases of the researcher. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated, “The data that are collected provide a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study” (p. 33). Additionally, the primary purpose of the qualitative researcher is to provide additional knowledge, not to take a judgmental stand on the subject (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The researcher for this study is a principal, just as were the participants in the study. The researcher had many parental interactions similar to those described by the participants. The researcher believed the interactions she had experienced were handled in much the same manner as the participants described. Her parental interactions would have fit well into the categories revealed through the study. However, this correlation was not recognized until all data had been analyzed and categorized.

Much as any researcher wants to disconnect from personal biases, it simply is not possible “to divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value….The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 34). There was no way for the researcher to eliminate completely her subjectivity, but she did make every effort to center collection of data on the focus of the study – principal-parent interactions. This required a conscious and continuous effort on her part to divorce her own thoughts and feelings from the process of data collection and analysis. During each interview or observation, when the researcher found herself particularly identifying with a statement or description provided by a participant, it was critical not to allow this “connection” to be visible to the participant. Allowing participants to see the researcher’s connection could have been taken
as confirmation, making the absence of any kind of reaction critical for minimizing the researcher’s subjectivity.

For this study, the researcher made use of multiple interviews and observations as well as extensive field notes that included notations regarding times when her own subjectivity might have impacted the impressions garnered. Furthermore, the researcher sought a saturation of data. In taking these steps, the researcher was again continually conscious of the need to force her own thoughts and perspectives outside the framework of the data collection and analysis process. Consequently, the study did not focus on the researcher’s subjectivity, but instead, it focused on the research questions. Because of this, her experiences as a principal simply shaped the study while the data informed her thinking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Thus, this researcher’s subjectivity did not have significant influence on the outcome of this study.

Summary

This chapter presented and reviewed methodology used in this qualitative study. The study was designed and conducted according to the symbolic interactionism theoretical framework. Interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews served as the data sources and were organized through use of a research file. Constant comparative analysis allowed for joint data collection and analysis. Categories were reviewed for saturation, and theory was allowed to emerge rather than being forced. Credibility was enhanced through the use of multiple strategies.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This study examined micropolitical strategies employed by effective elementary principals as they interacted with parents. Research was conducted to answer three questions:

1. What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?
2. What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?
3. What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents?

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher determined the strategies used by the participants and the effects of those strategies. This chapter presents findings and reports them as data from the individual participants.

All participants began their initial interviews by describing types of interactions they had with parents (See Appendix I). As the researcher identified and analyzed the data through the constant comparative method, two themes emerged to describe the types of interactions principals had with parents: formal interactions and informal interactions. These interactions are described in detail in the first section of this chapter.

After detailing the types of interactions with parents, the participants described different strategies they employed when interacting with parents (See Appendix J). Constant comparative analysis resulted in four substantive categories that best described strategies employed by the principals: exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships. The development of these four
substantive categories yielded the core category of *resolution*. Consistent with all strategies used by participants, the underlying common thread or effect was to resolve conflict. The core category and corresponding category set are described in the chapter’s second section.

Effects of the strategies formed the basis for the third section of this chapter. Three categories emerged from data surrounding the third research question. These categories are finding a resolution, strengthening relationships, and reaching an impasse.

The initial research questions formed the basis of the three sections of this chapter: Types of Interactions, The Core Category and Corresponding Category Set, and Effects of the Strategies. It is important to note that the second research question yielded the core category and subsequent category set as a result of data analysis. Table 4.1 provides a detailed summary of this chapter.
Table 4.1

Summary of the Findings

Premise of Study

*Principals use certain micropolitical strategies to achieve desired results when interacting with parents.*

Research Questions

*What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?*
*What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?*
*What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents?*

FINDINGS

1. Principals engage in two types of interactions: formal and informal.

   **Formal Interactions**

   Formal interactions fall into two categories: anticipated and unanticipated; typically, they center around some sort of potentially conflictual issue.

   - Anticipated formal interactions are those that are preplanned, require prior thought on the part of the principal, and usually necessitate some action by the principal.
   - Unanticipated formal interactions are those that usually occur during or as a result of a scheduled formal interaction but are not preplanned.

   **Informal Interactions**

   Informal interactions fall into two categories: anticipated and unanticipated; typically, they do not involve anything significantly conflictual.

   - Anticipated informal interactions are those typically occurring during an event or activity in which little was required of the principal other than to be present and sociable.
   - Unanticipated informal interactions are those typically occurring during the day or outside the school arena; there is rarely any purpose to the interaction, but the principal is usually required to demonstrate social finesse during the interaction.

2. Resolution is the main goal of all interactions.

   **Definition**

   Resolution refers to the attainment of a positive outcome for an interaction between a principal and a parent.

   **Descriptors**

   - Both parties desire a positive outcome.
   - All strategies employed by the principal work toward this positive resolution.
   - Nature of the interaction does not impact goal of positive resolution.
### FINDINGS

3. **Principals use four main micropolitical strategies in seeking resolution.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibiting a Welcoming Demeanor</th>
<th>Creating a Climate of Respect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting a welcoming demeanor involves all actions principals use to make parents feel welcome when entering the school or meeting with administration.</td>
<td>Creating a climate of respect involves two basic premises: giving and receiving basic respect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Subcategories

- **Being Available**: being visible and being accessible
- **Having Shared Objectives**: having a common goal and being collaborative
- **Managing Own Attitude**: being non-threatening, being non-judgmental, being friendly, being supportive, being receptive, being sociable, being gracious, and being positive
- **Demonstrating Respect for Parents**: listening, being attentive, responding in a timely manner, refraining from use of sarcasm or intimidation, refraining from exhibitions of disbelief or lack of confidence, exhibiting honesty, and following through with what is decided
- **Expecting Respect for Self**: maintaining role as professional, terminating conversations that are abusive in tone or nature and rescheduling if necessary, and insisting parent commits to follow through

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing and Maintaining Communication</th>
<th>Building Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and maintaining communication involves the manner and way in which principals stay in contact with parents.</td>
<td>Building relationships involves the steps or actions principals take to establish a relationship with parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Subcategories

- **Keeping Parents Informed**: providing opportunities to engage, being proactive, creating a sense of collaboration, and using newsletters, websites, and school message centers
- **Style of Communication**: being positive, using conversational language, being diplomatic, being consistent, and being non-confrontational
- **Using Interpersonal Skills**: being empathetic, developing trust, treating parents as equals, having patience, diffusing the situation, and seeking solutions
- **Validating Parents**: finding common ground, acknowledging the concern or suggestion, and respecting the individuality of the student
- **Having Knowledge of Parents**: knowing your parents, making it personal, and making initial contact

4. **Use of these four strategies yields three possible effects for the interaction.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding a Resolution</th>
<th>Strengthening the Relationship</th>
<th>Reaching an Impasse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal has interaction with parent.</td>
<td>Successful resolution is achieved from interaction.</td>
<td>Principal has interaction with parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal applies micropolitical strategies.</td>
<td>Relationship between school and home is strengthened as a result of successful resolution.</td>
<td>Principal applies micropolitical strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful resolution is achieved.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful resolution is not achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both parties agree to simply walk away or the issue is referred up the chain of command.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship between home and school is usually not strengthened.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of Interactions between Principals and Parents

At the onset of the study, the researcher posed the question, “What kinds of interactions do principals have with parents?” Data obtained depicted a plethora of interactions, ranging from parent conferences about academic or discipline issues to chats in local grocery stores (See Appendix F). Subsequent constant comparative analysis of data revealed two themes of interactions, each with two categories. Table 4.2 depicts these themes and categories.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Categories Emerging from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Interactions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Unanticipated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Formal Interactions with Parents*

Formal interactions between participants and parents in their respective schools fell into two categories: anticipated and unanticipated. Anticipated formal interactions were preplanned, scheduled, required prior thought on the part of the principals, and usually necessitated some action by the principals. Unanticipated formal interactions usually occurred during or as a result of an anticipated formal interaction but were not preplanned or scheduled. Unanticipated formal interactions were almost always interruptive, unscheduled, and problem oriented, typically required a timely response, and generally entailed an appropriate action by the principal.

Described or observed anticipated formal interactions included academic conferences, complaints about teachers, discipline conferences, home visits, and special education meetings. During such interactions, principals were required to take a specific action. All participants preferred to have formal interactions take place on their terms, meaning in a prearranged manner.
All participants provided data regarding their anticipated formal interactions with parents and all were observed interacting with parents on an anticipated formal level at least once. Table 4.3 details the settings for observed anticipated formal interactions.

Table 4.3

Observed Anticipated Formal Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Christy</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Marcie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council Meeting</td>
<td>School Council Meeting</td>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the seven participants were observed in the same type of anticipated formal interaction – conducting a Local School Council (LSC) meeting. These meetings had formalized agendas, rules of order, and specific purposes. Principals guided meetings to avoid any deviations from the agendas. They attempted to limit time spent on any dialogue other than that related to the agenda. After each meeting, there was little if any time for parents to engage the principal in a more informal discussion because of tight daily schedules. In all cases, LSC meetings were scheduled just prior to the start of the school day or sometime during the school day. All principals indicated that while this might have been more convenient for some members, convenience was a by-product of deliberate efforts on the part of principals to control demands on their time.

