Elementary Teachers’ Experiences and Perspectives on Parental Involvement

By
Alison Hanko

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Abstract

This study looked at elementary teacher’s perspectives and experiences on involving parents and families in the classroom to support students’ success. Using convenience sampling, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Ontario elementary teachers. The interviews were transcribed and coded the information by identifying codes, grouping them into categories, and composing four overall themes. The first theme was using varied and multiple modes of communication between teachers and parents throughout the year proved the most beneficial. The second theme was the impact parental involvement had on children’s social and emotional well-being and the importance of supporting the whole child. The third theme was the importance of considering safety and confidentiality when involving parents, such as administrative form and ensuring children’s sensitive information was protected. The final theme discussed barriers participants faced when involving parents, such as time constraints and language barriers. The broad implication of this study impacts how the Ministry of Education can support current and pre-service teachers in involving parents. The narrower implications of this study impacts school administration and principals ensuing effective safety and confidentiality measures are in place for parents and teachers. Another narrower implication speaks to how teachers can foster relationships with families to best support children both academically and social-emotionally. Recommendations are discussed to address these implications and areas for future research are to look at both parents and children’s perspectives in this area to better understand the multiple viewpoints.

*Keywords*: parental involvement, student success, teacher perspectives and experiences
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to Research Study

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2016) states that “parent engagement is a key factor in the enhancement of student achievement and well-being” (p. 1) and Darch, Miao, and Shippen (2004) assert, “Everyone benefits from effective parent teacher collaboration – families, schools, and students” (p. 24). The question remains however, how do we form these parent-teacher collaborative teams? This study will look at teachers’ perspectives around parental involvement and their beliefs about the relationship between parental involvement and student success.

Families can be involved in their children’s education in a variety of ways both in school and at home. This can include, but not limited to, volunteering on field trips, attending parent-teacher interviews, attending curriculum nights, helping with homework, working on assignments, and reading at home (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). This research study will look at the ways in which teachers view these different types of parental involvement and how they see them influencing student academic success.

Darch and the researchers (2004) looked at parental involvement of children with learning and behaviour problems. They concluded that “as schools become more inclusive and professional roles and responsibilities expand, especially when planning programs for students with learning and behaviour problems, effective collaboration with other teachers, parents and families, and professional agencies is a crucial factor in successful schooling” (p. 25). It is the contention of this research that parental involvement can play a substantial role in student success and understanding how teachers perceive and experience parental involvement is an important factor that must be looked at to help understand how to best support all students in achieving their best.
This research study has been conducted as part of my Master of Teaching degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto from September 2015 to April 2017.

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

This study will address the problem that schools and teachers are facing around how to best involve parents and families in their schools. More specifically, this study will look at how elementary teachers can best involve parents and families in their classrooms to support students’ academic success. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) states that “student achievement and well-being improves when parents play an active role in their children’s education, and that good school become even better schools when parents are involved” (n.p). There is currently a gap in the current research on teacher perspectives on parental involvement in relation to student success, and this research aims to help to address this gap.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand elementary teachers’ perspectives and experiences with involving parents and families in the classroom. This study will look at the successes and challenges teachers have faced around parental involvement and how their past experiences have changed or shaped their current practices. It aims to add to the existing body of research around parent and family involvement and how teachers’ perspectives and experiences can contribute to further understanding this area of study.

1.3 Research Questions

The key research question of this study is: what are elementary teachers’ perspectives and experiences on involving parents and families in the classroom to support student success? To
develop a deeper understanding of this question, my sub-questions will delve into more specific areas: for example; do elementary teachers believe parent and family involvement is beneficial? What do elementary teachers believe are significant barriers and/or challenges for parents and families becoming involved in classrooms, and, what are elementary teachers’ perceptions of what they can do to improve parent and family involvement in classroom? This question will gain understanding on both a teacher’s ‘micro’ perspective, what they themselves can do, and a more macro level, what they believe other professionals, ministries, and government can do. The aforementioned questions will inform this qualitative research study, and will be the central questions that inform semi-structured interviews conducted with elementary school teachers. This process will be explained further in Chapter Three.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As a child, I had parents who were very involved in my education, particularly throughout my elementary years. I struggled in elementary school, and I have the belief that the involvement my parents had in my education is one of the major reasons I achieved academic success both in elementary school and leading into secondary and post-secondary education. My family was involved both inside the classroom when issues arose as well as outside of the classroom volunteering on field trips, attending parent teacher meetings, and participating in parent council. Through this involvement, I was able to see my school as a larger part of my community. Academically, my parents and teachers were also in constant communication on how best to help support my success in school. I personally thrived on the consistency both at school and at home, and I believe my family being involved was directly related to my success in elementary school and in my later education.
I come to this study believing that my own parents’ and family’s involvement was beneficial, but will aim to also consider the possible negative consequences that may arise from parent and family involvement from elementary teachers’ perspectives. I also realize that I came from a middle class family with both parents at a stage in their lives where they felt they had job security and sufficient savings to be able to provide me with support. This stage afforded them the time to do things like volunteer at my school, attend my field trips, etc. I will to be sure to look at barriers other families may have in terms of participating in their child’s education, and identify ways in which teachers can still involve them in classrooms and schools outside of what the norm may currently be.

Considering these personal factors, I have chosen to articulate my bias as they may influence the outcomes of my research. I will continue to acknowledge these factors to ensure I am not imposing any of my experiences or beliefs on any participants or data.

