Best Practices and Challenges towards Positive Parent-Teacher Relationships & Parental Involvement at the Secondary School Level

By

Erica J. Brunato

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
Approved by: Cristina Guerrero

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-NoDerivs CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

Copyright by Erica J. Brunato, April 2016
Abstract

Parental involvement in students’ education is an integral component towards achieving the highest degree of possible success (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 398). However, there is a trend towards lowered levels of parental involvement in a student’s education once they reach the secondary school level (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). The goal of this qualitative research paper was to assess what methods teachers use to involve parents in students’ secondary education, where challenges can arise, and where positive changes can be made. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews with three participants employed by Ontario secondary schools, specifically in the Peel region. These interviews revealed potential efforts that can be made towards communicating with parents, which was cited by my participants as the most important method to promote parental involvement. First, communication must be positive to successfully invite parents towards student success efforts. Second, parents will be receptive to opportunities for school involvement if they are engaged by the school community. Finally, teachers must utilize different communication practices to contact the variety of parents they will encounter. These findings suggest that teachers would benefit from further development of their skills for interacting with parents during pre-service teaching programs, as well as for the need of an increase in school specific strategies geared towards getting parents involved and knowledgeable of their children’s education.

Key words: parents, parental involvement, secondary, practices, methods, communication, positivity, engagement
Acknowledgments

To my parents Pina and Marco, thank you for being the rocks that I stood on throughout this entire process. You have seen me at my best and worst as I worked towards completing this research project. Thank you for your love, advice, and for helping me move past the stressful moments when tears seemed like the only answer. I would not be where I am today as an educated woman and professional without both of you in my corner.

To my partner Ben, thank you for your constant positivity during this process. A phone call from you was always the most welcome distraction when things became difficult. My success in this journey was possible because I had you to support, love, and cheer me on.

Thank you to my professors Arlo Kempf and Cristina Guerrero. The construction of this extensive research took place under your guidance and expertise. I appreciate all that you have both done over the past two years to help me achieve a level of strength in my writing that I did not think existed. I have learned so much from both of you about what it means to be a teacher, and will use you as examples of professional integrity.

Finally, thank you to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The road was rocky at times over the past two years, but I come out of this experience in the Master of Teaching program happy to be a new teacher and a researcher. I have challenged myself in ways that I never thought was possible, and it was because of the opportunities I was offered in the institute. I will look back fondly on the memories of creating this work that contains my blood, sweat, and tears.
## Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... 3  
Chapter One—Introduction ........................................................................................... 6 
  1.0 Introduction to the Research Study ................................................................. 6 
  1.1 Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................... 7 
  1.2 Research Questions .......................................................................................... 7 
  1.3 Background of the Researcher—Reflexive Positioning ..................................... 8 
  1.4 Overview ........................................................................................................... 9  
Chapter Two—Literature Review ............................................................................... 10 
  2.0 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 10 
  2.1 Promoting Positive Parent-Teacher Relationships and Parental Involvement .... 10 
  2.1.1 Types of Parental Involvement .................................................................... 10 
  2.1.2 Methods and Practices to Promote the Types of Parental Involvement ........ 11 
  2.2 Challenges to the Methods and Practices ......................................................... 12 
  2.2.1 Parent-Teacher Trust .................................................................................... 12 
  2.2.1.1 Parenting Style ....................................................................................... 13 
  2.2.1.2 Types of Parent-Teacher Interactions ..................................................... 13 
  2.2.2 Racial/Cultural/Ethnic Differences Among Parents and Teachers ............... 14 
  2.2.2.1 Race/Ethnicity/Culture of Parents ......................................................... 15 
  2.2.2.2 Race/Ethnicity/Culture of Teachers ...................................................... 15 
  2.2.3 Notions of School Subjects .......................................................................... 16 
  2.2.3.1 Desirability for Post-Secondary Education ......................................... 17 
  2.2.3.2 Gender Stereotypes .............................................................................. 18 
  2.3 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 18  
Chapter Three—Research Methodology .................................................................... 20 
  3.0 Chapter Overview .............................................................................................. 20 
  3.1 Research Approach and Procedures ............................................................... 20 
  3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ......................................................................... 21 
  3.3 Participants ....................................................................................................... 22 
  3.2.1 Sampling Criteria ....................................................................................... 22 
  3.3.2 Sampling procedures ................................................................................... 23
Chapter One—Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

The level of parental involvement observed in today’s secondary school classrooms has evolved year after year. There are many more opportunities for contact between parents and teachers compared to previous decades (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The North American model of education has embraced this increased level of parental involvement (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 398). Legislators and educators see the involvement as a means towards increased student success (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 398). However, not every parent will get involved in their children’s schooling in the same way, with some being involved through the school as volunteers and some being involved through the home as aids for homework. (Lasky, 2000, p. 343). Much of this involvement has to do with the methods secondary school teachers employ to ensure positive involvement. Teachers are often the party that sends out the invitations for parental involvement, and these invitations can take on many forms depending on the parental involvement they seek. The success of these ensuing parent-teacher interactions depends on various factors including the methods of practice to engage in parent-teacher interactions, the different types of interactions and what they entail, degrees of differences among parents and teachers, and perceived notions about school subjects. Through my research I also hope to determine if teachers of different subjects purposefully use different methods and experience different challenges. Therefore, this study will investigate the different methods and challenges for parental involvement observed in select Ontario secondary schools. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with three secondary school teachers that teach different subjects in schools in the Greater Toronto Area along with a review and application of relevant literature on the topic.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

By researching the methods used by teachers to promote parental involvement and the challenges that arise to do so, my work sought to find the common trends of success that can lead to more teachers’ positive influence building relationships and more parental involvement. By investigating the challenges that teachers face when inviting parents to participate in initiatives for student success, my study shows how prevalent the challenges are and if they are dependent or independent of the department a teacher is a part of. This investigation is important because parent-teacher trust is reported to decline as students enter the secondary school grades, which would correlate to an increase in challenges to promote positive parent teacher relationships and parental involvement (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). Ultimately, it is my hope that the information of this study can be shared with teachers of all departments to ensure a common positive method to bring parents into the realm of student success through their involvement.

1.2 Research Questions

The goal of this study was to determine methods and practices secondary school teachers in Ontario use to promote a positive parent-teacher relationship that will ensure parental involvement. Also, the study wished to explore the challenges that teachers can face when attempting to implement their methods and practices. The questions outlined below are geared towards the teachers’ perspectives because they were the group given ethical clearance to participate in my research. The questions explored in this research study include: What are the methods and practices used to promote positive parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement? How were these methods and practices learned? How do teachers define a positive parent-teacher relationship? What types of opportunities for parental involvement do teachers
believe parents would want? Is all parental involvement geared towards student success? What challenges occur when trying to promote a relationship with parents and parental involvement? These and other questions were addressed in semi-structured interviews with Ontario educators.

1.3 Background of the Researcher—Reflexive Positioning

The decision to conduct this research study on the methods and practices of successful parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement came from my experiences during secondary school. I was a recognized as a good student throughout all four years of secondary school so there was never a dire need for my parents to be in contact with my various teachers. My parents saw me complete hours of homework every night and my marks on my report cards reflected my hard work. My parents went to parent-teacher interviews from ninth to tenth grade. After this, they chose to no longer attend the interviews because they felt that they were useless since I was bringing home good grades and was on top of all my tasks. My parents were also not active in activities that would have put them in contact with my teachers, like volunteering or school trips. While I was bringing home good grades I had anxiety that only my teachers were aware of due to their everyday presence in the classroom. Through this study I am curious to see if teachers observe other students that have been labelled “good” as having the same issues with a lack of parental involvement, and what practices they use to bring parents into the fold. I would also like to explore the differences in perceived relationships with parents whose children are not typically labelled “good” due to lesser grades or behaviour, as my own brother had been. He came home with less stellar grades and had a bad problem with motivation and procrastination. My parents had gone to parent-teacher interviews for my brother all four years of secondary school and had correspondences with various teachers over the years. I noticed this perplexing trend of inverse levels of parental involvement related to student grade level success through my
four years of secondary school. The perplexing nature is something that drove my curiosity to do further research on the topic of parental involvement. In the end, I hope to discover the ways that various teachers implement methods and practices that promote positive parent-teacher relationships that bring about parental involvement for all parents of different students.

1.4 Overview

This research paper is comprised of five chapters. In it I conducted a qualitative research study by interviewing three Ontario secondary school teachers with various subject backgrounds and years of experience. Through their interviews I learned about the methods and practices to encourage positive parent-teacher relationships, parental involvement and the challenges they faced in doing so. In chapter one I have indicated the purpose of the study, my main and additional questions, and have given a reflexive positioning statement. In chapter two I will review pieces of literature that show how parental involvement in schools is connected to various invitations to promote a parent-teacher relationship, the types of interactions between parents and teachers that lead to varying levels of parent-teacher trust, cultural and racial differences among parents and teachers, and perceived notions of school subjects affecting parent’s interest or lack of interest in their children’s learning. In chapter three I will explain my qualitative methodology for the research that was performed in this study. In chapter four I will present my research findings based on the information analyzed from transcribed semi-structured interviews with the interviewed educators. I will discuss the interviews’ importance and relationship to the existing literature on the subject matter. Finally, in chapter five I will demonstrate how the implications from my research can influence my future teaching practice, interactions with future student’s parents, and further research that can be done to promote positive relationships between parents and teachers to increase student success.
Chapter Two—Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this second chapter I present a review of relevant literature on successful methods and practices to promote parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement as well as challenges to these methods. I will cover topics such as levels of parent-teacher trust, opinions on the importance of certain secondary school subjects, and degrees of difference among parents and teachers. The literature reviewed was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data which was largely dependent on the size of the research study conducted. The reviewed literature has offered great insight into the topic of parental involvement that comes from positive parent-teacher relationships. Drawing upon the information from the literature review provided various lenses to consider when construction of the interview questions found in Appendix B took place.