The researcher had an opportunity to observe James during a different anticipated formal interaction, a parent conference regarding a bus discipline issue. James had requested that the parents meet with him during an informal school activity, explaining to the researcher that it was difficult to get the parents to come to school and he was taking advantage of their presence at the activity to talk about an on-going problem he was having with their son. The researcher
explained her presence to the parents and obtained their verbal consent to observe the conference. She did not participate in the conference except when spoken to directly by the principal or parents. During the parent conference, the principal used strategies identified in each of the four categories that support the core category. This will be discussed at length in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Unanticipated formal interactions occurred during scheduled events such as a parent conference, a Student Support Team meeting, or a Local School Council Meeting. Each principal might have had some responsibility in preparing for the meeting and was an active participant, but on occasion a parent would seek to change the focus. James spoke of being in a Student Support Team meeting about a child and finding that the parent really wanted to talk about another of her children. He stated, “I struggled to keep the focus on the purpose for the meeting and ended up finally telling the parent I would meet with her right after the Student Support Team meeting to discuss her concerns.” This was an example of an interaction scheduled for a specific purpose giving rise to a spontaneous or unanticipated conversation that the principal had to redirect to keep the focus on the purpose at hand.

Amelia was observed in a Local School Council Meeting during which a parent member of the Council kept bringing up an issue about the school’s lunchroom staff. It was evident that the issue pertained only to that parent and was not indicative of a pervasive problem that required the Council’s attention. Several other members gave examples that contradicted the parent’s assertion. Amelia allowed the discussion to continue for several minutes, and when it appeared that the issue was not going to be resolved without her intervention, she suggested she and the parent discuss the concerns in private later. The parent did not appear pleased to have lost her
Marcie described her participation in a parent conference concerning inappropriate behavior of a student. The parent continually attempted to change the subject, requiring Marcie constantly to redirect the dialogue back to the focus of the meeting. She stated:

[This particular child] was in danger of being reported to DFACS [Department of Family and Children’s Services] due to his tendency to place his hands in an inappropriate manner on the girls in his class. The counselor and I were having the parent in for a final conference before making the referral to our school social worker, and the parent kept trying to talk about a bus incident that didn’t even involve her child. It was as though she was completely oblivious to the seriousness of the situation…. I finally had to be extremely assertive with her, telling her…I wasn’t going to discuss the bus problem with her and that she had to listen to what we were saying or her son was going to be in serious trouble….It was a reflexive action on her part – if she dominated the conversation, she didn’t have to acknowledge what was going on with [her son].

Anticipated and unanticipated formal interactions appeared in the data with equal frequency. In almost all the anticipated formal interactions where one or more parents attempted to initiate an unanticipated formal interaction, it was conflictual. In the majority of these incidents, the principal was able to redirect the unanticipated interaction to a more appropriate time, thus allowing the current activity to remain on track. All principal participants indicated that a stringent time frame and a clear agenda limited the potential for unanticipated formal interactions to occur during an anticipated formal interaction.

Informal Interactions with Parents

All participants provided details about informal interactions with parents and all were observed interacting on an informal level during a PTO meeting. Through an examination of data, it was determined that informal interactions could be disaggregated into two categories: anticipated and unanticipated. Table 4.4 summarizes the informal interactions in which participants engaged.
Table 4.4

Informal Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unanticipated</th>
<th>Anticipated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drop ins</td>
<td>Honors nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking the building</td>
<td>Spirit nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunchtime</td>
<td>Fall festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent drop off line in the mornings</td>
<td>Spring fling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent pick up line in the afternoons</td>
<td>School dances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery store</td>
<td>Book fairs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fundraiser events</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PTO programs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Unanticipated informal interactions took place during the school day or while the principal was away from the school building, in places such as the grocery store, a church, or out and about in the community. There were no clear purposes to these interactions; however, principals were required to react instantaneously, usually with social finesse but rarely about conflicts. Anticipated informal interactions typically occurred during an event or activity at school where the principal was only tangentially involved, such as with a PTO program.

Anticipated informal interaction often resulted in a formal interaction of an anticipated or unanticipated nature. This distinction – moving toward a formal interaction or remaining as an informal interaction – depended on the parent’s needs. When the parent simply desired acknowledgement as a parent in the school, the interaction remained informal in nature. When the parent had an issue that needed to be resolved, the principal routinely deflected the conversation by suggesting a meeting at a more appropriate time, resulting in an anticipated formal interaction.

Unanticipated informal interactions occurring during the school day typically took place as the principal circulated throughout the building and encountered parents who were there for a variety of reasons. As Christy described, “My office is behind the main office and whenever I leave or come back to my office, I encounter parents in the main office….I always try to acknowledge them by name and chat for a minute.” Amelia indicated similar actions when she
said, “Lots of parents in our school eat lunch with their kids. When I am in the lunchroom, I always make time to talk to them. If they want to talk about something specific, some problem they are having, I encourage them to make an appointment so I can devote my full attention.”

Emily was observed on morning car duty which provided her with an opportunity to interact with parents in an informal manner. This activity was productive because more than half of her students were car riders. Jack used the same process during afternoon pick up. He stated:

This gives me a chance to talk to parents, even if it is just to say hello. Many times, this will be the only encounter I have with some of the parents….Over the years, I have found that this is very meaningful for both of us. Plus, the kids love to see the principal opening their car doors, which transfers to the parents in a positive way.

Unanticipated informal interactions also occurred outside the school day, away from the school building. For principals living in the school’s community, these unanticipated informal interactions might occur at the grocery store, at church, while running errands, or while engaged in some other non-school related endeavor. Christy spoke of seeing parents in the grocery store when she stopped on her way home from school. Laura talked of being in a Sunday school class with parents of children attending her school.

For all participants, these unanticipated informal encounters also occurred when they were at events sponsored by other schools in their districts. James described a situation in which he encountered parents while attending the high school football game. Parents of students in his school seemed pleased to see him, and he was reminded that regardless of his reasons for being in attendance at the game, he had to maintain his role as the elementary school principal. All participants spoke of the need to keep these unanticipated informal interactions informal in nature, rather than allowing a parent to turn the encounter into a formal interaction.

When observing the participants during anticipated informal interactions such as PTO meetings, fundraiser activities, and school programs, the researcher noticed that each principal
was adept at keeping conversations casual. The following field note, taken after observing Amelia during a PTO meeting aimed at exhibiting student work, evidences this skill:

The researcher noted that as Amelia moved throughout the building, she was “Teflon-like.” She deflected parents’ attempts to make this a time for conferences, keeping conversations casual instead. Parents seemed to respond well to this, agreeing to come in the next day or to call for an appointment if they required her attention.

The same behavior was noted after observing all the other participants during anticipated informal interactions. Laura allowed more depth in one conversation; she stepped aside during a spaghetti supper and allowed a parent to go into greater detail. Subsequently, the researcher questioned the deviation by stating that in other instances that evening Laura had deflected the conversations. Laura answered that this parent was emotionally needy and she felt that she could further enhance the relationship as well as the parent’s self-esteem by allowing her to share her story. The researcher noted that although Laura allowed the parent to share details of her concern, no attempt was made to resolve the problem in that setting. It seemed to be enough for the parent to know that the principal would address the concern the next day. In doing so, Laura was able to keep the interaction informal without offending the parent.

The researcher observed Emily in a similar situation that occurred within an anticipated informal interaction and made the following field note about the interaction:

Tonight at the honors night which was about showcasing student academic honors for this nine weeks, Emily kept getting cornered – at least three times – by a parent who wanted to discuss her daughter’s evaluation scores for the gifted program. Emily told the parent several times that she hadn’t reviewed the scores, but she would be happy to talk with her or to have [the gifted teacher] call her to set up an appointment….Emily repeatedly sought to redirect the parent to the purpose of the evening, but she saw it as an opportunity to have Emily’s undivided attention. Ultimately Emily was able to have the parent agree to come in the next morning, but the entire interaction took Emily’s focus off the honors activities. She commented to the researcher that, as a result, she was certain she missed contact with some parents who would have appreciated…talking with her. It seemed to be an area of high frustration for her.
Similar behavior occurred while observing Jack at a PTO sponsored parent night for kindergarten. A parent approached him in the hall and wanted to discuss the attendance policy. The parent, who had received official notification that day that his son was out of compliance, was noticeably upset, but Jack did not invite him out of the hall into his office area, even though it was in close proximity. Jack allowed the parent to vent for a few moments before politely reminding him that the school system’s policy had been sent to parents earlier in the year. The parent acknowledged that he knew the rules in the policy; he just did not like them. Jack laughed agreeably and said that the point was for students to be in school to learn. He suggested the parent review the policy and put his concerns in writing for administrative review. The parent indicated he would consider this and left to go to his child’s classroom. When the researcher questioned Jack about why he kept the irate gentleman in the hall rather than entering the office, Jack replied:

Had we gone into my office, the encounter would have become more serious and would have taken me away from the purpose of tonight. By remaining in the hall, he calmed down because of witnesses. I can’t solve his problem about attendance, only he can, and by allowing him to conference about it, I would be allowing him to think he can change my mind….He just needs to vent, and he vents longer and louder when he doesn’t have an audience. By keeping him in the hall, I was able to limit his ability to hold me hostage to his concern.

Jack’s purpose was to keep the encounter informal. By remaining in the hall, he was able to guide the parent away from a more formal encounter, keeping the focus on the real purpose of the evening – showcasing the work of the kindergarten students.

While attending the Christmas program at Christy’s school, the researcher observed her in a similar situation. After students performed, Christy was engaged in conversation by a parent who clearly had concerns about a community issue. He attempted to guide her away from the center of the room so he could talk with her privately, a difficult task given that the performance
had taken place in the school’s gymnasium. Adroitly directing him to a board member allowed Christy to remain accessible to other parents attending the performance. She was able to keep subsequent conversations more casual, ensuring that she interacted with a greater number of parents than would have been possible had she allowed in-depth conversations.

When engaged in an anticipated or unanticipated informal interaction, the ultimate goal of the participants was to keep the interaction focused on the purpose of the event. All participants used a causal demeanor, were welcoming of the parents, heard them out when necessary, refrained from making any kind of decision, and kept moving throughout the activity. The majority of informal interactions experienced by the participants, whether anticipated or unanticipated, required little from the principal other than acknowledgement of the parent’s presence.