1.5 Introduction of Research Methodology

This research uses the qualitative research approach by using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection instrument. This main idea of qualitative research is to gain and understanding of a problem from participants (Creswell, 2013), and gain rich data to better address that issue. As Turner (2010) states, “interviews provide in-depth information, pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints” (p. 754). Interviews are conducted with four educators and their voices are used to inform the research findings throughout. Creswell outlines qualitative research as necessary as it identified variables that may not be measurable and gives voices to participants that otherwise might be silenced. Teacher experiences and perspectives are voices I aim to shine a light on through this research by giving them an opportunity to express their perspectives on parental involvement and its effect on student success. The goal of this
qualitative research is not to prove or disprove any given hypotheses, but rather gather information and draw insights based on common themes that have been grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

1.6 Preview of the MTRP

This research will consist of the previous introduction to the study along with my personal background, followed by a review of the current literature in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, the research methodology is identified and discussed as well as the ethical considerations around this study. Chapter Four reports on the research findings and a discussion of the information followed finally, by Chapter Five, the implications of this research study, recommendations, and what future research is needed to further this field of study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Current Literature

The majority of research in the field of elementary education has been conducted on the benefits and challenges of involving parents in school and their children’s education; however, little research has been done on teachers’ perspectives on parental involvement – both their views on its effectiveness in relation to student success and how they foster positive parental involvement in their school. Drawing on the current research literature, this chapter outlines the benefits, challenges, and implications around parental involvement in schools and its influence on student achievement. I present these relevant findings as a foundation for addressing my research question: *What are elementary teachers’ perspectives and experiences with parental involvement in the classroom and how it influences student success?*

2.2 Defining Parental Involvement

Throughout the literature, parental involvement is defined as a multi-faceted aspect of education and the majority of definitions stem from the research done by Epstein (1995). Epstein identified six aspects of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration. For the purposes of this study, this working definition of parental involvement will be used to inform my research. Furthermore, the term “parental involvement” will be used interchangeably to refer to any parent, guardian, family member, or significant person of responsibility in a child’s life in relation to the child’s education. It is important to define parental involvement not only to better inform research on this topic, but as a necessary step for initiating it in schools. If teachers and parents are not in alignment about what parental involvement truly means in their own minds, then neither party is likely to be satisfied with the outcome. Lawson (2003) states that although the definition of
parental involvement does not have to be identical for both parents and teachers, it must have similar overarching themes and functions for both groups. Having all parties in general alignment about any topic is a vital step in moving forward and thus defining parental involvement is a step that must be taken seriously.

2.3 Benefits of Parental Involvement

Throughout the literature, many benefits of parental involvement both in the home and in schools are apparent. Darch and the team (2004) found that when parents were involved, students achieved higher test scores, better overall grades, better attendance at school, higher levels of homework completion, and an overall more positive student motivation and attitudes about schoolwork. These results were also confirmed by Domina (2005) when their longitudinal study found that when parents attended parent-teacher conferences and other school events, such as PTA meetings, as well as volunteered in the classroom and checked homework, students tended to obtain higher scores on academic achievement tests. Domina also found that these scores were consistently higher even after race, family background, and school sector were taken into account.

Outside of students’ academic achievement, parental involvement is also found to have other benefits. Domina (2005) found that parental involvement both at home and in school reduced children’s behavioural problems. Furthermore, the study found that not only were behavioural problems reduced, but the act of parents being involved in school and helping their children at home, was able to prevent behavioural problems from occurring in the future. Harris and Goodall (2008) also spoke with parents, students, and teachers and almost all participants agreed that parental involvement was an important aspect of education. Moreover, even students who had reservations about parents being “too involved” still concluded that parental
involvement in their educational careers was beneficial. Darch et al. (2004) also found that parental involvement had significant benefits for parents, teachers, and students.

There are many barriers to parental involvement and they are often impacted by other factors such as environment, access, and ability. It can be argued that families of low socioeconomic status face many barriers and people question whether the additional effort to overcome those barriers will have a positive impact. Dearing, Kreider and Weiss (2008) found that when parental involvement was increased, students’ relationships with their teachers was improved and led to students feeling more competent in their abilities and about school in general. Mayo & Siraj (2015) found similar outcomes when working with families of a low socioeconomic status and studied what practices contributed to the students’ gains in academic achievement. This study found that parents would encourage their children to work on their homework and assignments and offer positive feedback on behaviour as well as academic success. Furthermore, when looking at all families whose children exceeded their predicted academic achievement, parents had implemented consistent supervised homework routines which had become an integral aspect of their schedule during the primary years, and continued to maintain it through their children’s adolescent years. Through this consistent parental involvement, students stated that they felt they had become more intrinsically motivated, and thus the parental involvement could slowly be phased out, while still maintaining the positive effects of the prior involvement.

2.4 Challenges to Parental Involvement

As shown, parental involvement has many benefits for all parties involved; however, this does not come without significant challenges. Until the challenges faced by both parents and
teachers are understood, they cannot be addressed in a way to ensure the involvement is the most beneficial for all stakeholders.

Through interviewing parents, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that three major demographic variables were at play in predicting parental involvement: “race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parental education attainment” (p. 209). All of these factors play an important role when looking at how to make parental involvement most effective. Farrell and Collier (2010) found that factors from parents’ microsystems (such as the school and their family situation) and macrosystems (such as policies and jobs), influenced their involvement in their children’s education.

Parental education attainment plays a challenge in parental involvement because of the way in which many schools communicate with parents. It is not the case that parents often drop off their children at school and have the time to speak with teachers as many parents either have to rush off to work or begin work before school begins. Thus, many children are dropped off and picked up by a daycare or other sibling. This means that much of the communication from school to parents is through the children themselves via notes that children bring home. Lawson (2003) found that parents at their school of study found it increasingly difficult to be informed and in turn be involved in their children’s school because it relied largely on the ability of their child to bring home the materials distributed. Furthermore, Harris and Goodall (2008) found that communication between school and parents was mainly through flyers or emails which was a major barrier for parents whose first language was not English or those who identified as having low literacy skills.

Many schools create barriers to parental involvement in the way in which parents have been traditionally involved. Darch and their colleagues (2004) found that most parents were not
invited to participate in their child’s school programs and thus created a feeling of inadequacy for parents. Many parents felt it was not valuable to participate in parent teacher conferences because they had the impression the teacher would not consider their input and not value their thoughts and ideas. In contrast, May & Siraj (2015) found that when the parents they spoke with were invited into their children’s school, it was too often to discuss problem issues at school pertaining to their child. This caused parents to feel as though their child was being targeted and treated unfairly by the teacher and that their child was being labelled problematic. The end result of teachers only including parents in negative circumstances was that “parents no longer felt obligated to support the school in their efforts” (p. 56).