2.1 Promoting Positive Parent-Teacher Relationships and Parental Involvement

2.1.1 Types of parental involvement. When teachers want students’ parents to become involved with homework, success, and the school community they will send out what the literature calls invitations (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 110). Invitations by teachers play a large role in parents’ decision making process concerning educational involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107.). The invitations to parents enhance a sense of welcoming and trust while increasing confidence that their involvement efforts will be useful and valued (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 111). The invitations made to parents depends on the type of parental involvement a teacher would want parents to engage in. For teachers, there are typically six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2010, p. 87). Epstein’s (2010) work that
allowed for the six types of parental involvement to be defined focused primarily on elementary and middle school teachers. Teachers invite parents to participate in the different variations of parental involvement at different times of a school year by promoting positive relationships through their efforts of inclusion (Epstein, 2010, p. 87). Therefore, a gap in the evidence is the relevance of the methods to secondary school teachers which will be examined in this qualitative study.

2.1.2 Methods and practices to promote the types of parental involvement. Through Epstein’s interactions and research with teachers she came up with a sample of successful methods to promote the different types of parental involvement through positive relationships with students’ teachers. To promote involved parenting, teachers can help establish home environments to support students through suggestions to make the home a positive space for learning. For communication, teachers will find success when they design various forms of school to home communication (emails, telephone calls, notes in students’ agendas, etc.) that relay information about school programs and students’ success (Epstein, 2010, p. 88). If a teacher wishes to have parents engage in volunteering, then the teacher must be willing to reach out in those forms of communication and work with parents to find a volunteer opportunity that fits the time they have available and their interests (Epstein, 2010, p. 88). To promote learning at home teachers can provide information and ideas to parents to help their children with homework and other curriculum related activities, such as invitational workshops to learn about the course their children are taking (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 112). For parents to be involved in decision making parents should be made aware of school decisions and have representatives make the school aware of parents’ opinions (Epstein, 2010, p. 89). Finally, if teachers wish for parents to collaborate with the community the school belongs to then they must identify and
communicate to parents with resources and services that they will make a positive impact in strengthening school programs and development through their outreach (Epstein, 2010, p. 89). While these methods and practices have been found to be successful by Epstein in elementary and middle schools, there is a lack of literature on the methods’ success in secondary schools and whether the structure of the secondary level is conducive to proper implementation. This gap was explored through this qualitative study. Furthermore, while Epstein provided a clear guide to implementing methods and practices to promote parental involvement additional challenges exist. These challenges are very multifaceted and can work independently or in conjunction with one another.

2.2 Challenges to the Methods and Practices

2.2.1 Parent-teacher trust. A strong level of trust between teachers and students’ parents is an important element at all levels of schooling in order to promote positive parent-teacher relationships. At the secondary school level, parents tend to have a lower level of trust towards their children’s teachers compared to the elementary school level (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). This can be attributed to the fact that in elementary school students only have one teacher, while in secondary school they have multiple teachers. Parents’ confidence in secondary school teachers’ ability to truly know and care for their child decreases because the teachers’ time with the students’ decreases (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). Teachers do not show any form of documented decrease or increase in level of trust in parents based on their grade level, instead they choose who to trust on a case by case basis (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). While teachers are held to a professional standard, that does not mean that teachers do not want a relationship with parents that will get them involved in
students’ success at school (Lasky, 2000, p. 847). The levels of trust between parents and teachers can be affected by the types of parenting demonstrated and observed, and the opportunities for interaction between the two groups.

2.2.1.1 Parenting style. In terms of categorizing the styles of parenting, there are three terms that dominate the literature. Permissive parenting is characterized as having few behavioural expectations for a child and having limited involvement in their endeavours. Authoritarian parenting sets high standards of conduct for the child with little explanation for the reasoning of their rules and an expectation to be obeyed with no question. Finally, Authoritative parenting provides supervision and firm guidelines for the child while still granting psychological autonomy and development of a close, warm relationship (Baumrind, 1991, p. 889). Heaven, Make, Barry & Ciarrochi (2002, p. 455) argue that the authoritative parenting style leads to low behavioural problems and promotes maturity in their children. Due to this and other related findings teachers prefer working with parents who they believe use this parenting style. Most teachers will make a judgement on how parents act with their children at home mainly on two areas: their own interactions with the parents and the students’ behaviour (Lasky, 2000, p. 845). Permissive and Authoritarian parenting often leads to low academic achievement and high level of behaviour problems related to authority at school (Heaven, Make, Barry, Ciarrochi, 2002). Therefore, teachers may go into meetings with these parents with already preconceived notions that may not encourage a positive outcome related to parental involvement for student success. A gap in this research to be filled is how teachers make the assumptions about parenting styles students live with at home outside of behaviour seen in the classroom.

2.2.1.2 Types of parent-teacher interaction. As students get older and enter their secondary school years, interactions between their parents and their teachers decreases greatly
(Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). This decrease in interaction ultimately decreases the level of trust between the parents and teachers (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). As students go on to secondary school the interaction between parents and teachers becomes more formalised, episodic and rule-bound. While in elementary schools there are many opportunities for parents to volunteer, or drop in on their child’s school for a talk, parents of secondary school aged children are limited to events or correspondences directly sanctioned by the school like parent teacher interview nights (Lasky, 2000, p. 848). By doing things together over long periods of time, people can develop relationships based on shared meaning, values and goals. With the conditions that teachers and parents of secondary school students face concerning their interactions, it is not a surprise that they are unable to develop a relationship and are uncomfortable to discuss opportunities of parental involvement (Lasky, 2000, p. 849). If they can make contact, other differences between the parents and teachers could lead to further challenges in promoting a positive relationship that would inhibit parental involvement.

The literature I came across concerning this sub-topic is over a decade old. I include it here because it is the most up to date work and its content connect directly to my work. However, my hope is that my work will contribute to the literature and fill in gaps for a more recent time.

**2.2.2 Racial/Cultural/Ethnic differences among parents and teachers.** Just as there are different types of parental involvement and methods to promote it, there are also different types of parents and teachers. The differences among parents are what make them pick and choose which types of parental involvement are the most important and necessary for their child’s success in school (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). However, when there is recognizable difference
between parents and teachers’ race, ethnicity, or culture then building the bridge towards a positive relationship can be difficult.

2.2.2.1 Race/Ethnicity/Culture of parents. One’s culture will affect how a person acts as a parent and how those parents involve themselves with their child’s education. In Huntsinger & Jose’s (2009, p. 398) work they describe the trend that European American parents tend to volunteer more in schools, while Chinese American parents put more of an emphasis on in home systematic teaching. The discussion behind these trends is that European American parents seem to have a larger sense of trust towards the school system, and that teachers are doing their jobs to ensure their child’s success. When they volunteer in their child’s school it is more of a way for the parents to keep an eye of the student’s behaviour and keep up to date with the school as a form of community involvement. Chinese American parents like to have a more involved role in assignments and homework because high educational achievement of their children is very important in Chinese culture (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 399). For this reason, Chinese America parents increasingly assist their children with homework, check for its completion, and monitor activities that could have a negative impact on their child’s achievement (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 408). My research attempted to discover if teachers implement certain methods to promote positive relationships with parents and parental involvement based on parents’ race/ethnicity/culture.

2.2.2.2 Race/Ethnicity/Culture of teachers. As the general Canadian population has become more racialized the teacher population has not kept up the same pace (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009, 592). There is a continued over-representation of white, female, middle class teachers despite the value of racialized educators (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005,
p. 149). In 2006 racialized students made up 67 percent of the secondary student population, meaning that there is approximately 67 percent of racialized parents that teacher must make connections with (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009, p. 599). While the over-representation of white, female teachers exists that does not mean that their work and potential should be overlooked. Many of these white, female teachers have much to offer their students through their own teacher education and dedication to their work, but they can only take their talents so far (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 150). They are in no position to understand, communicate, or identify with students and parents of colour the way teachers of colour can (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009, p. 593). Teachers of colour are well positioned to establish relationships with parents of students of colour by showing a dedication to relevant pedagogy and preparation for a marginalizing world (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009, p. 595). Therefore, one of the challenges can come from establishing a level of comfort between teachers and parents through shared race, ethnicity or culture. Lack of these shared traits can lead to tension between the involved parties. Gaps in the data to be investigated include what the percentage of racialized students are in the Canadian and Ontario population today, as well as how racialized teachers can make connections to White students and their parents to promote relationships and parental involvement.