The Core Category and Corresponding Category Set

The participants were asked to detail strategies they employed when interacting with parents. Analysis of data gathered during this study revealed resolution to be the primary goal of all interactions between principals and parents. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identified the core category as the central phenomenon to which all other categories relate. In this study, resolution emerged as the core category and four micropolitical behaviors or strategies were identified as the lines of action principals took to accomplish resolution. The category set included exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships. Within the categories in the category set, the researcher identified subcategories. Subcategories are properties of the category (Merriam, 1998). Table 4.5 provides an overview of the core category and corresponding category set as
discussed by the participants. This section discusses the core category and corresponding category set in further detail, and salient excerpts from the participant transcripts are used to support the findings as well as to illustrate the perspectives of the participants.

Table 4.5

**Core Category and Corresponding Category Set**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Exhibiting a Welcoming Demeanor</th>
<th>Creating a Climate of Respect</th>
<th>Establishing and Maintaining Communication</th>
<th>Building Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being available</td>
<td>• Demonstrating respect for parents</td>
<td>• Keeping parents informed</td>
<td>• Using interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having shared objectives</td>
<td>• Expecting respect for oneself</td>
<td>• Using appropriate style of communication</td>
<td>• Validating parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Managing own attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Having knowledge of parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resolution**

Analysis of data revealed *resolution* as the core category or unifying element connecting all micropolitical strategies used by the principals in their interactions with parents. All strategies used by the principals were intended to resolve situations. The situation may or may not have been conflictual in nature. The nature of an interaction did not impact any principals’ goal of a positive *resolution*. Every participant described the need to seek resolution when engaged in most interactions with parents. During their interviews and observations, participants described their strategies which consisted of processes and actions that targeted achievement of *resolution*. The corresponding category set refers, then, to processes and actions strategically employed by the principals in their efforts to seek *resolution*. All properties assigned to the category set work to achieve the core category goal of *resolution*. 
Exhibiting a Welcoming Demeanor

Exhibiting a welcoming demeanor is defined as actions all participants used to make parents feel welcome when entering schools or meeting with principals. Within this category of exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, three subcategories exist as revealed by data: being available, having shared objectives, and managing own attitude. Table 4.6 summarizes these subcategories and Appendix J details all categories, subcategories, and properties. All participants indicated that exhibiting a welcoming demeanor was perhaps the most important action they took when interacting with parents. Marcie explained, “I always try to make a parent feel welcome…. [S]eeming glad to see them is the first step toward solving whatever problem they may have.”

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being Available</th>
<th>Having Shared Objectives</th>
<th>Managing Own Attitude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being visible</td>
<td>Having a common goal</td>
<td>Being non-threatening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being accessible</td>
<td>Being collaborative</td>
<td>Being non-judgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being friendly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being supportive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being receptive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being sociable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being gracious</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being positive</td>
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</table>

Jack was more reserved, but he agreed that it was important to make parents feel like they could talk to the principal when there was a need, although he preferred to set the parameters if it was going to be more than an informal conversation. He stated:

I prefer to have time to be prepared. I meet with parents when they come in angry or upset about something. I usually just try to appear receptive and ready to listen, but I almost always schedule a follow-up meeting to attempt to resolve the situation. Making them welcome goes a long way towards deflecting a problem, but you can’t let parents rule your day or you won’t be able to accomplish the other things that need to be done. Parents are only one part of a principal’s job.

Emily asserted, “I meet with parents whenever they need me. If I am tied up with something, I make sure another administrator hears their concerns if at all possible. When a
parent comes to the school mad, it only makes it worse if no one is available to hear…[his/her] concern.”

All seven participants discussed how important being available, expressly being visible and accessible, was in exhibiting a welcoming demeanor. James stated:

So many times, availability is a challenge…. [A] principal is not in control of his or her time…. While parents can’t always have immediate access, it is important for them to feel like you regret that you are not available, but then there are so many times you can be available – like at a school wide event. I have never understood principals who don’t attend things like Fall Festival. That is a great opportunity to just be around, just to be visible. Most parents aren’t going to try to have an important conversation, but just being visible sometimes makes the difference.

Christy’s statements corroborated this when she said, “Parents have a more restricted schedule. They are on the clock when we are on the clock, so to speak, and it isn’t always easy for them to see us during the day. I try to make myself accessible to them if they can’t come to us during our traditional workday.” Emily explained, “Sometimes availability is all about just being there…visible, and other times it is about being available when it is convenient to the parent and maybe not to the school.”

All participants spoke of the importance of establishing that the principal and the parent have shared goals and should work in collaboration to resolve an issue or to address a concern brought by a parent. Amelia stated, “Having parents understand you are on the same page as they are sometimes turns the tide for a conflictual interaction…. [W]e have to come first to an understanding that we share the goal of what is best for their child.” Laura’s thoughts followed much the same path when she said, “I tell parents we wouldn’t be here if not for their children. Who would we be teaching if they didn’t send their children to our school? We have the same objective, a common goal – to make sure their child gets the best education he or she can.”
With regard to the third subcategory, managing own attitude, all seven participants spoke about how attitude determined the degree of welcome the parent perceived upon entering the school. Jack commented, “Attitude is everything. It can make or break any interaction.” Christy asserted, “I think it is important to make parents feel as though you are just as glad to see them when they are unexpected as when they are expected. It never seems to work in your favor to make them aware that they have interrupted you.”

Throughout the interviews and observations, participants talked repeatedly about attitude. Four of the seven talked specifically about being non-threatening and non-judgmental. Jack said, “It is never successful to start a meeting in a threatening manner with a parent. They shut down or become more aggressive and it just doesn’t work.” Emily stated, “As a new principal, I found myself wanting to adopt a demeanor of power. This never worked for me, and I learned from it. Parents didn’t perceive it as power; they saw it as threatening them. Usually the conference fell apart at that point.” Christy commented, “You have to come across as non-judgmental or they shut down.”

All seven participants talked about being friendly and receptive. Five described the need to have a gracious attitude. Amelia explained, “Being perceived as friendly is a good way to start a conference. It isn’t necessary to appear as all business…. that sometimes is a turn off. They need to see you as a real person…” James spoke of the need to be receptive to parents’ suggestions:

So many times I sit in a conference with a teacher where the parent is trying to be part of the meeting…making suggestions, etc. and the teacher is not receptive to what the parent is saying. I try to guard against this tendency. The parent may not have a good suggestion, but it might work just because they suggested it and are going to work harder to make sure it does work.
All seven participants discussed the need to be positive and supportive of parental concerns or needs. Jack said, “Sometimes all a parent needs is to be supported. If their home situation is not so great, sometimes they just want someone to reinforce what they are saying, make it seem more positive.” Christy commented:

When I attend a [Student Support Team meeting], I do my homework on the child. The fact that I am coming to the meeting is never a good thing – what principal gets invited to the easy ones? If I am there, it is because the team is expecting some sort of problem. I try to find something positive about the child so I can offer it early in the meeting. This makes the parent feel supported and sometimes they decide I am there to be on their side. Just by making this positive statement, I have found I can often turn the tide of the meeting.

Laura stated, “So many times in the course of a conference with a parent, I find myself being a counselor to the parent. Parents tell…principals a lot more than we often need or want to know! But being supportive of their concerns will often help with a problem, even if no real resolution is reached.”

While none of the participants used the term sociable, all seven described situations in which their attitude was simply sociable. These situations typically occurred outside the school environment, usually when a principal encountered a parent away from school. Laura spoke of this when she said, “Living in the same community where I work means I often encounter parents in the grocery store or at the hair dresser. I always try to take a few minutes to make small talk. It helps in making them feel welcome the next time they are in the school, no matter what the reason for being there.”

Creating a Climate of Respect

Creating a climate of respect involves two basic premises: giving and receiving basic respect. Two subcategories make up the category: demonstrating respect for parents and expecting respect for oneself. James stated, “When it comes to the issue of respect, the key is that
it is mutual respect.” Table 4.7 details properties of these two subcategories. All participants indicated *creating a climate of respect* was imperative. Jack explained this when he said:

> I believe that respect is no longer automatic between a parent and a principal….Now parents have the perception they can tell the principal what to do. So to counteract this, you [the principal] have to maintain your role as the expert, as the professional. Conducting yourself in this way will often assure you get the respect you deserve.

Amelia felt much the same way when she said, “Some days I think respect is everything. Knowing that a parent has respect for me, I can’t help but react differently than when I know the parent doesn’t respect me. I want to respect the parent, but it really is a mutual thing.”

Table 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories for Creating a Climate of Respect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrating Respect for Parents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being attentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Responding in a timely manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Refraining from use of sarcasm or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intimidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Refraining from exhibitions of disbelief or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exhibiting honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Following through with what is decided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout interviews and observations, all participants indicated through comments and actions that demonstrating respect for parents was paramount in all interactions. Jack believed that nothing a principal does will matter if the parent even falsely perceives the principal has no respect for the parent.

All seven participants stated that responding in a timely manner was often significant in demonstrating respect. James asserted, “Parents want a response within a reasonable amount of time and it shows respect for their concerns to return their calls promptly or meet with them in a practical time frame.” Christy stated, “I try to call parents back within 24 hours. If I know I can’t, I might pass the call along to [my assistant principal].”
It was also important, according to all seven participants, to listen, to be attentive, and to exhibit honesty when interacting with parents, regardless of the nature of the interaction. Marcie stated, “Sometimes, all it takes to resolve a problem is simply to listen to the parent.” Amelia offered a similar idea when she said, “First…I have to listen to them. Until they get to talk, they don’t want to hear anything I have to say.” Jack asserted much the same thing when he said, “Parents usually just want to be heard. Listening to them, really listening…usually diminishes their anger to the point that they are willing to listen to…you….”