Finally, an important challenge to parental involvement to understand is the idea that parents often believe the teacher expert mentality wherein they believe the teacher is the expert in education and staying out of the way is the best way they can help their child. Darch and their team (2004) found that there was a lack of parental involvement in schools because of the “teacher knows best” attitude (p. 26). This creates an innate power imbalance between schools and parents. It is therefore important to help parents feel valued and appreciated as being their children’s first teacher. In addition, low income families can sometimes feel that they are not well equipped to help their child succeed in school. Yoder and Lopez (2013) found that it led to “feelings of fear, shame, and guilt and were consequently less involved” (p. 429). They concluded that marginalization was, in their research, the greatest barrier to parental involvement. It is paramount that teachers value the knowledge all parents bring not only academically, but the knowledge they have about their children that can serve to be invaluable at creating a home-school relation that best fosters academic achievement for children.
2.5 Oppositional Research

It is important to note, however, that there is research that refutes the premise of parental involvement being beneficial. Fischel and Ramirez (2005) reviewed current studies and concluded that they could not find any conclusive evidence that “parental involvement, as a broadly defined intervention strategy, is effective in improving academic achievement and behaviour” (p. 396). Furthermore, Yoder and Lopez (2013) looked at tangible barriers that parents faced when trying to become involved in their children’s school, such as lack of childcare, transportation issues, and work responsibilities. Through their study, they refute the notion in the current literature that “tangible barriers encumber parental involvement” (p. 248). They believe that parents are highly capable of navigating around these types of barriers through the use of family, friends, and community services. These opposing views on parental involvement call for more research in this area of education, and thus this study will be focusing on teachers’ perspectives on parental involvement and its impact on academic achievement.

2.6 Why Parental Involvement Matters

The many barriers and challenges to parental involvement presented here are worth noting and require action on understanding how to increase benefits and how to lessen the barriers all parties face. Through this process, many implications come into play not only for teachers, but for schools and society.

Involving parents can vary from one teacher to another based on their own practices and the way in which they view parental involvement. As children progress through the grades, confusion can arise with the difference in teacher’s practice and communication methods with parents. One way to help combat this confusion can be consistent school-wide practices for parental involvement and communication. Harris, Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins and Weiss (2006)
state that schools need to view parental involvement as something that should be fostered throughout a child's educational career and structure the environment in such a way that encourages parents who have previously not been involved, while also maintain the current involvement of other parents.

Darch and colleagues (2004) point out that because of the many tangible barriers parents today face such as work schedules that do not coincide with the schedule of traditional schooling, it is often the responsibility placed on the teacher to come up with “innovative ways to include parents in their children’s school program” (p. 24). This is not to say that the responsibility should fall solely on the teacher, but rather the teacher if often tasked with setting up initial communication to form a collaboration with parents, which can be impeded by the aforementioned tangible barriers. However, for teachers to be able to implement types of innovative techniques, they require not only the resources, but also require knowledge and training behind the importance of parental involvement. When Farrell and Collier (2010) spoke with teachers, some of the participants believe that pre-service training should include more of a focus on how to foster good communication between school and families, as well as put an emphasis on contextual factors and barriers these families may face. This study, conducted in Connecticut, concluded that teacher preparation programs are leaving new teachers unprepared on how to communicate and involve parents. In 2015, Ontario shifted their ten-month teacher preparation program to a mandatory two-year program to include more practicum days in schools as well as enhancing areas of focus for study, including developing professional relationships with parents and the community (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). The emphasis being put on new teachers developing professional relationships with parents and the community leads to the idea that the Ontario College of Teachers believes that teachers needed
more training in this area, and thus the conclusion can be drawn that teacher-parent relationships and parental involvement is valued by the Ontario education system.

Finally, one must look at how society is helping or hindering parental involvement in their children’s education. The average school day runs from approximately 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. In contrast, the average work day can range from shift work at unpredictable hours to a 9:00 am to 5:00 pm job. Many jobs do not have flexible hours and thus parents have a very small window in which to be present at their child’s school without impacting their own employment hours. The conclusion drawn by Dearing et al. (2008) is that employers often do not provide adequate time for parents to take off to be involved in their children’s school, and if they did, parents would fear their employment was in jeopardy. It is their conclusion that overarching policies need to be enacted that place a higher value on education and the pivotal role parents play; such as incentives given to employers for allowing parents time off to be involved in their children’s education.

2.7 Conclusion of Literature Review

It is evident through the analysis of the literature that parental involvement in schools is a complex topic with many factors at play. There is still much to be learned through research on the effectiveness of parental involvement in school and its effect on student success. This study will look at adding to the existing body of research by trying to better understand teachers’ perspectives on parental involvement and the nature of their experiences with parental involvement in relation to children’s achievement.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction to Research Methodology

This chapter will describe the research methodology for the following study. It begins by reviewing the general approach and procedures, as well as data collection instruments, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. Data analysis procedures are explained as well as a review of the ethical considerations taken into account. Furthermore, methodological strengths and limitations are identified. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summary as well as rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative researching approach involving a review of the current literature and data collection through four semi-structured interviews with elementary teachers. Qualitative research is an approach that is often used in educational research and was chosen for this research because of its focus on participant’s perspectives. The emergent nature of the qualitative approach allows for changes to be made along the way in any or all phases of the process to best enhance the findings (Creswell, 2013). This allows participants to expand on their answers and for probing questions to be asked, given the appropriate nature of the interview.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used for this study was the semi-structured interviews. It is not commonplace in qualitative research to use interview questions developed by other researchers, (Creswell, 2013), and thus I have created the questions myself. (Refer to Appendix B for a list of these questions.) Furthermore, the questions were pilot tested through a
network of peers and colleagues to ensure their coherence and respect. Using semi-structured interviews allows for continuity of questions for all participants, while allowing the interview to have flexibility based on the participants’ experiences and thoughts on different areas. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to respond to the emotions and feelings of the participant and direct the questions to make them feel most comfortable and speak to the topics they are most interested in sharing. Turner (2010) states that informal conversation interviews are primarily based on “in the moment experiences” which can garner a better understanding and clarification of a particular answer (p. 755). This research will use both a pre-set list of questions, but will be malleable enough to respond to individual participants and “in the moment experiences” (Turner, p. 755).