2.2.3 Notions of school subjects. In the hierarchy of the subjects taught in secondary schools’, sciences, mathematics, and literacy dominate. Due to this hierarchy, parents will show any openness to building relationships with teachers that teach these “important” subjects (Oostdam & Hooge, 2012, p. 338). Parents will become involved concerning the “important” subjects because they want their children to be successful to go on to post-secondary education as is the norm of our current time (Eagle, 1989, p. 4). However, gender stereotypes towards
certain secondary school subjects still exist today, with boys having more parental involvement with science and math subjects. Girls deserve just as much concern for their achievement in such subjects, however research shows that this happens in more specialised environments with proper involvement from parents and teachers (Cherney & Campbell, 2011, p. 38). Parents and teachers should seek to build relationships for the good of students’ success no matter the subject or who the student is.

2.2.3.1 Desirability for post-secondary education. The reasoning behind the push for students to do well in subjects related to science, math, and reading is because most parents see them as useful for their children’s years in post-secondary education (Hou & Leung, 2011, p. 350). If these subjects are pursued successfully throughout the post-secondary level it can lead to prominent, well-paying jobs in the STEM sector. Therefore, it makes sense that teachers may have a harder time using their methods to create relationships with parents if their subject being taught is not deemed important. Parents would not want to waste time with achievement in unimportant subjects because the desirable subjects will bring a good image to families, as if the parents did something right by raising a child who can succeed in subjects perceived to be the most difficult (Hou & Leung, 2011, p. 357).

The ability to achieve positive parental involvement is also related to the type of school that the children attend. If a student attends a normal public secondary school with a general emphasis on all subjects, then parents will be more likely to only be in contact with teachers for important courses or if their child is not achieving successful grades. However, when students are put in specialized private schools that focus on higher academics, parents will want an overall rate of success because they are paying for the program and the prestige that comes with it (Hou
& Leung, 2011, p. 358). This desire for success shows patterns of correlation towards increased levels of parental involvement in their children’s schooling (Hou & Leung, 2011, p. 358).

2.2.3.2 Gender stereotypes. In research done for their study, Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers (1998, p. 722) found that parents perceived boys to be more competent in science subjects. Relatedly, they also found that the parents believe that science and math are more important for boys, and therefore expect a high success rate from boys in those subjects. Due to these preconceived notions parents are often more involved in the success of their male children in science and mathematics subjects (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers, 1998, p. 735). This means that teachers need to be forward in their invitations towards parents of female students to ensure they are involved for the success of their child. By increasing the rate of parental involvement through a positive relationship with parents it will be possible for more girls to find the self-confidence to enroll in non-traditional fields like engineering (Cherney & Campbell, 2011, p. 713). A gap in the research is the lack of information about the subjects that parents do not deem important for boys, which would lead to a lack of parental involvement and relationships with teachers of those subjects. As well, another gap is the lack of information about the subjects that parents believe are important for girls. My research in the following chapters makes references to these gaps.

2.3 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on the practices and methods used by teachers to bring about positive parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement in schools. Epstein’s work in defining parental involvement with teachers has allowed for concrete methods of action to be demonstrated through variations of communications and invitations to parents. As
this qualitative study continues a gap in the research to be filled is to determine if Epstein’s work is relevant to secondary school teachers. Various challenges to the potential success of parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement were also explored in this review such as limitations on trust and interactions between parent and teachers, racial and cultural differences among parents and teachers, and the difference in importance of certain school subjects. Through the interview procedure outlined in chapter three I hope to uncover which of the above challenges secondary school teachers encounter the most, and if there are any challenges not referenced in the literature. Through my qualitative work I hope to expand on the methods and practices written in this review to promote positive parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement. This would allow more teachers the chance to successfully bond with and educate parents in the ways they can work together for student success.
Chapter Three—Research Methodology

3.0 Chapter Overview

In this third chapter I will describe the methodology used to conduct the relevant research. The general approach, procedures, and instruments of data collection will be reviewed and explained before expanding on the specifics of participant sampling and participant recruitment. Following this, I have explained my procedures used for data analysis and the relevant ethical considerations made towards the research conducted. While I speak to the strengths of the methodology used in the study, I have also included related limitations in hope of creating a consciousness about the choices made when deciding on appropriate research methodology techniques. With this in mind, I conclude this third chapter with a summary of the main methodological decisions and my personal reasoning for these decisions as they relate to the purpose and questions of the research.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study used a qualitative research approach. Such an approach involved an extensive literature review and the use of semi-structured interviews with experienced educators. Once my main topic had been chosen I set out to review research that had previously been completed in related areas. My research led me to discover connecting themes of documented methods and practices to promote parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement, as well as challenges to these methods. These challenges included: parent-teacher trust and interaction, racial and cultural differences among parents, and importance of certain school subjects over others. Once these subtopics had been condensed it was made clear that the qualitative research method would be the most successful for my work. Qualitative research can be defined as primary exploration
research (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 403). With it one can gain insight into reasons, opinions and motivations around a certain hypothesis or topic like building parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement. The qualitative research obtained can then be used to conduct larger quantitative research in the future using the information that had been initially gathered (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 403).

Due to the complexities of the challenges related to my research topic on parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement, the qualitative research method allowed me to easily access information from each of my participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed for an open conversation to take place between the participants and myself, allowing for a steady flow of questions from one theme to another. By speaking face to face with participants they could expand on ideas in their own way without the restrictions of a quantitative model (Taylor, 2005, p. 103). Through this methodology I could extract common themes and ideas from the participants and analyse the meanings towards an answer to my research questions.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The instrument for primary data collection used in this research study was the semi-structured interview. While a traditional structured interview method involves a strictly adhered to set of questions with no room for divergence, a semi-structured interview allows for new ideas to be brought up as a natural progression because of what an interviewee may say. Interviews are very useful instruments for qualitative research collection because they allow for verbatim quotations to show an interviewee’s experiences, feelings, knowledge and opinions related to a set of theoretically based questions (Taylor, 2005, p. 103). By creating an environment of openness between interviewer and interviewee, the semi-structured interview can be used to disentangle threads that complicate large phenomenon, such as the relationships between parents
their children’s teachers (Galletta, 2013, p. 2).

Such useful characteristics of the semi-structured interview made it an appropriate tool for my study. As my research sought to characterize the methods, practices, and challenges involved in parent-teacher relationships and initiating parental involvement, transcribing firsthand accounts from various teachers made their similarities and differences come to light through analysis of their answers to the interview questions (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). If the teachers believe that I missed a key component in a question, they would have the freedom to elaborate. If they feel a question is not relevant to their experience, then they could choose to give a simple answer. Therefore, the semi-structured interview allowed myself and the interviewees to engage in a conversation-like manner during the interview. I as the interviewer had a set of questions that were necessary to the research question to guide the discussion, and my participants were free to answer and expand where they saw it necessary (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). In this method of data collection both parties’ thoughts and ideas were given equal measure to construct an interpretation of a research question.

3.3 Participants

In this section I will set out the sampling criteria I established for recruitment of interview participants. I also look at the wide range of possibilities for educator recruitment. In addition, I have included a subsequent section wherein I elaborate on who the participants are.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. To answer my research question of: What are the methods and practices used to promote positive parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement? I needed a specific set of teachers for semi-structured interviews if I hoped to receive in depth responses to questions I set out. My first criterion for the teachers is that I needed all of them to
teach different subjects or within different departments. My reasoning for this is because I wanted to see if a variety of department teachers led to similar or dissimilar answers to questions and from there I could observe any emerging trends within a department or within school’s systems in general. The second criterion is that I needed at least one science teacher, one mathematics teacher, one English teacher, and one history/social sciences teacher. My aim was to conduct interviews with teacher of at least three of the four subjects listed. I chose these secondary school department subjects because they all have at least one credit that is mandatory to complete for acquiring an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. I felt that it would be a prudent choice to pick teachers from departments that teach courses taught to most students because they will most likely have the highest percentage of interaction with parents. Finally, my third criterion for participants was that each teacher has at least 10 years of teaching experience. This criterion was chosen for many reasons. Due to the numerous years of teaching experience the teachers can draw on all their past years for responses to questions about relationships with parents and how they have convinced parents to become more involved. Also, as teachers with at least 10 years experience they will be confidantes within their departments. Many teachers, old and new, will go to more experienced teachers when they need guidance for many issues, including parental interactions. This position will then allow the participants to give insight into parent-teacher interactions from their own perspective and experience as well as those of their colleagues. This set of criteria was set out to ensure a group of well-rounded participants was chosen to take part in the data collection process.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures. Given that I studied within a community of current and future educators I primarily relied on convenience sampling to locate my interview participants. I used my own direct contacts, and those of my colleagues to network and recruit educators for my
research (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Convenience sampling was the most successful technique for my sampling because it was the least rigorous and most accessible. Given the nature of limited time for completion of the MTRP it was also be the least costly in terms of time used searching for participants (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

My classmates come from various subject backgrounds and I was aware that using their contacts would be a convenient tool to contact educators. When contacting educators for consideration of participation I used different methods depending on the relationship with said educators. If I had a previous professional relationship with an educator, then I contacted each directly with the relevant information to have them decide if they wished to participate. If I had no previous professional relationship with an educator who was suggested by a classmate, then I contacted them first through their school’s administration. I contacted principals and provided them with an overview of my research study and stated who in their school I was seeking to interview. If they believed that the educator I suggested was appropriate and would be willing to consider participating, then I asked these principals to pass on my information so further contact arrangements could be made.