Five of the seven participants indicated that it was extremely important to refrain from sarcasm, or intimidation, or conveying disbelief in what the parent was saying. During the first interview with James, he talked at length about how many leaders resort to positional authority right from the start of a conflictual interaction. He said, “This [use of sarcasm or intimidation] is such a big mistake. When a principal resorts to this, the meeting is essentially over. The principal will never win over the parent under those conditions. You might as well call in the superintendent.” Emily, in making a similar comment, stated, “It is also one of the hardest lessons for a principal to learn.”

Six of the seven participants believed it was critical to follow through on decisions made during an interaction. Jack said, “You have to do what you said you would do.” Amelia commented, “If I say I am going to do something, I do it. This carries over to so many other aspects of future interactions.” James explained, “Nothing irritates a parent more than finally meeting with the principal only to have him not do what he said he would do.”

All seven participants stated that they felt it equally important for principals to expect respect for themselves, believing parents and principals should respect each other. Emily asserted, “It is important for me to show respect to the parents, but it is also equally important to
expect that the parents demonstrate basic common decency towards me no matter how angry or dissatisfied he or she is.”

All seven participants commented that in all situations, the principal must be professional. Laura explained:

[As principal] you have to do everything you can to not take something the parent says personally. It may be personal – after all, you have so much invested in your school, but you have to remain the professional. This may mean you call a temporary halt to the meeting or it may mean just taking a breath and refocusing the meeting, but you have to remain professional.

Emily stated, “You have to stay professional. The parents are going to be emotional. It is their child after all, so you have to remove emotion from [the situation] when necessary. Sometimes emotion on the part of the principal is good; it just depends on which way makes you more professional. You have to make a judgment call here.”

Six of the seven principals stated that it was important to terminate abusive conversations. Marcie felt that her own behavior caused parents to respect her. In addition to listening and being a caring person, she felt that her own beliefs about what was acceptable often set the tone for the interaction. She said:

I am not sure how it got around, but my parents seem to know that I will not tolerate verbal abuse of any kind….toward me…[or] toward a teacher. If parents yell or act out, I will politely ask them to calm down. If this doesn’t work, then I will simply tell the parents that this meeting is over until they can talk more calmly and more rationally. Usually, this statement will settle them down, but sometimes I have to follow through and get up and leave.

Laura explained:

Nothing is going to be accomplished when parents are so angry they can’t be reasonable. At that point the conversation needs to be terminated. I tell parents…[during a phone conversation] I am hanging up and I will call back in 30 minutes and if they have calmed down, we’ll continue the conversation. If it is a face to face meeting that has gotten out of hand, then I will ask if they would like a few moments to collect their thoughts, maybe offer them a [soft drink] or some water, and then leave for a few minutes so they can regroup. If that isn’t going to happen, I will suggest they leave and come back when they
are calmer. Usually, simply calling their attention to the inappropriateness of the interaction works to calm the parent down and we can proceed.

Six of the seven participants indicated that they attempt to have parents commit to follow through. Emily stated, “The school can do only so much. The parent needs to commit to the process too. It is important to get them to verbalize what they are going to do to make [whatever the solution is] work.” Jack explained, “Without the parent’s support in following through at home, you aren’t going to get far. It is a two-part endeavor.” Marcie commented, “They [the parents] need to tell me what they are going to do. This shows a commitment on their part.”

Establishing and Maintaining Communication

For all participants, establishing and maintaining communication was a critical area of focus. Communication includes the manner and way in which a principal stays in contact with parents. In discussions with and observations of the principals, two communication issues, using communication as a means of keeping parents informed and using an appropriate style of communication, were emphasized. Emily believed that since problems with parents usually come from a lack of communication, it is important that all staff members communicate effectively with the parents. James explicated this further when he stated that communication either makes or breaks a principal because parents need to acquire factual information from the principal before they get a variation of the facts from another source. Table 4.8 summarizes these two subcategories and the properties associated with them.

Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories for Establishing and Maintaining Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Parents Informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing opportunities to engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using newsletters, websites, and school message centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Creating a sense of collaboration</td>
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</table>
All participants indicated that keeping parents informed was an essential part of establishing and maintaining communication. Christy stated, “We want…parents’ help. The best way to obtain that is to make sure they know what is going on at school.” Amelia explained, “In all encounters, whether good, bad, or ugly, better communication would probably have brought better results.”

Six of the seven participants indicated giving parents ample notice of ways they could be involved in the school resulted in more help from more parents. Emily talked of times when parents provided the school with extra help because parents the school would not have thought to contact offered to help after receiving a flyer or reading the monthly calendar.

Five of the seven participants stated that being proactive in communication often averted potential problems. Jack commented:

I know who my problem kids are, and I know which parents would like advance notice about something unusual at school. Either I or [the counselor or the assistant principal] will talk informally with the parents ahead of time. Parents prefer to not be surprised or to hear the bad news after the fact, and I have found that they are more than willing to help up front.

Amelia described a similar way of thinking when she stated, “If I think a child might have a problem with an upcoming situation, I will make it a point to call parents and ask for their help, much like a preplanning activity. Here is what is going on, here’s how we know [the child] usually reacts to something like this, so let’s come up with a plan.”

All participants used some sort of monthly newsletter and five of the seven indicated they routinely updated their portion of the school website. Four of the seven had message boards attached to permanent school name signs. Laura stated, “There are many ways to keep parents informed. I use all of them to help keep lines of communication open.” Marcie asserted, “I learned early on to tell parents everything I could about upcoming events and to tell them more
than one time in more than one way.” James suggested that open communication had helped him resolve more problems than he could count. He said:

Many times when parents come in upset about something, after I listen, I can politely remind them of what they read in my newsletter, or in the handbook, or on the school calendar, or whatever. I operate under the assumption they read it. Rarely will they admit they never read what I sent home, so they are willing to let the issue, whatever it is, drop. When I am able to pull something out in writing, it proves very effective in reinforcing the school’s position.

Jack said since a lot of his students are car riders, regularly updating the school’s message board is one more way to let parents know what is going on.

Amelia and Christy indicated that keeping parents informed helped create a sense of collaboration. Christy explained, “Parents really want to know what is going on in their children’s lives. Having the school stay in communication with them is one way they feel more in control.”

In addition to keeping parents informed, all seven principals indicated through the interviews and observations they believed style of communication was as important as having communication. Laura stated, “Even if you are telling the parent something wonderful, it will be ill-received if it is conveyed in an inappropriate manner…the tone of voice…the language used.”

While all seven participants talked about how important it was to remain positive when interacting with parents, all also indicated that was not always possible. Christy stated, “Being positive is important. Sometimes what I have to tell the parents isn’t nice or pretty, but I still try to be positive, to have my compassion come across even though I am telling them something they definitely do not want to hear.” Laura explained, “No matter what you have to tell a parent, you can be nice about it. You may need to be firm…to be determined, but you can still be positive about it, maybe only in the way you offer suggestions for changing things.” Marcie commented, “Even when I have to suspend a child, I try to suggest to the parent that this is a
perfect opportunity for [the parent] to talk with the student and work on a solution for the problem. That way, the parent usually leaves feeling like something positive can come from a negative situation.”

All seven participants talked about the pitfalls of using educational jargon and suggested that principals need to make sure they use more conversational or informal language when interacting with parents. James stated:

Parents in my school are often intimidated by the principal and teachers. We use a lot of secret terms such as SST, EIP, IEP, ISS, and so on. That coupled with our tendency to talk about learning styles, pedagogies, and assessment data can overwhelm the average parent. We need to be cautious about this. We can be saying something good or positive and have it come across negatively because the parent simply can’t follow the education speak.

Laura commented, “I try hard to avoid confusing terms, things that are common to educators but maybe not to the average person. Use of them, I have found, limits the conversation because it limits the parents’ comprehension of the conversation.”

Five of the seven participants stated that when communicating with parents, diplomacy was critical. Jack stated, “Even if you want to tell the parent the hard cold truth, it is better to be diplomatic. No one wants to hear the unadulterated truth.” Christy commented, “You can’t take back what you have said. If you have something ugly to say, save it for later meetings. If the student is that bad, believe me, there will be more meetings! Be diplomatic but firm in the initial meeting and maybe you can prevent the later meetings.”

All seven participants spoke of the need for consistency in communication. Amelia stated, “If your student handbook says there will be a monthly calendar or a monthly newsletter, then it needs to be monthly. Parents need to know they can count on regular communication.” Marcie spoke of consistency in style of communication when she said, “Whatever your style of
communication is, you need to maintain it. Parents don’t know what to do when you are friendly one time and cool or reserved the next time. Be consistent, be predictable.”

Six of the seven participants described the need for principals to avoid allowing personal style to create a confrontational encounter. Jack explained, “A principal needs to avoid creating an adversarial encounter just because of body language or word choices.” James stated, “As a principal you are going to have a lot of confrontational encounters. This will happen just because parents never want to hear bad things about their children, so they will start out on the defensive. I try never to be the one who makes it confrontational.”

Building Relationships

Although each participant approached building relationships in a different manner, all seven felt it extremely important in all interactions with parents. Building relationships is defined as steps or actions a principal takes to establish a relationship with parents. Three subcategories emerged from data: using interpersonal skills, validating parents, and having knowledge of parents. Christy explained, “As a principal, you have a relationship with every parent in the building. It can be an unexplored relationship, but it is there nonetheless. It is important to establish a foundation so that if a problem arises, you have something positive already in place.”

Table 4.9 delineates the properties associated with these subcategories.