The interviews were approximately 20 minutes in length and were conducted in person, one on one, at a time and place set up to accommodate the participant. The interviews were audio-recorded using digital recording device as well as a smart phone to ensure it was recorded properly. The interviews were transcribed and sent back to participants, by request, to ensure accuracy before continuing with data analysis.

3.3 Participants

In this section, the sampling criteria for participant recruitment is reviewed as well as a range of possible avenues for reaching out to possible participants in this study. Participants are also introduced through short biographies.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The criteria set out for my participants were that they must currently be a full-time elementary teacher in a primary or junior grade in Ontario and they must have at least 5 years of experience in education. It was required all participants to be full-time teachers because they
would likely be more familiar with the school’s policy regarding parental involvement more than an occasional teacher might be. Next, it required for the participants to be a teacher in Ontario because the curriculum and policy analyzed in this study was limited to the Ontario Ministry of Education. It was also required that the participants to be elementary teachers, in either primary or junior grades, because this study looked at parental involvement early on in a child’s education, before the child enters middle school. Finally, the participants had to have at least 5 years of experience in education because this study looked at both current perspectives and experiences of teacher as well as how those perspectives have changed, if at all, and if the participants have done anything differently based on past experiences.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

Due to the small nature of this research study, non-probability sample design was used, more specifically convenience sampling, to determine my participants. Convenience sampling is when a researcher obtains participants by selecting what is readily available to the research (Fornkfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). As this is a small-scale study, it does not have the ability to do a random sample or a sample representative of the larger population.

Through my immersion in the education community from my undergraduate education in Early Childhood studies and my current Master’s in Teaching at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, I had a network of teachers whom I made connections with. This included teachers I worked with directly in schools, other teachers in schools I did my practicum teaching at, teachers in my neighbourhood, and connections through family and friends.
3.3.3 Participant Bios

The first participant, who will be referred to as Dianne, was at the date of the interview a grade 1, 2, and 3 physical education teacher and a grade 1 resource teacher who had been teaching for 15 years. She was currently teaching in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and she had previously taught grades 1, 2, and 3. She self identified her school as having a high degree of parental involvement.

The second participant, who will be referred to as Angela, was at the date of the interview a grade 2 teacher who has been a teacher for 10 years. She was currently teaching in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), and she had previously taught kindergarten, grade 1 and 2. She self identified her school as being a high needs community with moderate parental involvement.

The third participant, who will be referred to as Layla, was at the date of the interview a grade 4/5 teacher who had been teaching for 32 years. She was currently teaching in the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), and she had previously taught from kindergarten through grade 12. She self identified her school as having moderate parental involvement.

The fourth participant, who will be referred to as Jaqueline, was at the date of the interview a grade 1 teacher who had been teaching for 14 years. She was currently teaching in the TDSB, and she had previously taught Kindergarten, grades 1, 2, and 3, library, and reading recovery. She self identified her school as having very low parental involvement.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided using Ryan and Bernard’s tasks of data analysis (2003). To begin the data analysis, each interview conducted with participants were transcribed electronically. The electronical transcripts were each individually analyzed and coded. The first
level of coding was within each individual interview identifying categories of data and then larger themes within those categories. The second level of coding was interpreting the categories and synthesizing the themes where applicable. A later stage in the coding process was a meaning-making process whereby the relevancy and significance behind each theme was identified, informed by the existing research looked at previously.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Through the University of Toronto and OISE, ethical review approval was obtained for this study within the parameters that have been set so as to ensure its ethicality. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix A) outlining the research study and their part in it. Participants had the option to pass any question and to withdraw at any time, even after the interview was completed. All participants were been given a pseudonym and their identity is not connected to their pseudonym at any point in this research study. Participants’ identities remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their school, students, or school board have been excluded. Following the lead of Creswell (2013), I treated all participants with respect by using their language, speaking to them by their preferred name, and not stereotyping them or imposing my own beliefs on them at any point. There were no known risks to this study and that was also outlined in the consent form for the participants to understand. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview, by request, to clarify any points and ensure they are comfortable with their answers and retract anything if they wish. This aspect of ethics can reduce any feeling of a power relationship as it establishes the interview and participants as collaborators during the data collection and analysis phases (Creswell, 2013). All data, such as the audio recording, was stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed within five years of the study.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Due to the ethical parameters of this research study, it did not include the comparison of parents’ experiences and perspectives, which is a limitation of the study. Nor does this research include the experiences and perspectives of students due to their inherent nature as a vulnerable population (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007). Further research may be needed in this area in order to compare the experiences of teachers to parents and children and find where their perspectives align, where they differ, and their ultimate goals for the parent-teacher-student relationship. Moreover, due to the time constraints of this study, only four participants were interviewed. This is a limitation because more participants would have provided a wider range of experiences and perspectives and allowed for a deeper set of insights to be drawn. Finally, a limitation of this study is the convenience sampling being used to obtain participants. With all four of my participants, I had pre-existing relationships, some professional and some personal and it is likely that a more objective view and answers may be given through randomized sampling. However, this limitation was counteracted by not allowing the pre-existing relationships to guide the interviews, and the same general questions were asked to all participants, and only letting their given answers guide the follow up questions.

The strengths of this methodological approach are that a semi-structured interview format allows for the interview to be flexible based on the participants’ knowledge in certain aspects and the ability to have the participants fully explain their answer with probing and follow up questions. Conversely, a quantitative study or a questionnaire approach would not allow for the personal connections to be made and the participants would be more likely to misinterpret questions on paper. Interviews also allow participants to reflect on their own perspectives and
experiences and explain their past experience with parental involvement and how it may have shaped their teaching philosophy or style.