3.3.3 Participant biographies. My first participant was Teacher A. Teacher A has been teaching for 18 and a half years. She teaches a variety of subjects within the Canadian and World Studies department at her school. Those subjects include: history, civics, politics, economics, and law. She currently teaches with the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board at St. Catholic High School. She has taught at the school for 10 years. She was previously a co-department head at the school but stepped down from the position recently for personal reasons. She identifies as a Caucasian Canadian with Portuguese background.

My second participant was Teacher B. Teacher B has been teaching for close to 35 years.
She has been a teacher in the Caribbean, and now teaches in Canada. She is a mathematics teacher, and is currently the mathematics department head at her current school. She teaches in the Peel District School Board at Public Institution Secondary School. The 2016-2017 school year will be her second year at the school. She identifies as Indo-Guyanese.

My third participant was Teacher C. Teacher C has been teaching for 13 years. He teaches in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board at St. Catholic High School. He has taught at this location for 10 years. He teaches in the science department, with a focus on the grade 10 science course, the grade 11 environmental science course, and grade 11 chemistry. He comes from a football coaching background, and has coached his schools’ boys’ varsity football team in the past. He identifies as a Caucasian Canadian with an American background.

3.4 Data Analysis

Before data analysis took place, I had to transcribe my transcripts. I completed my transcription work using the program InqScribe which allowed for an audio file to be played, paused, and slowed down at the same time as typing took place. Once my interviews were transcribed I began coding my transcripts. I decided to primarily use descriptive codes in order to capture the primary essence of the sections of text being read. Where appropriate I used in vivo coding to capture the exact words used by an interview participant that perfectly summed up a point, or the code represented a set of words used by other participants showing a shared idea. When coding, I used my interview questions as an interpretive tool to further understand the points being made by participants. This coding work took place for each individual interview, with repetition as needed for additional understanding of the summarized codes.

When coding was completed I moved on to grouping the codes into categories. The category process would show similarities and differences among the codes, and how they fit with
one another. I found it useful to use a concept map at this stage to move categories around and
determine if they would make sense grouped in certain ways. Ultimately, this grouping of
categories led me to determining my synthesized themes. Themes were determined because the
topics were prevalent to some degree among all interviews and because they made a connection
to the content touched upon in the literature review.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Several ethical standards were put in place to ensure that all participating educators felt
safe and comfortable during their semi-structured interviews. These ethical standards were put in
place to ensure the rights and protection of all participants. These ethical standards were adjusted
as participants saw fit to ensure that the interview process was a positive one (DiCicco-Bloom &

To start, all participants were consistently notified of their right to withdraw from
participation in the study during any stage. Participants were offered use of a pseudonym if they
felt the need to remain confidential. Relatedly, all markers to identify participants’ schools or
students were excluded. Once the participants comfort over their confidentiality had been
established I ensured their comfort with the questions they were to answer in the semi-structured
interview. I sent participant’s the interview questions beforehand to ensure that they were aware
of the nature of the questions, re-stating their right to withdraw if they felt questions were
inappropriate. Once participants were prepared for the upcoming questions and completed the
semi-structured interview they had the opportunity to consult the transcripts and edit (e.g. clarify
or retract statements) before I moved on to conduct analysis of the data. All data, such as notes
and audio recordings, are store in a secure password protected device and will be destroyed
within 5 years. All the above ethical standards as well as an overview of the research study and
specifcics for the participation are included the consent letter (Appendix A) given to all participants. This letter ensured that all participants had full knowledge of what it meant to give consent for a semi-structured interview.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The reason that there are different types of methodological procedures for research studies is because each will have its own set of strengths and weaknesses. In this section I address the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology for my own research study.

In terms of strengths I believe the most important is that the semi-structured interview method allows educators to deliver more in depth answers that a quantitative survey would allow for. They created multi-layered answers and gave greater details towards questions that mattered to them the most. In this way, the interviews served as a vehicle for the educators to showcase their experiences and validate them through careful choice of words and explanations. Another strength was the opportunity for reflection that the semi-structured interview allowed. While the educators were answering interview questions, they could conceptualize how they perceive certain educational topics in practice and in theory. The questions challenge the educators to differentiate between what they do and what they think; if these ideas are the same or different. While the participants are educators, they could still learn about themselves and how they bring certain ideas and actions into their classrooms for better or worse.

In terms of methodological limitations, most came from the ethical parameters approved for the research study. The MTRP only allowed for interviews with teachers excluding possible interviews with students are parents. This limitation was very important for my own study because my research topic is based around parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement. I had the chance to have in depth interviews with three experienced educators but did not have
interviews with any parents. This meant that I could only look at the issue from one party’s point of view with no reference to the other. While this gap allows for others to take on such research in the future I would have preferred to make my study as well rounded as possible. Another limitation comes from my ethical parameters in that I had a limit on the number of educators that I could interview. For this research study, I have chosen three different subject area teachers. While this difference in subject area helped to create an informed conversation about the topic, the three interviews conducted cannot generalize the experiences of the broad spectrum of teachers.

With these strengths and limitations stated and set out, I used my knowledge to ensure that the research study was conducted in a way to produce new and useful data for the education sector related to parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement.

3.7 Conclusion

To conclude, I have conducting a qualitative research study into the methods, practices and challenges in building parent-teacher relationships and promoting parental involvement, specifically from the teacher’s perspectives as set out by my approved ethical parameters. I used the semi-structured interview as my instrument of data collection for my three participants that I contacted through variations of convenience sampling. The semi-structured interviews allowed a casual, constructive conversation to arise out of the answering of a set of topical questions, and the participants varying subject background brought different experiences to relevance. In Chapter 4 I report on the research findings and analyse the data from the participants’ interviews.
Chapter Four—Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

The ultimate purpose of this research study was to determine the methods and practices used by various teachers towards growing positive parent-teacher relationships. The study also looked at how these teachers go on to deal with the challenges that come with relationship building with parents. My findings should be looked at as an example of successes used by some teachers that could influence others in their interactions and relationship building with students’ parents.

The research study was based on qualitative data. The data was obtained through three semi-structured interviews and analyzed along with existing literature. Each semi-structured interview was conducted using the same set of questions. Participants’ interviews lasted approximately 35 to 55 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person and over the phone, with recording devices used to transcribe the interviews for coding. The transcribed data obtained through the semi-structured interviews went through multiple rounds of coding. The types of coding used were descriptive and in vivo coding. Descriptive coding summarizes the primary topic of an excerpt and in vivo coding uses the participant’s own language to label an excerpt (Saldaña, 2009, p.3). These coding methods were used to analyze and understand the data to appropriately categorize the interview content into coherent themes.

For this research study, I interviewed three secondary school teachers. Teacher A is a history teacher at St. Catholic High School in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board. Teacher B is a mathematics teacher at Public Institution Secondary School in the Peel District School Board. Finally, Teacher C is a science teacher also at St. Catholic High School in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. Each of the participants were recruited through convenience
sampling, meaning if I did not have contact information for a teacher from a past professional relationship I then reached out to my colleagues for their contacts that would be interested in participating in my interviews. Through this recruitment method I compiled a set of findings that shows the uniqueness of each participant’s career while showing where similarities exist in terms of how they have built positive relationships with parents over their time as teachers.

In this chapter my findings will be organized into three major themes with corresponding subcategories that will be directly related to my research questions. Each theme is directly related to the idea of communication as the main method used by teachers to cultivate positive relationships with parents. The first theme relates to the question: what are the methods and practices used to promote positive parent-teacher relationships, and how were these methods and practices learned? The theme will look at teachers’ use of positivity as a practice, and how they consciously interpret interactions with parents to assess when and where positivity should be used. The second theme relates to two questions. The first is: how do teachers define a positive parent-teacher relationship? The second is: is all parental involvement geared towards student success? This theme will assess how teachers pursue parental engagement with increased communication, and how parental engagement is directly related to student engagement. The final theme is also related to two research questions. The first question is: what type of opportunities for parental involvement do teachers believe parents would want? The second is: What challenges occur when trying to promote a relationship with parents? This theme will explore differences between the teachers’ use of formal versus informal modes of communication, their preferences, and how parents choose to participate in these different forms.
4.1 Positivity learned through Experience

Building relationships with parents means that communication needs to be established to discover commonalities and differences between the parties involved. If there is no communication, then teachers and parents will not be able to become partners working together for the good of students. Adams and Christenson (2000) claim that communication is the main method used by teachers to build relationships with parents, and the data I have collected supports this claim. Communication can come in various forms as will be discussed in the forthcoming pages, however each will contain a purposeful foundation of positivity. This positivity is wound through every attempt to interact with parents because it is seen as a key component in ensuring parents are comfortable with and trustful of their child’s teacher. The integration of positivity in various communication methods to build relationships with parents is the attempt made by teachers to increase levels of trust, where parents will openly work with the teachers and show confidence in their skills to achieve successful outcomes in their classroom (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 480). This emphasis on positivity and the different routes in can take will be discussed below. It is worth mentioning that each teacher explicitly mentions “being positive” (Teacher A, B, C) as a practice for positive relationships with parents. However, each teacher additionally mentioned that this method was not taught to them explicitly in their academic pre-teaching studies. Rather, the importance of positivity and how to use it appropriately was discovered and mastered through the numerous years of experience each participant possesses.