Table 4.9

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Subcategories for Building Relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Using Interpersonal Skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Being empathetic</td>
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<td>▪ Developing trust</td>
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<td>▪ Treating parents as equals</td>
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<td>▪ Having patience</td>
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<td>▪ Diffusing the situation</td>
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<td>▪ Seeking solutions</td>
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All participants described a similar skill set required for a principal to be able to build relationships with parents. Amelia stated, “I think there is a core set of skills, certain things a principal needs to be able to do to be able to be an effective principal.” Christy explained it this way:

I definitely think there are particular things that principals inherently need to have….empathy…care and patience…able to see multiple sides….caring not just about the kids but about what it is like at home. Good principals instinctively know just how far to take something when working to resolve a situation. I’ve worked with another principal who knew just what to say to turn the tide of a conversation to get the parent on the school’s side instead of working against us. There is something about good principals that makes parents want to trust them, to seek their help. Yes, sometimes it is adversarial – it will have to be, but the good principal is able to work through the emotion to find a resolution or to send the parent higher up because it is something that can’t be resolved at the school level. A principal who is going to be successful has a level of commitment that makes it all work.

Six of the seven participants spoke about the need to be empathetic. James stated, “If I can convince parents I empathize, that I might have been where they are, then I am one step closer to solving whatever our problem is. When they think I can’t imagine what they are experiencing, we don’t get far.” Marcie and Amelia commented that they often speak to parents as one parent to another, which puts them on a level playing field with parents.

Six of the seven principals commented about the need to develop trust between themselves and their parents. Marcie said, “Sometimes this issue of trust is very out in the open. I’ll say outright to a parent, I know you have to place a lot of trust in us [the school] when you send your kids to us. We have to trust that you are following through on [whatever is in question] at home.” James stated:

I am not exactly sure how you develop trust in a relationship with parents. I just know that you have to have it. I guess I think that it is something you have just because of who you are and then the real responsibility comes in how to maintain and develop that trust. Assuming that you never give them a reason not to trust you, and that they have no big deep dark secret hatred of school from their own past, then you are probably going to be okay.
Christy explained, “It all comes down to trust. Do parents trust me? Have I given them a reason to or have I given them a reason not to?”

All seven participants talked about having patience when dealing with parents. Laura stated, “Patience is essential. You have to have this in spades. Parents will say things that will make the hair on your head stand up, but you have to hang in there with it. Remain patient and move on.” Christy commented, “You have to be a really patient person – patient about getting to the point, patient about listening to the parent, patient about getting to a resolution. Patience is not just about dealing with parents; it runs through the entire principalship!”

All seven participants described times when they needed to be able to diffuse a situation that was potentially problematic. James stated, “A parent comes in clearly irate. As the principal you have to diffuse anger before you can begin to resolve a problem.” Most participants felt parents often reacted first and asked questions second. The principal has to be able to redirect the reaction long enough to get to the root of the issue and address the actual facts. Amelia said, “I want to resolve their issues at my level. I prefer that my parental problems not make it to the Board Office. This means I need to be able to handle the parents. I can’t walk away when it is hard.”

All seven participants discussed validating parents’ roles in educating their children as a critical element in building relationships. Amelia asserted, “I never talk down to parents. They are equal partners in educating their children and they need to be expected to assume that role.” Jack stated, “One of the things I tell parents every year is that this is an equal partnership. We are the experts in educational strategies and they are the experts in their children.”

Six of the seven principals stated that it was critical to find common ground. Christy explained:
If you have a [heterogeneous] population of parents, some white collar and some blue collar, it is even more important to recognize that their needs are not going to all be the same. Their times of availability may not be the same. Their educational levels will not be the same. Too often, the school falls into the trap of thinking that all parents are like us, working the same schedules, with the same concerns, with the same knowledge base, and we forget how tired we are when we go home and how overwhelming homework can be, and we are supposed to know better. We forget how the parents must feel. Somehow the school and the parents must meet in the middle to find common ground.

Jack stated, “Parents sometimes have completely different agendas than we do. We have to find that common ground and work from there. Usually it is going to be in that we both want what is best for the student. When we differ in what we think is best, well, therein lies the challenge.”

Marcie commented, “We all want the same thing – a good education for the child. The key is finding a common starting point for the school and the home and then working off that point.”

All seven participants believed it was validating to acknowledge parents’ concerns or ideas. Emily, who works with a highly educated population of parents who are well-versed in ideas and suggestions, explained, “It is very validating for the parent to have the school acknowledge the parents’ concerns or ideas. They don’t just like to be involved, they expect to be involved in the process of educating their children. They won’t accept less.” Laura commented, “I have found over the years as both a teacher and an administrator, parents often have the best suggestions.” Marcie stated, “We need to remember to validate the parents’ efforts. Sometimes, even when it seems to us like they aren’t doing enough, they may be doing all that they can. We need to remember to acknowledge this, not just climb all over them for not doing enough.”

Four of the seven participants made statements about respecting the individuality of a student as a means of validating the parent’s role in the relationship. Laura explained:

Sometimes a parent has only one child or only two children and they’ve spent all this time prior to school developing them as individuals. We want them to be a third grader or a special needs child, when the parent wants them to be [child’s name], be unique, not
just part of a group of students. When we say, “oh, all third graders do so and so,” well, the parents want us to say, “[child’s name] is able to do ‘x’. Let’s work on ‘y’.” This means we see their child as an individual.

Amelia stated, “Each parent sends us an individual child. They expect...[and] need us to see their child as an individual, not as number 657 or whatever.”

All seven participants, through both interviews and observations, suggested knowledge of the parents was vital in building relationships. Jack, having been the principal in his school for 18 years, stated:

My entire principalship has been in this school. In some cases, we are actually teaching the children of the children who were here when I first started as a principal. The relationships I built with those parents carries over to now when it is their children I am entrusted with. I hope I made a positive impression, built a good relationship because it is so difficult to undo a negative one. It is so much easier to build on the relationship when it is positive to start with. Of course, with the growth in our area, many of our parents are not from here. In those cases I have to lay the groundwork to build that relationship, which means using my skills as a principal to get to know them.

Five of the seven principals stated that making it personal was a critical part of building relationships. James stated, “I have been in a conference when the people in the meeting did not have a clear understanding of who the child was, maybe not even knowing the right name. Nothing is more personal to parents than their children. Know the facts, know the details, make it personal.” Marcie commented, “I have been here long enough to know most if not all parents by name. Calling them by name makes it personal.”

Five of the seven principals indicated that they felt it was effective to make the initial contact when building relationships. Amelia explained, “I stand out in the hall at open house and try to talk to as many parents as I can. Something simple, nothing complicated, but an initial contact, a name with a face.” Laura commented, “I am out circulating at every parent event. It gives me a chance to speak personally with more parents, making that important face to face contact.” Emily, in discussing why she assisted with morning car duty, explained, “I see so much
about the kids when I stand out there in the mornings. I speak to them, I speak to parents, and I make that all important first contact. Parents appreciate…seeing me….”

All seven participants indicated that they believed it was important to know the parents in their schools. Marcie stated, “It is so nice to have multiple kids in one family – it means most of the hard work in building that relationship between the school and the family is done. All you have to do is pull it back out!” Christy indicated a similar perception when she said, “In our school, I am always hearing so and so taught my other child; I’d love for her to teach [this one]. That tells me that a positive relationship between the teacher and the parent was established, which reflects nicely on the school and on any subsequent encounters I might have with the parent.”

The analysis of the data amassed during this study yielded a core category of resolution. As previously stated, the core category is that central phenomenon to which all other categories relate (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Resolution was supported by the category set, which consisted of exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships.

Effect of the Strategies Used by Principals

The third research question was: What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents? The analysis of perceptions of the participants revealed three categories of effects: finding a resolution, strengthening the relationships, and/or reaching an impasse. This section discusses each of these strategies in detail. Figure 4.1 details the effects of implementing these strategies.
Finding *resolution* refers to how conflict is settled. Specifically, this means the actions that will be taken to solve a concern of the parent or school. Strengthening the relationship refers to the connection between the school and parent. Based on actions taken to resolve the conflict, the parent will be satisfied or dissatisfied. When the parent is satisfied, he or she is more likely to look favorably upon the school and approach future situations with a more positive or constructive outlook. Reaching an impasse refers to the time when the solution is one in which neither the school nor parent attain satisfaction. Impasse occurs when parents’ requests or expectations cannot be met within constraints of the school setting and it sometimes results in a stalemate. In a stalemate both parties might simply walk away or the issue might be referred higher up the chain of command.

In any interaction with parents in which the goal was more than social interaction, conflict had to be addressed. Principals applied micropolitical strategies previously identified in
this chapter to the conflict and either the conflict was resolved or it was not. When the conflict was resolved to parents’ satisfaction, resolution was achieved and the relationship, fledgling or established, was usually strengthened. All seven participants described situations in which positive resolution was achieved, resulting in strengthened relations between school and home.

James said:

Usually, when working with a parent, I am able to find a resolution we both can live with – a win-win situation. The parent leaves satisfied, and I have strengthened the relationship between the school and the home. Then the next time there is a conflict, and there is usually a next time, I can refer back to this one, reminding the parent that past experience has taught them I will work with them, that together we can resolve the problem. That goes pretty far with an upset parent.

Emily corroborated this with her explanation, “Parents want to leave feeling as though they have accomplished something. Collaborating to find a workable solution means a win-win for both of us. I have put a plus in the bank for the school’s side. We have made a positive contribution to the relationship we are building with the parents regarding their child.”

Four of the seven participants described situations in which the relationship between school and home was not strengthened despite a resolution that satisfied the parents. This usually happened when the relationship with the parent was extremely fractured or was based on a history that simply could not be overcome. Marcie described this when she said, “I have a parent who has a very negative history with our school system. No matter how satisfactorily a problem is resolved, she still leaves unhappy. There is little I can do to rectify this, although I keep trying, hoping for that one time when she realizes we are on her side.”