3.7 Conclusion of Research Methodology

This research study was conducted using semi-structured interviews and all participants gave signed consent to participate. Ethical considerations were taken into account and precautions were made to ensure no foreseeable risks were associated with the study and to be as accommodating to the participants’ schedule as possible. Next, in Chapter Four, research findings and themes are discussed.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to Research Findings

This study aims to explore teacher’s perspectives and experiences around parental involvement in the classroom. The previous three chapters have introduced the study, examined existing literature, described the instrument of data collection consisting of four semi-structured interviews, and examined research methodology. The following chapter will present the research findings, in the form of themes, with the goal of identifying and describing them in a clear and concise manner, as well as discussing the significance of what was found. During the data analysis portion of this study, which involved transcribing and coding interviews, the following four themes were uncovered:

1. Communication
2. Social and Emotional Benefits
3. Importance of Security
4. Barriers

These themes will assist in presenting the findings by discussing their significance given what existing research has communicated to date, while also taking into account information gathered from the participants. Each theme will also incorporate sub-themes in order to achieve a deeper level of analysis.

4.1 Communication

A theme that was represented across all four participants was the concept of reciprocal communication between both teachers and parents. Along with the importance of communication, the notions of using both a variety of communication methods and maintaining ongoing communication were present in the findings. Using differentiated strategies was a
finding Harris and Goodall (2007) also found when trying to attain parental engagement with a diverse range of needs. As this theme is prevalent in the current research, it was expected that the participants would speak to the concept of communication; however, the teachers demonstrated a high level of resilience and willingness to adapt year to year with the ever changing needs of the community. It can be argued that some educators will find a communication method that works for them as a professional and expect people to adapt to them. However, the four participants in this study appeared to go out of their way to ensure the modes of communication were catered to their school communities, even if it required additional time and effort on their part. This sentiment is echoed by Farrell and Collier (2010) who found that their teacher participants did not express a preference for one particular form of communication, but rather found communication overall as the imperative feature.

4.1.1 Varied communication methods

Communicating with parents was a major theme in the interviews, and all participants made mention of ways in which they communicate with parents. Something to note was the fact that all four participants mentioned multiple ways in which they communicated with parents. These range from written forms such as agendas, communication books, email, and newsletters to more in-person conversation such as on the telephone, speaking during arrival and dismissal, and parent teacher interviews. The variety of ways in which teachers communicate with parents is differentiated in an attempt to reach all parents, both formally and informally, in order to include them in the classroom.

When speaking about the variety of communication methods she used in her classroom, Dianne noted the importance of knowing that parents saw the agenda and understood that they could communicate with her at any time. She explained, “So parents didn’t need to write
anything [in the agenda], but they just needed to initial it, so I knew there was communication.”

The importance of keeping lines of communication open was prevalent throughout her interview.

### 4.1.2 Ongoing communication

When speaking with the participants, it was clear that they ascribed to the idea that communication should be constant and ongoing, rather than inconsistent or stagnant. This sentiment is echoed by Farrell and Collier (2010) who state that it is vital to understand how schools communicate with families to inform collaboration. When speaking about communicating with parents, Angela mentioned how important it was to have constant communication with parents: “Using the agendas daily is probably the best way for daily communication…we also do a monthly and a semester newsletter.” She went on to say that her class has its own newsletter that goes home alongside the school’s newsletter, as she felt it was important for parents to know what was going on in her class specifically, in order to spark conversation between parents and children at home:

That’s the main thing, just keep it ongoing. It’s not just a letter that’s sent home once a month, it states in the newsletter things that are going on in the day and has a section that says “ask your child about” and lists all the things that are going on in our classroom for the next month… it gives parents talking points so they can understand what's going on in the school every day.

Jacqueline’s interview was focused around the difficulties she and her school were facing when trying to get parents more involved both in school and at home; however, she did not feel discouraged and brought up the new things she was implementing along with strategies her school was attempting. Even with the low involvement of parents in her school, she still spoke about her personal goals of ongoing communication with parents stating, “My goal this year is to
try and foster daily communication, tracking it, so at least once a week I have made some connection to a parent.” Some teachers may become discouraged after extensive effort to involve parents with little or no return, but Jacqueline showed resilience because she felt the benefits of parental involvement were important enough to persevere. Jacqueline and her colleagues “are always trying, we are always optimistic every year,” in terms of getting parents more involved in the school community.

4.2 Social and Emotional Benefits

Another theme that was developed through the interviews was the benefits of parental involvement supporting children non-academically, specifically in their emotional well-being and parents showing their children the value of education by being involved. While studies such as the one conducted by Domina (2005) found the link between parental involvement, academic success and the reduction in behaviour problems, other studies tended to neglect speaking to the emotional support and well-being parental involvement had on children. In contrast, multiple participants in this study mentioned their own views on how parental involvement was perhaps primarily related to children’s social and emotional development. The participants made mention of the fact that they felt the social and emotional well-being of children was impacted by parents, and that when children feel supported emotionally, it translates to academic success in the classroom. Much of the existing research looked at academic success independent of students’ well-being where in contrast, the participants of the current study looked at the two factors collectively.

4.2.1 Promoting positive well-being

It can be argued that in elementary school, it is as much about supporting children academically as it is about support children’s non-academic needs; their well-being. When asked
about how children are influenced by parental involvement non-academically, Dianne believed parents influenced, “children’s emotions and their overall happiness at school.” Furthermore, this statement was echoed by Layla who believed that “parents are happier and kids are happier” when asked about positive aspects of parental involvement. Finally, Jacqueline went further to say that not only did parental involvement benefit the well-being of the children, but that she believed it had a trickle-down effect onto their academic success. “I do think parental involvement helps make a happier, more confident, outgoing, more positive child and so then I think that could influence academics.” Mayo and Siraj (2015) also found that verbal communication between parents and children played an integral role in children emotional development whereby parents talked with their children frequently about school and their learning.