4.1.1 Importance of place. Through the experience of working in the teaching profession for many years my interview participants learned that the location of any communication with parents is very important. This is because the setting of an interaction with a
parent is very crucial to ensure its success. Through my research I have learned that certain locations or settings do not allow for a comfortable introduction for issues or concerns about a student. Social events at a school that are not focused on the academic achievements of those students attending should not be used to inform parents about problems. For my participants, this involves using their experience to judge a situation for if the location and setting will allow parents to engage as teachers wish them to, as Teacher B explains:

[I]f we have a social gathering like let's say commencement or a prize giving or we have something and there's a parent that I meet because the child is there to introduce me... and in that case it's always a pleasure to meet a parent, it's always good to see the child and parent together and having a conversation does not circulate around the academia. It could be about personality, about something good that I’ve observed.

From this I can conclude that these “social gatherings” (Teacher B) in the school community are therefore not the appropriate time to have a serious conversation about a student’s issues because it would catch the parent off guard. According to my participants, these situations should be used by teachers to casually build the relationship with the parents, to learn more, and show their dedication to the students and the school community. Therefore, I believe that such social interactions can lead to a level of comfort that will allow parents to openly seek out the teachers and let them know about why their child behaves in the classroom as they do. Teacher C explains how such casual conversations can turn into something more serious:

[If] the parent feeling comfortable enough and opening up about trust because I simply called home to inform them that their child had missed an assessment and they opened up about the fact and you know I was positive about it and talked about the option available.
And you know, this parent opened up about how their child is going through and fighting an eating disorder… Um, then all of a sudden you become the trusted individual.

Therefore, because conversations about academic or behavioural issues can lead to discussions about other serious matters teachers want to make sure that the environment is one where the parents would feel comfortable. When that comfort is established the teacher is seen as trustworthy, and can then form a team with the parent that can lead to purposeful collaboration geared towards student success (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 478). Discussions about academic or behavioural issues are very serious and both parties involved need to be aware that the discussion is going to take place based on the setting. It can be inferred from the interviews that showing parents that their child has positive qualities in the classroom through casual, social school interactions will allow the teachers to show that academic or behavioural concerns come from a sincere place of care and support of the child. With this purpose in mind, I can see how allowing the parents to not be bombarded with critiques of their child at a bake sale or play lets the parents know that the teacher wants to enjoy themselves while getting to know their student’s parents.

4.1.2 Positivity in word choice. Just as the setting for initiating communication between teachers and parents is important, so is the word choice in the dialogue that takes place. Opening with positive words and questions to get to know the parents and the situation at home helps to show parents that their children’s teachers are genuinely interested. Teachers and parents share the desire that children should succeed in school. In Teacher A’s opinion, the only way to start a conversation with parents about student success is to “try to talk about all the positive experiences” first. This sentiment was shared by Teacher B and Teacher C. I take this to mean that starting off positively is a way to ease a parent into the discussion about how to improve a
child’s performance. Through analyzing my interviews, it became clear that due to the deeper personal and emotional relationship between parents and their children, speaking about children right away in a negative light may make the parent less open to discussion. Teacher C explains this phenomenon as such:

Parents don’t want to hear about how bad their kid is. They want to know the good things so any time I engage a parent you know I talk to them about the positive things that are happening and then I'll kind of bring in the challenge we have at the moment and then identify some opportunities or steps, giving choices to work with the parent. My understanding is that teachers need to come across as concerned and caring so that the recommendations made to help a child better succeed in the classroom are seen as sincere. If teachers reach out in this way, then parents will be responsive because a comfortable environment has been established based on respectful, positive dialogue. Parents will take action and let the teachers know about the situation at home, instead of the teacher instigating questions for the information because they will be comforted by a positive response. When this comfort is established, a true collaborative team between parents and teachers is created and can be nurtured over time to produce successful outcomes for students (Lasky, 2000, p. 108).

4.1.3 Dialogue with no judgement. According to my interviewees the most important part of the word choice towards parents is to ensure that the dialogue does not come across as judgemental. This emphasis on non-judgment came across especially during the interview questions concerning parenting styles and how that can affect teacher’s relationships with parents. Teacher B stated it in terms of how he as a parent would want to be treated: “Judge not yet ye be judged”. All three teachers agreed that there are behaviors or observations that can be made to label parents as negligent or authoritarian. However, they were all aware that they did
not know the whole picture of what goes on in the homes of parents and students. Therefore, my interpretation of the hesitance of teachers to make judgements is that if such judgements are made and felt by the parents’ then there is a scarce chance for a collaborative partnership to be formed.

It is shown in the research that parental interactions decrease in number as students move from elementary to secondary school (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p.491). With this in mind, my interview participants believed that these limited number of interactions between parents and teachers during a normal secondary school year should not be the defining points in how to classify parents. The small number of interactions does not allow for enough information to be gathered on perceived parenting styles. In my interpretation of the interviews parents should not be labelled as good or bad, rather they should be put on a spectrum with their known and unknown circumstances affecting their place within it. My interview participants voiced that judgements seem to be made towards the time of parent-teacher interviews, and that those parents that do not attend are looked down upon. Teacher C does not believe that such judgement should be passed:

So, those who come may have been making a sacrifice to come. Maybe there are... they aren’t negligent parents. To say a parent that doesn't come to meetings, doesn't respond to your phone calls is negligent, is not a good thing because we don't know the circumstances.

To me this means that there is a greater context to be understood about the lives of parents and students outside of the school environment. Through analysis of my interviews this recognition of greater outside context comes from years of experience as a teacher. This is due to teachers coming to the realization that their own entire life does not revolve around work, just as
students’ parents’ lives do not revolve around interactions and involvement in the school setting. While there is evidence concerning the positive or negative effects of certain parenting styles outlined in Heaven, Make, Barry, & Ciarrochi’s (2002) work, teachers do not know parents well enough to make a judgement call. Coming to this realization about context will ensure that teachers can connect to parents in a way where judgement is not passed, positive dialogue is utilized, and both parties feel comfortable in their environment for such dialogue.

4.2 Increased Engagement Levels

A good relationship with parents cannot grow and prosper towards success if they do not feel included, valued and useful. In order to feel included, valued and useful parents need to be engaged. All three of my interviewees agreed with the idea that engaging parents by giving them something to do within the classroom environment makes them part of the school community and more invested in the outcomes for their children and others. Parental engagement can help to increase the likelihood of parents involving themselves in the school environment in the different ways outlined by Epstein (2010) such as communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Since my work showed that communication is the most important method used by teachers, increasing parental communication through practices of engagement are vital. Engaging the parents means keeping them informed and showing that there is something they can actively do to participate in efforts for student success. Below are different ways to achieve that end.

4.2.1 The 3-legged stool. While my research focused on the relationship between teachers and parents, it became apparent during the interview process that students are an integral part of the relationship. A good relationship with parents cannot grow and prosper
towards success if students are not included. This is the case because the students are often the vehicles used to bridge the gap between parents and teachers. If the student is uninformed about something important relating to the classroom, then very often the parent will be as well. The teacher, the student, and the parent are each one leg on a 3-legged stool, and if “you take one of those out of the equation… the stool falls over” (Teacher C).

In my interviews, it was brought up that due to the adolescent age of secondary school students, there may be a stigma in the idea of including their parents in their secondary school lives because they want to show their independence. Such a stigma could be a factor in the documented decrease in parental involvement as students move from elementary to secondary school (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 491). This stigma does not positively affect the students because it cuts them off from a potential partnership between parents and teachers that can lead to ideas based around increased success. Parents and teacher want to help, but students at the secondary school age want to seem grown up with no need of help from adults. The students are at the age where they want to exhibit an extroverted side of themselves that is not seen in the home (Heaven, Mak, Barry, & Ciarrochi, 2002, p. 454). They wish to separate home and school, even though mixing the two will have a positive effect on their success. The key to bridging the gap and making the students accepting of their parent’s involvement and engagement can be achieved through promotion, as Teacher A explained:

Until I guess we get away from that stigma that as a student is going into high school they have to get I guess… cut the… Cut the cord, cut the apron strings. I don’t know. Because we don’t talk, don’t really promote [parent involvement]. So I don’t know. Maybe promotion... That it [parent involvement] is a healthy thing to do in high school.
It is my belief that if parental involvement and engagement is seen as a natural, healthy action that takes place during the years of secondary school right from the beginning then it can be positively accepted by students since they will have been used to their parent’s presence during their elementary school years. Teachers actively talking about how parents can get involved should provide the methods for involvement to the students to make it seem that it is the teacher reaching out, rather than the parents reaching in. The onus therefore falls on the teacher to provide the opportunities for parental involvement and engagement so that the students can still feel some sort of autonomy in the new independent world of secondary school. Teachers can promote this involvement and engagement through various information sessions and well thought out use of technology in the classroom.