When a conflict was not solved to a parent’s satisfaction, there was no resolution, no strengthening of the relationship, and an impasse was reached. All seven participants corroborated this with their descriptions discussed during the interviews. Christy stated, “Sometimes you just can’t come up with a solution that will satisfy the parent. We have all had
those parents…the ones we just can’t please…and there is no way to make them happy. That parent comes in unhappy and leaves even unhappier because [he/she] could not prevail. We have not made a supporter out of that parent.”

Laura explained:

There are times when a situation is just out of my hands. I am not in a position to make the parent happy, usually because the complaint or concern is unreasonable or unjustified. I always try to explain, to make sense out of their concern, but there are times this is just not possible. I usually offer to make them an appointment with [the superintendent]. Sometimes they’ll accept and sometimes they’ll just drop the entire concern. It often depends on what is going to happen to the student if they drop it.

In all interactions, the participants first sought to resolve the situation, seeking a solution that met the needs of the parents and the school. Typically, this was possible and the relationship between the school and the home was strengthened as a result of achieving resolution. When resolution was not possible, the relationship suffered and an impasse usually occurred. In all cases, the outcome, whatever it was, came after the micropolitical strategies had been applied to the situation.

Summary

This chapter summarized findings of this study. Principals engaged in two types of interactions: formal and informal. Formal interactions consisted of two categories: anticipated and unanticipated. Informal interactions were comprised of two categories: anticipated and unanticipated. Principals employed four micropolitical strategies to achieve resolution. These four strategies were: establishing a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships. Finally, the study looked at effects of implementing these micropolitical strategies, and the researcher determined through the analysis of data based on principals’ perceptions that there were three possible
effects: finding a resolution, strengthening the relationship, and/or reaching an impasse. Figure 4.2 provides a graphic representation of the cycle of principal-parent interactions. In the final chapter, research is summarized, findings are discussed and linked to relevant literature, and implications of the research are identified.

Figure 4.2 Cycle of Principal-Parent Interactions
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined types of interactions principals have with parents, micropolitical strategies employed by principals during these interactions, and effects of the strategies. In this chapter, the research study is summarized, findings are discussed, and implications are presented.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine strategies used by elementary principals during their interactions with parents in their respective schools. Based on grounded theory research, three initial guiding questions were used:

1. What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?
2. What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?
3. What effect does micropolitics have on the principals’ interactions with parents?

Summary of the Research Design

To examine strategies used by principals, a grounded theory protocol was used for this study. Employing a grounded theory methodology required an in-depth immersion in data by the researcher. The premise of grounded theory rests on understanding that theory will emerge from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hutchinson (1991) asserted that grounded theory is more of a circular way of working than a linear one due to continuous analysis and comparison of data.
required to achieve necessary levels of saturation. It is at saturation that theory begins to emerge from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In accordance with grounded theory methodology, purposeful sampling was used to select participants, and constant comparative analysis was used to collect, code, and analyze data. Interviews and observations were conducted with the seven participants over a six month period. The researcher also was given access to documents pertaining to participants’ interactions with parents.

The theoretical framework used to guide the study was symbolic interactionism. Inherent in symbolic interactionism is recognition that individuals, in interacting with other individuals and situations, develop shared meanings and act accordingly. Blumer (1969) stated that interactions only have significance when individuals interpret and apply meaning to them. As anticipated when conducting research based on symbolic interactionism through the lens of grounded theory methodology, participants’ descriptions of their interactions were derived from their personal experiences and interactions with others, in this case, exclusively parents in their respective schools. Themes or categories emerged that were based on micropolitical strategies used by the principals.

Through use of this framework, data from interviews, observations, field notes and document reviews were collected and analyzed using a grounded theory protocol employing the method of constant comparative analysis. Categories emerged that revealed meanings and actions of principals, and these categories resulted in discussions during subsequent interviews and observations.

In-depth interviews using open-ended but guiding questions were conducted with all participants. Observations of all participants were conducted during formal and informal
interactions. Field notes were recorded after each interview and observation. Documents reviewed included parent letters, school handbooks, newsletters, SACS survey results, and flyers about school events. Principals were asked to describe in detail types of interactions they had with parents, strategies they used while engaged in these interactions, and outcomes of interactions. All principals described similar interactions that yielded data which resulted in two prevailing themes – formal and informal interactions, each with two supporting categories and related properties.

Principals also described categories of strategies they used, which on analysis merged into one core strategy and a category set comprised of four behaviors. This analysis resulted from the researcher’s use of the constant comparative method which allowed recurring concepts in data to be identified and organized into these categories. Data from each observation and interview were compared and analyzed to examine each principal’s strategies. Each time a category emerged, the researcher compared the data to other data and other categories to ensure accuracy of interpretation. The constant comparative method was used in analyzing all data yielded directly from each participant, each subsequent interview or observation and related field notes, and each document review. It was through this constant comparative analysis that a framework for theory regarding strategies used by principals in their interactions with parents began to emerge.

Findings included a core category of resolution and a corresponding category set comprised of four behaviors: exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships. The corresponding four behaviors provided the foundation for development of a framework for a substantive theory of the effects of micropolitical strategies used by principals during their interactions with parents.
When principals employed micropolitical strategies in their interactions with parents, they were more likely to resolve conflicts successfully. These successful resolutions strengthened relationships between school and home.

Data in this study demonstrated that principals were engaged in two types of interactions with parents. Throughout most of these interactions, principals were seeking to resolve conflicts. In doing so, principals employed the previously identified four strategies. Data showed that use of these strategies contributed to successful resolution of conflict. Specifically, when parents were made to feel welcome, were respected, were kept in the loop of communication, and were seen as partners in the education of their children, principals were much more likely to be able to resolve any potential conflict. Resolution was found to be the common theme in all categories and subcategories, and the outcome of each resolution was influenced by implementation of strategies described by participants.

Discussion

The findings of this study were presented in Chapter Four and were reviewed in the previous section. The primary findings of this study are:

- Because most formal interactions are conflictual in nature, the primary goal of the principal is resolution of conflict.
- Principals use four micropolitical strategies when seeking resolution of conflict.

This section includes a comprehensive discussion of the major findings related to micropolitical strategies used by principals in interactions with parents. It is important to note again that this study examined principal-parent interactions, an area of inquiry not readily evident in the available body of literature and research. Consequently, findings are discussed in conjunction with relevant literature on micropolitics, parent involvement, and interpersonal conflict as well as
with two seminal pieces of literature about interpersonal conflicts from outside the educational
arena. The section concludes with a discussion of the framework resulting from the study.

Discussion of the Findings

A major finding for this study centered on the principals’ goal of resolution when
engaged in conflictual interactions with parents. Resolution was the term most frequently used by
participants when they spoke of conflictual interactions with parents. They used this term in
describing the need to settle parents’ concerns in ways that worked for both parties – the school
and the parents.

Consistent with the work of other researchers (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987;
Blase, 1991a, 1991b; Pfeffer, 1981), this study found that participants sought to minimize
conflict through the application of micropolitical strategies. Ball (1987) emphasized the
conflictual nature of micropolitics, focusing on three areas: interests of people involved,
maintaining control of the organization, and conflict over policy. In this study, conflicts
described by principals conformed to Ball’s theory of organizational activity.

Hoyle (1986), in studying relevant literature, determined in part that micropolitics
consisted of strategies individuals used to exert influence. In this study, principals consistently
made use of four categories of strategies to influence outcomes of conflictual interactions.

Blase (1990, 1991a, 1993), in studying principal-teacher interactions, found that being
control-oriented and protective offered little to principals seeking to enhance interactions with
teachers. While his study addressed teacher-principal interactions, it revealed that use of
strategies perceived to be open and effective allowed principals to accomplish desired goals with
parents in a more successful manner.
A second major finding for this study was the identification of four major behaviors or strategies employed by principals in parental interactions. These four categories are:

- *Exhibiting a welcoming demeanor,*
- *Creating a climate of respect,*
- *Establishing and maintaining communication,* and
- *Building relationships.*

Greenfield (1991) stated that principals must also have the adroitness needed to know which micropolitical strategy to use in a given circumstance. Principals in this study indicated they used all four of these strategies as needed with parents. To resolve conflicts successfully, principals believed all four must be in play. During any interaction the principals made choices about implementing a micropolitical strategy from various subcategories within a strategy. The choice was not between strategies but rather from within subcategories.

Goldring and Shapira (1996) determined that “principal-parent interactions are the result of unique processes in each school and are negotiated and institutionalized over time” (p. 342). While strategies revealed by this study had commonality for all participants, their methods of implementation were not necessarily congruent. For instance, one participant might exhibit a welcoming demeanor by being in the school lobby each morning while another might attempt to exhibit the same demeanor by having an open door policy. This was true across all strategies and with all participants, reinforcing Goldring and Shapira’s assertion.

First in resolving conflict with parents is *exhibiting a welcoming demeanor.* Lopez et al. (2001) suggested strategic methods for getting parents involved. They believed providing a welcoming environment for parents was paramount. Zalman and Bryant (2002) found that positive or welcoming physical or verbal gestures resulted in more successful resolution of
conflict as did focusing on the positive while engaged in an interaction. It is important to recall that in using the Critical Incident Technique in their study, Zalman and Bryant focused on the extreme tails of a normal distribution, capturing data that were among the very unusual. In contrast, this researcher’s dissertation study, in using constant comparative analysis, sought instead to focus on behavioral strategies that fell into a central tendency. While the methodological approaches of the two studies varied substantially, it is worth noting commonalities of results between this dissertation study and that of Zalman and Bryant’s study.

The second strategy in resolving conflict with parents is creating a climate of respect. Zalman and Bryant (2002) discussed several strategies centering on respect that were found to be effective at successfully resolving conflicts. These included making an appropriate choice of location for the meeting, listening attentively, involving appropriate parties in meetings, empowering parents by asking for their input, and following up on or following through with the decisions made in the meetings.