Angela made mention of the importance the well-being of the child that parental involvement can influence, and extended it onto having parents and teachers work together to support the child both at home and in school:

I will often call home and ask what’s going on in the home life that may be affecting the child or vice versa. Parents will call me and ask how things are going at school because they’ve noticed a change…having that open communication with parents makes things easier and the more attuned they are to what’s happening in the daily life of the child, it helps academically later on too.

This shows the importance of parental involvement both in school and at home and the benefits it can have for children’s social and emotional well-being. Angela stated that she also felt the communication between home and school also opened the door for constructive
conversation between parents and teachers when discussing how to best support the child both academically and non-academically.

4.2.2 Value of education

It can be argued that Canadian culture values education to a high degree and is often a concept that is instilled in children at a young age. Darch and their colleagues (2004) found that when family involvement increased, children perceptions of their own competency rose along with how they felt about school and education. Two of the participants pointed out how parents can show their children the value of education by becoming involved both inside the physical classroom and engaging with their children at home around the subject of school. Dianne spoke about setting guidelines for parent volunteers that wanted to be involved in her classroom. She wanted to ensure the parent was there to support the entire class, not just their own child, while also communicating the significance and importance of that child’s parent deciding to be part of the classroom: “The parent has taken time out of their busy day to spend time with you [the child], which is a huge message to kids, that they have taken a moment to be with you in class because school is so important.” Reinforcing that notion, Angela also spoke about how parents can show their children the value of education, but can do so outside of the physical classroom.

The basics of encouraging their children, showing them the importance of education, if they [parents] show that they believe in it and that it is very important, then the students will believe it themselves…teachers can dictate all they want about why they think going to school and education is important, but if it’s not reinforced at home, it has very little meaning.

Mayo and Siraj (2015) also found that by communicating with their children at home, parents were reinforcing the importance of education for the child’s future. Furthermore, parents
communicated their high expectations held for their children around academics, like homework, and social and emotional behaviour in school. These findings are consistent with what the participants in the current study indicated as an important form of parental involvement.

4.3 Importance of Security

Participants also noted the importance of security that goes hand in hand with parental involvement in both ensuring the security of parents when in the school as well as ensuring the confidentiality and protection of children in the classroom and wider school population. Much of the literature around safety in schools was centered around the physical safety of children from harm (Lawson, 2003), such as accidents or emergency situations like drills, rather than the confidentiality of children’s information. Ewton (2015) found that when speaking to parents and school principals about safety, although the two groups differed on what posed the most risk to security, both parties agreed that it was imperative to understand both perspectives for the sake of keeping all children safe. The participants in this study put a large emphasis on security when involving parents in the classroom both from a top down approach – what their administration had outlined – and a bottom up approach – their own practices of how they involve parents while maintaining the safety of children and their sensitive information. To elaborate, one of the school policies multiple participants shared was having parents sign in at the office to ensure they are accounted for and allowed to be in the school building. One teacher’s practice involved the use of a mobile application to send messages to parents as a form of communication, but the parents could only access their own child's information, not any other parent or child's. This feature helped ensure the confidentiality of the children and the information being shared by the teacher.
4.3.1 Confidentiality and safety

Children can spend upwards of thirty hours per week in school and a certain level of safety is expected to be provided for them when they are in the care of educators. Schools need to maintain a level of security for everyone, and that includes all visitors to the school, even parents. Every school board and oftentimes individual schools have their own policies on what parents and visitors to the school need to do in order to ensure the safety of the school population. Dianne mentioned that she has seen the policies go through many changes from parents being able to, “just come in and out freely” to now to having to inform the classroom teacher, sometimes the principal, sign in at the office, and wear a visitor pass. Both Dianne and Jacqueline mentioned that there are certain restraints on parent volunteers to ensure confidentiality. Dianne stated that she is aware of certain activities parents are no longer allowed to be directly involved in, while Jacqueline’s school has a policy that does not allow parents to volunteer in their child’s classroom, but rather has them volunteer in another area of the school.

Layla had dealt with many confidentiality issues in her school and she took that into account when she created the parent volunteer handbook for her school. One of the issues she noted when working with parent volunteers was “parent gossiping…parents have to sign a confidentiality agreement so if a child in the classroom has a learning disability they do not have the right to share that information.” Multiple participants outlined the many hoops parents had to jump through in order to come into the school and while some educators might find that frustrating and excessive, the participants all made mention that they felt the policies were justified because of the reasoning behind it – the safety of children. As Dianne put it, “We keep the school safe because we are around everyone’s gold [children].” Ewton also concluded that
“a safe and secure school environment is essential to successful student learning” (2015, p. 109), and thus this factor cannot be ignore by the school or community.

4.4 Barriers

The final theme that emerged from the participants was centered around the barriers they faced when trying to involve parents. The major barriers mentioned were the constraints of the school day schedule and language barriers. The participants in the study mentioned that the barriers they face when involving parents change year to year. As a result, they are left trying to anticipate barriers, apply proactive strategies for involvement, as well as manage the year to year barriers faced by specific individual families. The language barrier was one faced only by one participant, but it should be noted that the other three participants were in areas where English was the predominant language spoken by parents and thus may not have been as prevalent an issue for them. Language is a vital part of communication and thus it is discussed here as it can be argued that on a larger scale, language barriers may become a more predominant issue teachers face when engaging with parents.

4.4.1 School hours

According to the Canadian Public School Guide, the typical school day is around six hours with a start time at approximately 8:30 am and an end time at approximately 3:30 pm, depending on the specific school board or school (Public schools: The Canadian public school system, 2016). When discussing how to help facilitate parental involvement, multiple participants made mention of how the school schedule limited parents’ ability to be more involved. Angela spoke about how both the daily schedule provided limited opportunities for parental involvement and went on further to discuss how the school yearly calendar left few days to host events for parents. In speaking about parent workshops, she also noted the limitation
parents face around childcare during those sessions, “the problem with that [workshops] is that they often don’t have child care or they are hosted late in the evening when children are in bed.” Angela felt that if childcare was offered during workshops or if the workshops were held at a more convenient time for parents, involvement may become higher. Yoder and Lopez (2013) also found that tangible barriers, such as the lack of access to childcare, were identified by parents as barrier to involvement.