4.2.2 Teacher led information events. All three interviewees agreed that information nights concerning a new course, a large project, or new school initiatives would be very useful for engaging parents. Information events in the school serve the purpose of getting “parents into the [physical] school” (Teacher A), making it feel natural to be walking in the halls and being in a class even though they are not students. Inviting the parents into the school and the classroom shows an intimate level of interest by the teachers. These are opportunities where they can plainly lay out how their courses will be organized, what assessments will be given to students, and how to engage in various forms of contact with the teachers. Furthermore, such events also allow parents to voice concerns or ask questions. The format allows an open conversation to take place which can help grow the relationship and put a face to a name. These information events can happen on a small or large scale, but will usually take place at the beginning of new course sessions to welcome parents, as is done at Teacher B’s school:
[...] Major interaction I will have would be when they become grade 9 students…We have the grade 9 parent evening where the parents do come in to hear a little about the school, what's going on, how they can get involved. The key to these events is that they are led by the teachers. The teachers take charge and direct the discussion and show that they are the authority in the classroom that the students will have to listen to (Lasky, 2000, p. 844). Having parents be exposed to the teacher as a professional in an in-person setting allows the parents to understand first hand what the teacher expects and they will then bring those expectations home to their children for them to be well-behaved students. Laying the expectations and relevant information about a course or school related topic out in the open near the start of the endeavour will positively affect the parent-teacher relationship because the information sharing will lead to a lack in confusion down the road. However, if there is confusion on the parent’s end due to lack of memory of information or change in information then effective use of technology in the classroom can help in that regard.

4.2.3 Use of technology. Technology used in the classroom has been increasing over the years. It is rare to find a teacher at the secondary level that uses no form of technology in their teaching (Galt, n.d.). One noticeable type of technology that has had increased presence in classrooms are Learning Management Systems, such as Google Classroom. With this technology, teachers can create a space where all the assessments, rubrics, lesson presentations, feedback, and submissions can be held and accessed through teacher and student logins (Galt, n.d.). With more teachers introducing these technologies into the normal makeup of the classroom, access for parents should also be included to normalize the idea of parental involvement and engagement. Integration of technology that would allow for parent logins or parent messaging could ensure faster updates to parents about how their child is doing in school,
and what is going on in their child’s courses on any given day. The purpose of a Learning Management System is not to have the parents police their children or criticize the teacher about how they run the class. Rather, as Teacher A put it in their interview it is about providing the “shell of the course. And then a link to their kid’s [course related items] … to open a conversation with their child”. This would all be provided to the parents and it would be their choice to use it. This is another example of the teachers initiating the engagement and communication efforts so that they can show that they are the authority figure. However, while parental logins can be made available the teacher cannot force the parents to use them. Providing the logins to a Learning Management System is one way for parents to “be more engaged if they want to be” (Teacher A). These technologies with parental logins are available for parents to showcase behaviours of support to the teacher and student that can lead to increased achievement in school subjects and positive goal setting (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers, 1998, p. 722). However, if using technology is not the way parents wish to stay up to date with their children’s teachers, there are other forms of communication that can be used based on levels of formality.

4.3 Formality Levels of Communication

Before conducting my research, it was already known that communicating with teachers is one of the most predominant forms of parental involvement (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 399). Communication between parents and teachers allows the relationship to grow and to develop into one based on shared ideals concerning student success. Just as my work has discussed how there are different methods to include positivity into communication opportunities with parents, and that there are different methods for increasing opportunities for active parental engagement, there are also different formality levels of communication with parents. These different options are
distinguished as either informal or formal in nature (Lasky, 2000, pp. 847-849). My research shows that the informal modes of communication seem to be more prevalent and that both informal and formal communication is more often initiated by the teachers. Both informal and formal modes of communication have unique characteristics and will be discussed in the following sections.

4.3.1 Informal communication. Informal communication between parents and teachers can be defined as communication that takes place outside of a mechanistic sanction made by the school (Lasky, 2000, p. 489). These are the modes of communication that take place more often during the school year. Examples suggested by my interview participants of informal communication methods include phone calls and email correspondence. My data collection from my three interviews revealed that phone calls tend to be the preferred method used by the teachers. I believe that this is due to the ease of initiating a phone call. It is harder for a parent to ignore a phone ringing than an additional email in their unchecked inbox. Teacher C explains that the preference for phone calls additionally comes down to time management since they “try to touch base with as many people…over the course of the semester. With…close to 90 students that’s not always possible” with something like email. The interviews showed that emails are most useful when there is a need to attach some sort of document with instructions for the parent, such as a missed assessment to pass on to a sick student.

The phone calls and emails that are made are planned in a quasi-spontaneous fashion. Teachers may know beforehand which days that are appropriate for contacting parents, but I was made aware that for the most part teachers initiate these informal messages when they have a moment of freedom. Through my analysis of the transcripts these phone calls and emails are primarily used to relay issues of concern from the teacher to the parent regarding behaviour or
performance in a class. Teacher C informed me that they sometimes alter how the phone call is initiated for it to be as impactful as possible:

I make them [the student] call home… Here’s the phone pick it up and tell your parent why you didn’t do your homework. You can have that conversation… if the kid has the conversation they’re taking ownership and [then] I get on the phone with the parent after and say yeah had some challenges and these are the things they’re doing and these are the things they need to do… Yes, we have this challenge but we can get by that if these positive things [continue].

As mentioned by Teacher C and the other interviewees, it is imperative to start off the conversation positively to begin a good rapport with the parents. The effects of this embedded positivity in parent-teacher communication was discussed in previous sections of the chapter.

While my data collection showed that it was primarily the teachers initiating the informal communications, an interesting situation was discovered where the reverse was true. In Teacher B and C’s respective mathematics and science classes they recalled that within the past decade there was an increase of female students in their senior level courses. Related to this, both teachers shared that parents of female students tend to initiate informal communication for checking up on their daughter’s progress. This goes against the idea from previously conducted research that parents tend to be more concerned with the success of male students in these subjects (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers, 1998, p. 735). As more females have entered careers that require post-secondary qualifications in the sciences and mathematics, the increased informal communication initiated by parents can be looked at as a hope for their own daughter to be successful in these male dominated fields (Cherney & Campbell, 2011, p. 713). When informal modes of communication are initiated by parents to help female students succeed
then parents and teachers can form teams to provide methods for the students that will help them achieve their goals.

Therefore, informal communication can be initiated in both directions. In my interpretation, teachers will initiate to a greater degree because they see it as their duty to inform parents about issues in the class, while parents will be the initiators if they are concerned with the success level of their child. When formality levels increase, teachers gain an even higher initiation level, and will show an even higher level of professionalism.

**4.3.2 Formal communication.** Formal communication can be defined as communication that takes place within a mechanistic sanction made by the school (Lasky, 2000, p. 489). This type of communication takes place less often during the school year and requires more planning and effort by the teacher. However, due to this effort needed much more information can be shared in these modes of communication. Based on answers given by my interviewees the typical formal modes of communication are letters sent home and parent-teacher interview nights.

Letters sent home can be sent at various times during the school year. For instance, Teacher B sends,

an introductory letter to my grade 9 students’ parents [which says] "My name is so and so, I'm your child's mathematics teacher, these are some of the thing's we're going to be doing, here's my expectations" and stuff like that.

The purpose of these introductory letters is to orient the parents within the structure of a course. These introductory letters seemed to be standard practice among my interview participants. Later on in a school year early warning and late warning letters can be sent out. These letters will primarily deal with unremarkable grades in a class, reasons based on observation for the
unremarkable grades, and an invitation for parents to engage in informal communication like a phone call to make a plan regarding the issues for the student. These letters are sent home to initiate an alliance between the school and the home, so that teachers and parents can be partners working towards student success (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 477). I think that this practice of formal communication is popular because teachers can create letters once and reuse them in the future as needed. This allows them to initiate professional communication without putting in unnecessary effort every year that would take time away from other important matters.

The most formal mode of communication during the school year is the parent-teacher interview. Interestingly, these interviews are also cited as “the only one [mode of communication] that is happening in person” (Teacher A)—excluding any welcome events that the school may choose to offer. Based on the data I think that if no informal communication has taken place between a teacher and parent before an interview, then it is a chance for the parents to finally speak up about their concerns for their child. Comparatively, if there has been previous communication, then the teacher and parent can use the interview as a time to update one another on a student’s success, issues, or behaviour in school and at home with suggestions on how to move forward. I think that the interview is a good time to bring up opportunities for parental engagement that may have been overlooked by the parents from the beginning of the year. Teachers could introduce any technological aspect of the course if the teacher can “bring out [their] computer and show them [the parents] everything” (Teacher A) such as the learning management system, what is contains, and how to log in.

Just as parents of female students show a trend towards communication through informal practices, immigrant parents are perceived to take a greater advantage of parent-teacher interviews than others. Immigrant parents will show up with prepared concerns and questions to
ask whether their child is being successful or not because in the Asian, Middle Eastern, and African cultures that greatly populate my interviewee’s schools, educational achievement is a collective achievement of the family (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009, p. 408). Other reasons that come to mind for immigrant parents to show up to interviews include wanting to know if their child is facing any form of discrimination, asking about their child’s language proficiency, or using the opportunity to communicate with a teacher to improve their own English language proficiency. Whatever the reason, the parents are coming to the interviews with some sort of purpose and the teacher is there to serve that purpose, primarily through answering the parents’ questions as a professional. Just as a patient would go to a doctor to answer questions about bettering their health, so do immigrant parents go to teachers to answer questions about their children because they are seen as respected professionals of education (Lasky, 2000, p. 844). Consequently, the trend of immigrant parents being present at parent-teacher interviews is related to their respect for teachers as professionals. According to Teacher A, this respect towards the professionalism of a teacher is directly related to a parents’ culture, it is “50/50…based on their own personal experience”. I interpret that to mean that if parents were raised in a culture that showed respect to teachers, then they will continue to show that respect as their children go through school. This respect manifests itself in attending the interviews, being attentive, and being open to working together with the teacher towards student success. If the parents did not grow up in a culture that showed respect to teachers, then the parents may not show such commitment to formally communicating with teachers to hear their professional opinions. With this interpretation, a conclusion can be drawn about why all of my interview participants explained that this dedication to formal communication is not shown with the same enthusiasm in Canadian born parents. I believe it is because Canadian born parents grew up in a society where teachers are
often criticized for making too much money and getting more vacation time that other professions. Their level of respect for teachers and the educational system they teach in may be less than the level of respect given by immigrant parents. Therefore, based on my analysis of these points in the data I think that the enthusiasm for formal communication from immigrant parents comes from their pride in being able to put their children through the respected Ontario educational system with well trained, professional teachers.