Seitsinger and Zera (2002) also found evidence that respect is a critical issue in principal-parent interactions. They found that principals needed to pay careful attention to the manner in which parents exerted their influence. Implications for principals from this study would include the need to involve parents in conflict resolution. Parents, as suggested by Seitsinger and Zera, wish to be involved in making decisions regarding their children. Respectful consideration of their suggestions would be a way in which principals could allow for this desire.

Lawson (2003) also found respect to be important in his research. He stated that schools often see themselves as experts and discount opinions and knowledge of parents. In creating a climate of respect, principals would naturally guard against this tendency, seeking instead to demonstrate respect for the insight of parents.
The third strategy revealed by this study is *establishing and maintaining communication*. This study illuminated the need for clear and consistent communication to enhance principal-parent interactions. Use of this strategy is supported by Lawson’s (2003) research. He argued that parents believed that poor communication was a central reason for conflict between parents and teachers. He further asserted that parents share both positive and negative information about the school, reinforcing the need for the principal to disseminate accurately and positively worded communications.

Lopez et al. (2001) took communication to a higher level. They asserted that home visitation was a critical element in fostering positive interactions between parents and principals. Zalman and Bryant (2002) discussed the importance of appropriate communication. They determined that principals needed to gather accurate information and communicate it in a skillful manner. Communication, from their study, also included listening skillfully and seeking input from parents. Sheldon’s (2002) research on social networks of parents supported the need for avenues of communication as well.

Fourth in resolving conflict with parents is *building relationships*. Lopez et al. (2001) indicated that schools should establish relational bonds with families. Additionally, Goldring and Shapira (1996) offered insight into *building relationships* when they stated, “Effective schools, those with a cohesive, inclusive school community…obviously greatly alter the role relationships between principals and parents” (p. 345). Sheldon (2002) found that it was important for schools to help parents become connected with other parents. This strategy would establish another layer to relationships principals seek to build with parents. Zalman and Bryant (2002) determined that empowering parents by seeking their input was a viable strategy for resolving conflict. Such empowerment would work to develop further relationships between principals and parents.
It is interesting to note that conflict resolution research conducted outside the field of education has produced results similar to those revealed in this study. Two additional pieces of research discussed here focused on marital conflict resolution strategies and negotiation tactics used across different cultures.

Using a sample of 267 couples, Du Rocher Schudlich, Papp, and Cummings (2004) studied marital satisfaction and conflict. In their study, they found that couples used certain strategies to achieve resolution of conflicts. Positive strategies included support, calm discussion, verbal affection, physical affection, and problem solving. These strategies involved reassuring the other party that he or she was being listened to or understood, complimenting the other party, showing expressions of caring, using a calm and respectful tone of voice, and suggesting possible solutions to achieve resolution and prevent the problem from recurring. Du Rocher Schudlich et al. found that calm discussion, problem solving, and support were the most frequently occurring productive and positive strategies used during conflict regardless of type of interaction (p. 17). While there is little room for physical and verbal affection in principal-parent interactions, support, calm discussion, and problem solving correlate with strategies employed by principals in this study.

Tinsley (2001) studied strategies negotiators used across a variety of cultures to obtain a “yes” response. Employing a sample of 104 businesspeople comprised of Japanese, Germans, and Americans, Tinsley used a two-party conflict simulation which was observed and coded for analysis. This study revealed that participants used a series of conflict resolution strategies. Included in these strategies were use of persuasion based on the other party’s interests, persuasion based on rights, persuasion based on power, positive remarks, procedural suggestions, requests for proposals or information, and offers of proposals or information (p. 6).
While not all of these were found to produce positive results, five were deemed by Tinsley (2001) to be especially effective. Persuasion based on rights referred to discussions predicated on formal regulations or informal standards. Positive remarks included strategies such as friendliness, agreement, statements to minimize tensions, and face-saving gestures. Procedural suggestions were made by participants in an effort to set the stage for proceeding with negotiation. Requests for proposals or information allowed the parties to gather facts and set parameters while offers of proposals or information focused on providing resolution strategies or additional facts pertaining to the situation. All five strategies parallel strategies revealed by the study on principal-parent interactions.

**Framework**

The goal of grounded theory research is to discover new theory from data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study sought to generate theory as a way of arriving at a theory suited for use with principals interacting with parents. While this study did not generate an actual theory, it did suggest a framework regarding principals’ use of micropolitical strategies during parental interactions. Data in this study are consistent with and add to the literature on micropolitical strategies, parental involvement, and interpersonal conflict. Furthermore, data support the framework emerging from this study regarding principals’ use of micropolitical strategies during parental interactions.

The framework revealed by this study suggested that principals employing micropolitical strategies when interacting with parents were more likely to be successful in resolving conflict and in strengthening the relationship between the school and the home. This study found that principals used a series of micropolitical strategies as they sought to resolve conflictual interactions with parents.
The intent of introducing micropolitical strategies in an interaction is to use power to influence others (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991a). In using micropolitical strategies identified in this study, principals sought to influence interactions to achieve positive resolution of conflicts.

This study found that exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships were essential in resolving conflictual interactions with parents. When principals used these strategies, they were usually able to achieve successful resolution of conflicts, resulting in a strengthened relationship between the school and the home.

Implications

In this section, implications of the findings of this study are discussed. Implications for further research are discussed first, followed by implications for public school administrators, and finally, the section concludes with a discussion of implications for university preparatory programs for future school leaders.

**Implications for Further Research**

This study examined types of interactions principals have with parents, micropolitical strategies employed by principals in these interactions, and effects of these strategies. This study established four key strategies the principals routinely used to achieve conflict resolution. Because little if any empirical research exists regarding principal-parent interactions, further research should continue to investigate how use of micropolitical strategies impacts these interactions.

This study was conducted solely with elementary principals and involved a limited sample. Further research should consider a larger sample as well as perceptions of middle and
high school principals. Studies should focus on whether these principals have the same types of interactions, use similar strategies, and work toward similar resolution goals. Additionally, further research should delve deeper into effects of the application of these strategies. Studies for that purpose should investigate how resolution is impacted by an absence of these strategies or by the addition of some other strategy.

This study was conducted with principals who had reputations for being able to interact successfully with parents. Implicit in those reputations was the fact that they used effectively the strategies needed for conflict resolution. Further study should take into consideration behaviors of principals who do not have effective interactions with parents. Questions such as, “What strategies are employed?” and “What strategies are not evident in their interactions?” could reveal significant findings.

While a key finding in this study was the issue of communication, consideration was not given to nonverbal, paraverbal, or extraverbal cues such as eye contact or body language used by participants in interactions with parents. Because so much of any interaction’s success or failure rests on the nonverbal, often even to the exclusion of what is actually said aloud, attention to this area would prove beneficial in future studies. Delving deeper into this area of investigation would provide the future researcher a more substantial understanding of the impact of establishing and maintaining communication.

This study was conducted to solicit perceptions of principals regarding their use of micropolitical strategies. This required them to be cognizant of strategies they employed. While use of the grounded theory methodology allowed the researcher to take perceptions from one participant back to others who might not have considered a particular strategy, there is the possibility that the data were not in fact saturated. Potential for this could be limited through use
of a larger sample or by further research pursuing a specific set of strategies, seeking to investigate effects on conflict when that specific set of strategies was applied to a situation.

Implications for Public School Administrators

Interactions are clearly part of any public school administrator’s day, and inherent in these interactions is potential for conflict. This potential exists because each party may have different goals, different perceptions, or different interests. This study identified resolution as the primary goal of principals while engaged in conflictual interactions. Furthermore, this study revealed four strategies effective principals employed when attempting to find resolution to a conflict.

Two major implications for practice emerged from this study. First, principals must be aware of types of parental interactions in which they engage. Parents seek different things from principals depending on the type of interaction, and principals need to be cognizant of the differences. So they are not caught unaware or unprepared, principals also need to be aware that certain types of interactions are more likely to lead to conflict.

Second, to resolve parental conflicts successfully, principals need to be conscious of micropolitical strategies they employ. This study has shown that, by exhibiting a welcoming demeanor, creating a climate of respect, establishing and maintaining communication, and building relationships, principals are able to resolve successfully most conflicts with parents. Absence of any one of these strategies could significantly hinder a principal’s ability to achieve resolution. Furthermore, the presence of one or more of these strategies could also divert potential conflict by enhancing parents’ perceptions of the principal and the school.
Implications for University Preparatory Programs

Findings of this study have implications for university preparatory programs for future administrators, particularly school-based administrators. Educational leadership programs should include a study of micropolitics in their preparatory programs. Principal candidates should be knowledgeable in use and effects of such conflict resolution strategies.

From this researcher’s personal experience, most conflict resolution study in leadership preparatory courses targeted conflict with staff, and conflict resolution work in undergraduate programs focused on resolution of student conflict. Little, if any, attention was given to interactions with parents, and yet they constitute a significant portion of the interactions and potential conflict experienced by a principal. Programs in educational leadership and administration should be restructured to emphasize all facets of interactions principals will likely encounter. Given the limited amount of research available on principal-parent interactions, it could be difficult to incorporate this in textbooks and other writings, but effort should be made whenever possible. Furthermore, instruction provided by these programs should be configured to teach theory of micropolitical strategies and its application to conflictual interactions as well as practical aspects of applying such micropolitical strategies to actual interactions in schools. Leadership students must be made aware of the implications of conflict as well as strategies deemed successful at resolving conflictual interactions.