In regards to parents volunteering on school trips, Layla pointed out work to be another barrier parents face, “If the parent is working, it’s very difficult to come on a trip because they have to take a day off work and a lot of parents aren’t paid for a day off so it’s quite challenging.” Again this demonstrates how teachers feel the school day, both in the building and outside during field trips, limit parents’ access to involvement. The statement is echoed by Darch and the research team (2004) who spoke about families often being unable to be involved in schools because of commitment like work and time limitations. Furthermore, Dearing and their team (2008) proposed that the solution to this issues lies in the policies which would set out incentives to employers to allow parents time off from work. This is all in the hopes that they are able to participate in their child’s schooling without the looming threat of their jobs being compromised.

4.4.2 Language barrier

Jacqueline faced an additional barrier than the other participants, however, it should be noted as it is likely a barrier faced by many other teachers depending on the location of the school. Jacqueline’s school had a large population of non-English speaking parents, and thus she faced a language barrier when trying to involve parents in her classroom. “I would like to have more communication with parents, but language is a barrier because for most of our parents,
English is not their first language.” Jacqueline found that communication, both written and oral, was difficult because of the lack of a common language, however, she noted her school was trying to combat the language barrier by bringing in translators for written correspondence. Lee and Bowen (2006) assert that teachers can often interpret a lack of parental involvement as a parent’s general lack of interest in their child's education, independent of the reasons. However, when speaking with Jaqueline, she indicated that although she had struggled with parental involvement for multiple years, she understood parents faced many challenges and multiple barriers when it came to being involved in their child’s school. All of the participants noted that they felt parents acted in the best interest of their child, and to the best of their own abilities. Nonetheless, both tangible and societal barriers often posed an issue.

4.5 Conclusion of Research Findings

The current study aimed to look at teachers’ perspectives and experiences with parental involvement in their classroom. After four semi-structured interviews, four themes became apparent and were discussed. It should be noted that further research is needed in this area to draw broader conclusions. As Harris and Goodall (2007) state, research regarding the impact on parental involvement is complex due to the many factors at play; parents, teachers, children, administration, policy, etc.

The first theme discussed was the role of communication between parents and teachers and the fact it needed to be mutual. Furthermore, participants indicated the importance of using multiple methods of communication to ensure they are reaching as many parents as possible. Participants also indicated that communication needed to be an ongoing process rather than disjointed or far and few between.
The second theme discussed was the impact parental involvement had on social and emotional well-being. Participants indicated that they felt parental involvement helped support children in their social and emotional development and even extended to the parents’ well-being as well. Additionally, participants spoke to the notion that parental involvement showed children the importance of education and that parents valued school by taking time to be engaged both in school, on field trips, or at home.

The third theme discussed was the importance of security that participants felt was imperative to take into account when involving parents. Participants indicated how their administration and policy guidelines were set out to ensure parent volunteers were safe and accounted for the building as well as limitations that went along with those procedures. Moreover, participants mentioned the importance of confidentiality when parents were dealing with sensitive information of children and ensuring parents were acting in a professional manner when volunteering.

The fourth and final theme discussed were barriers participants faced when involving parents in their classrooms. One barrier participants faced was the limitations of the school day and hours of operation, which they felt limited the opportunities parents had to become involved. It was also indicated that there were limitations around holding these events outside of school hours and providing adequate supports, such as childcare. Finally, language barriers were discussed with one participant who found communicating with parents difficult because of a disconnect in common language.

The findings above have been discussed in the context of the current research and present study. Chapter Five will go on to discuss the impact these findings have on the educational community both on a small scale and a larger scale. It will also discuss the implications this
study had both personally and professionally for the researcher. Finally, recommendations will be given for practical strategies for educators as well as recommendations for future research, with the hope of adding to the body of knowledge in this area.
Chapter Five: Implications

5.0 Introduction to Implications

The present study was designed to learn about teachers’ perspectives and experiences around parental involvement in the classroom. The findings serve to support and add to the existing literature pertaining to the challenges and benefits educators face when involving parents. In addition, the practices and strategies used to best support student and families in the school community are analyzed. This chapter summaries the research findings, highlights the present study’s implications for various stakeholders, provides several recommendations, and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Key Findings and their Significance

The present study was designed to investigate teachers’ perspectives and experiences around involving parents in their classroom, both in class and at home. The term “parent” is used throughout, and refers to parent, guardian, family member, or significant person of responsibility in a child’s life. Following interviews with four teachers, a rigorous analysis revealed four central themes within the data: the role of communication, social and emotional benefits, the importance of security and confidentiality, and barriers educators have encountered.

The first theme highlighted the major role communication plays in parental involvement. Participants noted the importance of keeping communication open and ongoing in an effort to involve parents at all points in a child’s education, rather than only at points of discourse or when a child is facing challenges. The data also suggests that educators felt it was important to use multiple methods of communication to ensure that they reach as many parents as possible.

The second theme discussed the impact parental involvement has on the social and emotional well-being of students. Educators indicated they felt parental involvement directly
supported their students’ social and emotional development. This includes positive feelings about school, which extended to parents positive well-being as well. Additionally, participants spoke about the notion that parental involvement indicated to children the importance of education, and the fact that their parents valued school by taking the time to be engaged in school, on field trips, or at home.

The third theme highlighted the importance of safety, which educators felt was imperative to take into account when involving parents in the classroom. The data indicated how administration and policy guidelines were in place to ensure parent volunteers were safe and accounted for in the building, as well as looking at limitations and barriers the procedures had. Moreover, participants spoke to the importance of ensuring confidentiality when parents were working with sensitive information pertaining to children, and having them maintain a level of professionalism when in the school.