Ultimately, if the teacher makes immigrant parents feel comfortable being in formal conversations about their child’s success, then it could lead to more frequent informal forms of communication in the future. The formal modes of communication for any parent are important to establish an initial relationship based on respect between the parents and teachers. Parents should respect teachers because of their professional standing, and teachers should respect parents as the ultimate authority in their students’ lives. Moving past the formal letter and interviews into the realm of informal phone calls and emails will allow teachers and parents to communicate more frequently, and with a level of comfort that would offer an environment for positive collaboration based on student success.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter was written to serve the purpose of analyzing the major themes that emerged during my data collection concerning methods and practices used to build positive parent-teacher relationships. My data analysis showed that communication between parents and teachers is the dominant method used towards relationship building. The themes that emerged in this chapter showed how to put that method into practice in various forms. The first theme dealt with positivity, which was the answer to the question of best practice teachers used to develop positive relationships with parents. Teachers methodically include positive speech, composure
and environment to ensure that parents feel comfortable to reach out and participate in communication concerning their child’s education. The second theme showed that parental engagement leads to further student success and additional communication is the ultimate goal of the practices teachers use towards parents. Teachers offer opportunities for engagement by including students as well as parents in the communication process, offering parent oriented events to meet teachers and get an understanding of their child’s classes, and technological options for parents to use at their convenience at home or work for fast updates and messaging communication. Finally, the third theme exhibited how different forms of communication help teachers to build positive relationships with different parents. This communication between teachers and parents can be informal or formal, spontaneous or non-spontaneous, in person or via some other medium. Certain types of parents show a preference to one type of communication over another based on their own culture or the aspirations of their children.

While my work was completed to put major aspects of parent-teacher relationships into the well-defined themes outlined in this chapter, I found that the success of building positive parent-teacher relationships is very context specific. This context specificity comes from the fact that parents and teachers are each unique, and will interact with one another in different ways depending on many different variables. There is no fool proof way to interact with teachers; no absolute answer in achieving a positive relationship with parents. Rather, it was my intention that the contents of this chapter have shown that it is instead an array of practices which will have varying degrees of success depending on the parent. Thus, teachers need to ensure that their practices for parental communication and other forms of involvement are differentiated to meet the needs of the various families that make up a school community.
In my final chapter, I give a comprehensive conclusion of my work. I review my research findings as well as suggest how my own research fits into the literature. I also make recommendations for research within the educational community that can be done in the future and lend questions that can guide such research.
Chapter Five—Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

The following pages are a conclusion to my research of study and the final chapter of my work. It is divided into a series of sections to address my closing thoughts and predictions. I first provide an overview of my key findings discussed in chapter 4 of my work, as well as the significance of these findings. Following this overview, I discuss the implications of my findings. The implications are sorted into two categories: those relevant for the educational community and those relevant for my own professional identity and practice as an educator. Based on these implications, I then make recommendations for the groups relevant to my work concerning how they can create opportunities for progress around parent-teacher relationships. Finally, I finish the chapter by providing ideas towards future research possibilities that can be conducted to address my remaining questions before my concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

My findings in Chapter 4 are organized into three main themes which revolved around the method of communicating with parents as the key towards more frequent and successful parent-teacher interactions. The first theme dealt with the importance of instilling positivity within all aspects of interacting with parents. Being cognizant of the necessity of positivity within interactions means that teachers need to consider the appropriateness of the environment of interactions, the language used, and a conscious effort to not come across as judgemental. The significance of these findings is that the encompassing idea of positivity is something that all my interviewees learned while they were employed, rather than during their pre-teacher training.
This shows that there was a gap in their learning before becoming teachers in their respective secondary schools.

The second theme explained that communication between parents and teachers can be enhanced when the parents are given opportunities for engagement. This engagement allows them to feel involved in the classroom environment. Such opportunities that were discussed include: welcome events for parents at the beginning of a school year or semester, an increased use of technology that gives parents the chance to immerse themselves in the course syllabus and content, and a conscious effort to involve the student in the efforts of communication to create a three-part team of teacher—student—parent geared towards student success. These findings are significant because they are examples of initiatives that secondary schools should put in place to combat the decreasing level of parental involvement seen in secondary schools as previously discussed in chapters two and four.

The final theme from my data analysis is concerned with the differences in modes of communication between parents and teachers. In my work, different modes of communication were categorized within two categories: informal and formal. Informal modes of communication are those that take place more often during a school year and are usually not in person but rather take the form of phone calls or emails. Formal modes of communication happen less frequently during a school year. They generally take the form of parent-teacher interview and official school mandated letters. The significance of these findings is like that of the first theme in that pre-service teachers are not exposed to the details and make up of these modes of communication. While communicating with parents is mentioned in pre-teaching programs, the understanding of the logistics of such communication is not explored to great depths.
Therefore, I believe that the significance of my findings leads to several implications for the greater education community as it exists today, as well as for myself as an educator wishing to improve my professional practice.

5.2 Implications

The implications for myself and the greater educational community are connected because I will be a member of the greater educational community in the future. I will be able to provide the knowledge I have gained through this research to aid in reaching positive outcomes concerning the growth and sustainability of positive parent-teacher relationships in secondary schools.

5.2.1 The educational community. My work shows that one implication for the educational community is the need for an outreach system geared towards getting parents more involved in their children’s secondary schooling. Regarding the reference of the 3-legged stool in chapter four that is based on the relationships between parents, teachers, and students it can be said that the relationship between parents and teachers is the most artificial. The relationships between parents and students as well as students and teachers occurs naturally. This is through the dedicated and extensive amount of time spent together as well as the existence of a superior and subordinate party within the relationship. Since the relationship between parents and teachers do not share these characteristics it can feel unnatural to form them. It is in my opinion that the school boards and individual schools within those boards need to work together to put in place resources and strategic plans to make the relationship building between parents and teacher more of a natural process, to promote more fruitful and more frequent interactions.
The second implication for the educational community concerns pre-service teaching institutions. All three of my research participants claimed that the methods and practices used to facilitate parental involvement and grow their relationships with parents was learned through their work experience. This phenomenon seems to be the norm, given that as a graduate of the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education I can confidently state that no required courses offered any concrete or tangible resources or strategies for dealing with the parents of students. The implication of these findings, combined with my personal experience means that there is a learning gap within pre-service teaching programs concerning methods and practices for interacting with parents in a positive fashion. Therefore, pre-service teachings institutions need to re-evaluate time spent on all topics of necessity to find room for resources concretely related to parents.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. Through my work on this research I believe that the biggest implication for myself as I move towards my teaching career is that I need to use my knowledge to advocate for better parent-teacher relationships within the multiple streams of the educational community. With all the research I have read and personally conducted on this topic it would be irresponsible to not share my findings and opinions on how to make the current situation better. To make the most impactful changes I will need to reach out to every educational outlet available to me. This means sharing my findings with colleagues in my school, school board, and greater community. I intend to keep up regular correspondence with any interested parents and educators through phone calls, email, or other technological mediums. As well, I will take initiative to have welcome events at the start of a school year or semester to meet face to face with parents. In doing so, I hope to be looked at as an educator that
can be approached for help when dealing with parents and how to better support building relationships with parents as a key group within a school community.

Since my research has allowed me to become a source of information on positive interactions with parents, I also believe my role implicates me towards being an advocate. I will need to be an advocate for parents within the school, within department offices, and within staff meetings where they are not heard and they can be deemed a lower priority. With my knowledge, I need to advocate for the possibility and necessity of positive parent-teacher relationships, and that any negative ideas about parents does nothing to make current situations better for the educational community. Through my work I want to show fellow educators that working with parents is better than working against them, or not working with them at all.

5.3 Recommendations

To begin, I believe that school boards should be collecting more data about who the parents in their school community are in terms of work hours, languages spoken, accessibility issues, and others. Such questions could be asked as part of the registration process for students at any school within a board. Parents will need to register their children at the school and fill out paper work, and therefore forms or surveys concerning the conditions listed above could be included in the registration process. This makes the data collection seem more natural because the parents do not have to go out of their way to provide the data. The information gathered can then be used to assess the needs of parents in the school board, which can then be passed on to the individual schools.

Individual schools would similarly benefit from this collection process during school registrations. Instead of only asking for the home and cell phone number, schools should be asking if parents are willing to provide email addresses. With these email addresses school’s can
send out mass messages geared towards areas of interest for parents. Email messages to parents can include information about parent-teacher interview nights, information events, parent councils, volunteer opportunities, tutoring options, and more. By communicating directly with parents instead of through the students, less information will be lost and parents will be given the information in a timelier fashion. These recommendations align with findings in my fourth chapter citing expanding the use of technology for increase parental engagement.