This chapter provided a summary of the study and a discussion of findings related to relevant literature. Implications for further research, for school administrators, and for university preparatory programs were presented and discussed. There is no question that a principal’s work is filled with potentially conflictual interactions. Effective use of micropolitical strategies will increase the likelihood of more successful resolution of such conflicts.
REFERENCES


**APPENDIX A**

Consent for Participation in Study

**CONSENT FORM**

I, _________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled "Principals’ Micropolitical Experiences During Parental Interactions" conducted by Susan M. Usry from the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia (XXX-XXX-XXXX) under the direction of Dr. Joseph Blase, Department of Educational Leadership, University of Georgia (XXX-XXX-XXXX). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to identify micropolitical strategies utilized by principals in interactions with parents. Potential benefits include identification of key strategies most commonly utilized in particular parent interactions and perceived applicability to me in my position as a principal.

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

1) Participate in 2-3 interview sessions, which will be tape-recorded and will last approximately 60-90 minutes each.

2) Allow my documentation of parental communications and interactions to be reviewed. This will not include any confidential notes regarding students, parents, or teachers. If they are deemed by me to be of merit, any identifying information will be excluded by me. This collection should take no more than 60 minutes.

3) Allow the researcher to observe me during a PTA/PTC/PTO meeting or during a Local School Council meeting.

4) Review the document review summaries, observation notes, and interview transcriptions/summaries for accuracy. This will take approximately 10 minutes per summary.

5) Provide clarification to the researcher should she call me to request it regarding any of the document review summaries, observation notes, and interview transcriptions/summaries.

I understand that any identifying information will be removed from any summaries in order to protect confidentiality.

I understand I will receive no remuneration or compensation for my participation and my participation is strictly voluntary. I also understand that the research will be conducted over a period of approximately 5 months.

No risk is expected in this study. No deception in collection of information will be necessary in this study.

The results of my participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any identifiable form, unless otherwise required by law. My name and identifying information will be changed in all reports of data to be published.

Any and all tapes of my interviews with the researcher will be kept until publication/acceptance of the researcher’s dissertation and then will be erased.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (XXX-XXX-XXXX).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records. I also understand that if I have any questions or concerns in the course of this study, I may contact the researcher, Susan M. Usry at XXX-XXX-XXXX or her UGA faculty advisor, Dr. Joseph Blase at XXX-XXX-XXXX.
Susan M. Usry
Name of Researcher  Signature  Date
Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX home or XXX-XXX-XXXX work
Address: XXX XXXXXXX XXXXX XXXXXXXXX XX XXXXX
Email: XXXXXXXXXX@XXX.XXX

I willingly consent to participate in this study being conducted by the identified researcher.

Name of Participant  Signature  Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Guide for Interview # 2, Research Question # 1

I sent you via email a list of the interactions generated through the first round of interviews. Have you had a chance to review it? What did you think about it? Are there any identified interactions that you have not encountered? Have you thought of any other types that may have been omitted?
I also sent you an email regarding the kinds of strategies you and the other participants employ when interacting with parents. Have you had a chance to review it? What did you think about it? Are there any identified strategies that you have not used at some point? Which are more preferential for you, even if you didn’t mention them during the first interview? Have you thought of any other types that may have been omitted?

Several strategies seemed to come up more often than some of the others, both in our conversation and among participants:

- Accessibility
- Availability
- Relationships
- Common ground
- Communication
- Friendliness
- Honesty
- Listening
- Mutual respect
- Non-threatening demeanor
- Receptiveness
- Seeking information
- Seeking resolution
- Shared resolution
- Timeliness
- Trust
- Validating concerns
- Welcoming attitude

Let’s talk about each of these in more detail.

The following strategies came up only once or twice:

- Appreciation
- Comfort
- Compromise
- Conversational approach
- Cooperation
- Diplomacy
- Empathy
- Engagement
- Follow-through
- Graciousness
- Humor
- Individualization
- Information sharing
- Informal language
- Non-committal response
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Ownership of problem
- Patience
- Proactive approach
- Professionalism
- Sarcasm (absence of)
- Visibility

Let’s talk about them in more detail.
APPENDIX D

Structured Format for Interview # 3, Research Question # 2

- Let’s talk more about building relationships.
- Do you feel that building relationships is an important strategy to use when interacting with parents?
- What are some specific strategies that you use in building relationships?
### APPENDIX E

Summary of Documents Provided for Document Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents Provided</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Christy</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Marcie</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>**</td>
<td>LSC Meeting Agendas</td>
<td>Results of Parent Survey for SACS*</td>
<td>Results of Parent Survey for SACS*</td>
<td>Results of Parent Survey for SACS*</td>
<td>Results of Parent Survey for SACS*</td>
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<td>Parent Volunteer Survey</td>
<td>End of Year Parent Letter</td>
<td>School Newsletter</td>
<td>LSC Agendas</td>
<td>PTO Programs</td>
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<td>Fundraiser Notification</td>
<td>Principal's Portion of PTO Newsletter</td>
<td>LSC Agendas</td>
<td>PTO Minutes</td>
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<td>Notice of a Visiting Illustrator</td>
<td>School Newsletter</td>
<td>School Calendars</td>
<td>PTO Minutes</td>
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<td>PTO Board Survey</td>
<td>Welcome Back to School Letter</td>
<td>Principal’s Newsletters</td>
<td>Attendance Protocol Letter</td>
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<td>Welcome Back Letter for January</td>
<td>PTO Newsletter</td>
<td>Not Meeting Expectations Letter</td>
<td>Flyers for School Events</td>
<td>School Newsletter</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Sample Letters sent to LSC members</td>
<td>School Newsletter</td>
<td>Teacher Looping with Her Class Letter</td>
<td>Upcoming Standardized Testing Letter</td>
<td>Principal’s Back to School Letter</td>
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<td>Flyers from School Events</td>
<td>Pamphlet about School</td>
<td>Thank You Letter for Parent Conferences</td>
<td>Presence of a Weapon Notification Letter to Parents</td>
<td>Sample Forms sent home at beginning of school</td>
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<td>Sample Letter for Charges Due</td>
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<td>Presence of a Weapon Notification Letter to Parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Flyers for School Events</td>
<td>School Student Handbook</td>
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</table>

* Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – avenue of accreditation for many GA Public Schools

** No documents provided despite three requests
## APPENDIX F

### Coding Chart for Research Question #1

What kinds of interactions do these principals have with parents?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
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APPENDIX G

Coding Chart for Research Question # 2
What micropolitical strategies do they employ when interacting with parents?

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<th>Micropolitical Strategy</th>
<th>James</th>
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APPENDIX H

Open-Ended Questions Used to Begin Initial Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing Rapport</th>
<th>In Reference to Research Question # 1</th>
<th>In Reference to Research Question # 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Tell me about your background in administration.</td>
<td>- What kind of interactions do you routinely have with parents?</td>
<td>- How do you handle the interactions you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How long have you been an administrator here?</td>
<td>- Provided explanation of the study and answered any questions they had about it.</td>
<td>- How might you handle an apathetic parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are you enjoying it?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- How might you handle a confrontational parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provided explanation of the study and answered any questions they had about it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Does this change if they are in the right? If they are wrong?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- A parent wants to talk to you during a non-conference oriented meeting…how do you handle this?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Tell me more about…</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Provide more detail about …</td>
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</table>
## APPENDIX I

### Themes, Categories, and Properties for Research Question # 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Formal Interactions   | Anticipated| ▪ Preplanned  
▪ Require prior thought  
▪ Usually require some sort of action on the part of the principal  
▪ Purpose of interaction is usually business-oriented  
▪ Typically follows an agenda or program  |
|                       | Unanticipated| ▪ Usually problem oriented  
▪ Parent calls or drops in, unannounced  
▪ Typically requires timely response  
▪ Usually requires some sort of action on the part of the principal  |
| Informal Interactions | Anticipated| ▪ Purpose of interaction is not conflict resolution  
▪ Requires on the spot social finesse  |
|                       | Unanticipated| ▪ May lead to formal interaction of either an interruptive or scheduled nature  
▪ Completely unscheduled in nature  
▪ Typically arise out of another type of interaction  |
APPENDIX J

Themes, Categories, and Properties for Research Question # 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Exhibiting a Welcoming Demeanor | Being available | - Being visible  
- Being available  
- Being accessible |
| | Having shared objectives | - Having a common goal  
- Being collaborative |
| | Managing own attitude | - Being non-threatening  
- Being non-judgmental  
- Being friendly  
- Being supportive  
- Being receptive  
- Being sociable  
- Being gracious  
- Being comfortable  
- Being positive |
| Creating a Climate of Respect | Demonstrating Respect for Parent | - Listening  
- Being attentive  
- Responding in a timely manner  
- Refraining from use of sarcasm or intimidation  
- Refraining from exhibitions of disbelief or lack of concern  
- Exhibiting honesty |
| | Expecting Respect for Oneself | - Maintaining role as a professional  
- Avoiding creating a volatile encounter  
- Terminating conversations that are abusive in tone or nature  
- Expecting honesty |
| Establishing and Maintaining Communication | Keeping Parents Informed | - Providing opportunities to engage  
- Being proactive  
- Using newsletters, websites, school message centers  
- Creating sense of collaboration |
| | Using Appropriate Style of Communication | - Being positive  
- Being collaborative  
- Using informal language  
- Being conversational |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Building Relationships          | Using Interpersonal Skills      | • Being empathetic
• Developing trust
• Treating as equals

|                                | Validating Parents              | • Sharing responsibility in educating the child
• Finding common ground
• Acknowledging the concern
• Confirming their efforts

|                                | Having Knowledge of Parents     | • Making it personal
• Making initial contact
• Knowing your parents

| Finding Solutions*             | Seeking Needed Information      | • Being supportive of parent’s concern
• Being engaged in conversation
• Remaining patient with parent
• Working to diffuse the situation
• Being cooperative
• Remaining diplomatic
• Not taking abuse from parent
• Terminating conversation and rescheduling if needed

|                                | Seeking Solution                | • Working in a collaborative manner
• Being consistent
• Attempting to determine ownership of problem – school, parent, student
• Respecting individuality of student
• Seeking compromise
• Following through

*emerged as core category through data analysis