Next, I believe that there need to be serious considerations made towards the inclusion of topics related to interacting with parents in pre-service teaching. While it may not be within reach to dedicate an entire course related to interacting with and building relationships with parents, there are courses already set up where the topic would fit. Courses that deal with the issues or fundamentals of teaching would be good fits to include in depth knowledge and discussions about parents. Due to the inescapable nature of interacting with parents throughout a teaching career, I believe it is imperative that some training on how, when, and why to interact with parents should be included. Inclusion of topics regarding parents in pre-service programs will help to ensure that a new teacher’s first interactions with parents will be as positive and effective as possible. While seeking out advice from experienced colleagues is common for any topic a teacher may be unfamiliar in, that does not mean that there should not be any course related work regarding parents consciously included in pre-service programs. By including parent-teacher relationships in the academic subject matter, pre-service teaching institutions are also showing that they value parents as a group within the educational community. This is another opportunity for pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between teacher and researcher. By immersing themselves in work revolving around best methods and practices towards parental interactions, new teachers can put the research in action through their practicum placements.
This experience will help to bring about positive parent-teacher relationships right from the beginning of their careers based on the academic experience they obtained.

### 5.4 Areas for Further Research

Considering the varied groups with implications based on my research, there are many options for further research that can one day be conducted. I believe that the key to finding out more information on building positive relationships with parents is with larger scale research, that was not possible for this study. Engaging with as many people and as much information as possible will reveal where there are trends. Once these trends are recognized, initiatives can be planned to bring about positive interactions and relationships between parents and teachers.

First, I suggest research to be done on the place of the topic of parents within pre-service teaching institutions. This work may be qualitative or quantitative in nature depending on the researchers’ preference. Analysis of the course calendars from the different faculties of education across Ontario would allow for a comprehensive analysis of where potential teachers are learning about topics related to parents, if they are at all. Interviews with current students at the institutions, surveys on their thoughts on the inclusion of parents as relevant topics to teaching, as well as interviews with program coordinators would all be useful methodological tools when conducting such research. Such work would aid in finding the learning gaps that this study showed teachers seem to have concerning interactions with parents during their pre-teacher training.

Second, I propose that school boards across the province conduct their own quantitative research with parents as the subjects. With parents as the research subjects the boards would be able to determine parent’s needs and suggestions related to their interactions with schools and relationships with teachers. A questionnaire or survey sent out to parents would be the most
effective method to conduct the research and collect the data. Along with determining parent’s needs and desires related to their interactions with schools and relationships with teachers, the survey or questionnaire could also collect some demographic information about parents. Such information could be marital status, racial or ethnic identity, languages spoken in the home, weekly work schedule, and educational background. With this additional personal information school boards can look at general trends among all parents, and more specific trends among parents that share certain personal characteristics. This potential for multi-level results will allow school boards to receive a record of their parental population, and to then use their responses towards new board wide initiatives for more positive and effective interactions between parents and schools.

While both above suggestions for research can be conducted for the elementary and secondary levels, I hope that there will be a greater focus on the secondary level in the future. Greater focus on parents with students in secondary schools across the province may be useful in answering the questions around why parental involvement in schools drops in secondary years, as discussed in chapters two and four. If this future research is conducted with a secondary school focus, then it can be used alongside my own research to expand the current collection of literature concerning parental involvement at the secondary school level.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My findings were developed through three themes exploring effective communication between parents and teachers. The first theme concerned the effort to instill positivity into communication, which was based on skills learned in the workplace thus showing a learning gap within pre-service teaching programs. The second dealt with creating effective communication through efforts of engagement for parents, which were done so because of the decrease in
parental involvement at the secondary level. Finally, the third theme dealt with effective communication performed through the informal or formal modes of communication, which are conducted as such to address communication needs for the diversity of parents that exist. These findings lead to implications for faculties of education with pre-teaching programs, school boards, and individual schools.

The implication for faculties of education is that there is a lack of conscious inclusion of parents as a topic in pre-teaching programs. My recommendation is that these programs restructure their required courses and content to include either an entire course or a dedicated section of a pre-existing course to topics directly related to parents. The implication for schools and school boards is their need to strategize to help foster authentic relationships with parents. School boards will need to determine the objectives and the budgetary information for approved strategies. This information can then be shared with schools to implement unique involvement endeavours based on the populations of parents that exist from school to school. My recommendation for these educational groups is to allow parents to share their information early on; when parents are registering their children as students they should also be registering themselves. Asking for more contact information during student registration would allow schools to get in contact with parents easily to share information about school related areas of interest.

Based on these implications and recommendations, further research should be done on the topic of increasing parental involvement and positive parent-teacher relationships at the secondary level. If faculties of education are going to implement a change into their organization of topics related to parents, then research should be done concerning where those topics would fit. The opinions of current students as well as program coordinators would help determine where including topics related to parents would be the most appropriate and impactful. If school
boards wish to have such impact with the initiatives for parental involvement that they develop, then they should make efforts to conduct research about what kind of initiatives parents would want to see. This collection of data along with additional personal information about parents concerning their own personal classification would help the school boards and schools to develop programs specifically geared towards the population of parents that live in any community.

Ultimately, I conducted my research because I always found interactions between different groups of people to be fascinating. Parents and teachers are very intertwined in the lives of secondary school students. They are the groups of adults that secondary school students will consult when making the decisions that will influence their future as they proceed towards life outside of their school. For this reason, a positive relationship between the two groups is necessary to bring about discourse and action that is geared towards student success. I hope that my work and any other work conducted in the future focused on parental involvement in secondary schools and their relationships with teachers helps to brings the two groups closer together, and ultimately make a positive impact on the students involved.
References


Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: from research design to analysis and publication (qualitative studies in psychology)*. New York University Press.


Appendix A—Consent Letter

Date:
Dear _______________________________

My Name is Erica J. Brunato and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on methods, practices, and challenges towards building positive parent-teacher relationships and promoting parental involvement. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are heads of their department or senior level teachers, and will therefore have had numerous years of experience interacting with parents of students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60-minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Cristina Guerrero. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Erica

Erica J. Brunato
erica.brunato@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Cristina Guerrero
Contact Info: cristina.guerrero@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Erica J. Brunato and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B—Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for participating in my research study. The aim of this research is to learn about the methods, practices, and challenges towards building positive parent-teacher relationships and promoting parental involvement. This interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes, and is comprised of approximately 27 questions. The interview protocol has been divided into 4 sections, beginning with the participant’s background information, followed by questions about the methods and practices to achieve relationships with parents that can lead to parental involvement, then questions on the challenges to these methods and practices related to trust, race/ethnicity, and opinions of school subjects. The questions finish with a section that hope to allow you to reflect on your career long experiences with parents. I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and can remove yourself from participation at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To begin can you state your name for the recording?

Section A—Background Information
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. Where do you currently teach?
   a. How many years have you taught at your current location?

Section B—Teacher Practices and Methods for parental relationships and parental involvement
1. Would you describe your overall relationships with parents over your years as a teacher as positive or negative?
   a. Why?
2. What are some of the attitudes towards sharing experiences of parental involvement amongst the teachers in your department?
   a. Are there any attitudes that you would describe as predominant?
3. What methods do you use to promote an inviting and approachable image towards parents?
   a. Are these methods shared amongst other teachers in your department?
4. Which of the following six types of parental involvement do you promote: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community?
   a. How do you invite parents to the different types of parental involvement?
   b. Where did you learn the methods of invitation for parental involvement?

Section C—Challenges to the Methods and Practices ➔ Parent Teacher Trust
1. How important is trust in the parent-teacher relationship?
2. What methods do you enlist to convince parents that you are trustworthy?
3. Is there any correlation between a perceived parenting style and trust between parents and yourself?
4. What type of parenting style do you believe is the most effective for building a positive relationship with teachers that can lead to student success?
5. What type of parenting style do you believe is the least effective for building a positive relationship with teachers that can lead to student success?
6. How spontaneous are your interactions with parents?
7. How often would you interact/be in contact with any parent during a school year?
   a. Name specific examples if possible
8. What is your opinion on invitational workshops for parents to learn about their children’s courses, in terms of usefulness and desire to participate?

Section C—Challenges to the Methods and Practises ➔ Racial/Cultural/Ethnic Differences among Parents and Teachers
1. What ethnicity/race do you identify as?
2. Do the majority of your students’ parents match your ethnicity/race?
3. Which ethnicity/race of parents do find become the most involved in your classes?
   a. What factors do you think make them become more involved?
4. What are the benefits to sharing your ethnicity/race with your students’ parents?
5. Do you feel like there are parents that you cannot convince to become involved because of differences in ethnicity/race?
6. What methods for inclusion of parents of all ethnicities/races do you practice?

Section C—Challenges to the Methods and Practises ➔ Notions of School Subjects
1. How important do you believe the subjects you teach are for attaining an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and potential success at the post-secondary level?
2. Do parents value the courses and subjects you teach and think they are important to become involved in?
   a. Why do you think this?
3. Are your classes dominated by female or male students in number?
4. Is there a difference in the level or type of parental involvement between the parents of female and male students?

Section D—Next Steps
1. What advice would you give to a young teacher looking to improve on their relationships with parents that might lead to an increase in parental involvement?
2. What are some goals that you have for yourself regarding relationships with parents and parental involvement?