The fourth and final theme discussed the barriers participants faced when trying to involve parents in their classrooms. One barrier that was mentioned revolved around conflicting schedules. Participants felt that the opportunity to have parents physically involved in their classroom was limited due to factors such as the school day schedule and the buildings hours of operation. It was also noted that limitations existed around holding events outside of school hours in terms of permits and providing adequate supports such as child care. Finally, language barriers were discussed with one participant who found communication difficult because of a disconnect in a common language between the school and the families. From these findings, it is important to look forward and further explore the issue of parental involvement in schools and the implications it has on a large and small scale.
5.2 Implications

The present study has important implications for educational reform. On a broad scale, this study should serve as a reminder to the Ministry of Education that both in-service and pre-service educators need research-based information around parental involvement to inform their practice both in the field and as part of their teacher-education program. Consistent with conclusions drawn by Farrell and Collier (2010), if teacher education programs are not informed of current research and strategies, it becomes a reactive process of getting parents involved rather than a proactive approach of including parents from the beginning. This study also had novel implications for principals and administrators surrounding confidentiality and safety. The responsibilities lie with them to ensure procedures are effective in keeping all parties safe while also avoiding the creation of an unwelcoming environment for parents to become involved. Finally, teachers need to be active participants in parental involvement partnerships to support students’ academic needs as well as social and emotional needs. Domina (2005) showed that parental involvement improved students academic achievement while also decreasing the prevalence of behavioural issues.

The first implication of this study broadly impacts the Ministry of Education in the ways in which they currently support teachers, and the education provided for pre-service teachers. As shown in the literature review, there has been a wealth of research conducted around parental involvement in schools and this will likely continue into the foreseeable future. It then becomes the role of the Ministry of Education to disseminate the research findings to all teachers. It can be argued that the goal of research in education is to best support students in their educational journey and teachers need to be informed of the findings in order to implement them in their own classrooms. Without dissemination of information from the Ministry of Education, teachers who
are not involving parents in their classrooms may never receive information surrounding the benefits and those families and children may be disadvantaged by this. Furthermore, if new teacher education programs are not informed by this research, a new wave of teachers will not be able to develop their own practices and beliefs around integrating parents and families. As a result, this may lead to the development of low self-efficacy and fear around the subject. If new teachers are not armed with the knowledge and tools needed to understand the value of parental involvement, they may in turn not sufficiently involve parents to their fullest or avoid parental involvement all together. Furthermore, the Ministry needs to draw on existing research as well as fund future research into practical strategies teachers and schools can use to help support parental involvement and reap the benefits of a home-school partnership.

The second implication of this study, on a narrower level, speaks to school administration and principals and how they view confidentiality and safety. The data showed that the participants’ schools currently have policies in place to ensure the safety of students. One way this is done is by screening parent volunteers. However, concerns surfaced when it came to student confidentiality and how to ensure sensitive information is not shared inappropriately. For instance, teachers often felt students who were struggling would benefit greatly from one-on-one time with a parent volunteer, but they felt apprehensive about parents potentially sharing individual students’ progress with other families. The role administration and principals have is to ensure parents are made aware of confidentiality agreements and ensure they are enforced and maintained. This must be coupled with creating and maintaining an environment that invites and welcomes parents in the school and encourages them to become part of the learning community. If safety procedures are not implemented and maintained, the security of students is in jeopardy and all participants agreed this was not a risk they were willing to take. It now becomes the role
of the administration and principals to uphold these policies so teachers can feel comfortable and more at ease when it comes to including parent volunteers in the classroom.

The third and final implication of this study, on a narrow level, speaks to the important role teachers play in involving parents due to the nuanced nature of varying communities and needs. Research has shown the positive benefits of parental involvement (Darch et al., 2004; Dearing et al., 2008; Dearing et al., 2006; Domina, 2005), and it is important to ensure they are included as valuable members of the child’s education. The implications on teachers are more multifaceted due to the multiple and varying needs of the communities and families they work with (Harris & Goodall, 2007). If action is not taken to purposely and authentically involve parents in a child’s education, both inside and outside of school, the stakeholders who will suffer the most are children. It is important for teachers to initiate a dialogue with parents and try to foster relationships to support all students in their classroom, while working in tandem with families. Communication is a two-way street, but it is the role of the teacher, who holds inherent power, to initiate the conversation and foster partnerships between parents and classrooms. The implications outlined above point to a need for future action to be taken in order to better support all stakeholders in effectively involving parents in classrooms.

5.3 Recommendations

The implications of this study point specifically to several recommendations for the Ministry of Education, school administration and principals, and teachers. Three recommendations will be outlined below.

1. New teacher education in Ontario has put in place a focus on helping new teachers develop professional relationships with parents and the community to best support children’s learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). It is imperative that the
Ministry of Education follows up this new expectation with research on how it is being implemented in classrooms with new teachers, and adjust the programs as the need presents itself. The Ministry needs to ensure they are providing a balance of teaching pedagogy around parental involvement while also equipping new teachers with strategies and skills to successfully include parents in their classrooms. These strategies can include ways to involve parents in the classroom as well as continue communication at home. Furthermore, these strategies should have a balance between ones that involve the use of technology and ones that do not to reach a wider group of needs in any given community. A final step in this recommendation is to ensure the research being conducted is disseminated to all stakeholders, teachers, principals, and administration, in order to ensure the information is being used to the fullest ability in successfully involving parents in the classroom.

2. Parental involvement is a nuanced issue that needs to be viewed in the long-term rather than a yearly basis, to be able to successfully support students. This is consistent with conclusions found by Dearing and their colleagues (2006) who concluded that policies and schools need to both sustain involvement from families who are currently involved, while also encouraging and supporting families who are less involved. It is recommended that the role of the administrations and principals be to engage parents through whole-school events and ensure they are creating a space for all to feel welcome in the school. It is important to convey the message to parents that they are experts on their children and their input and involvement is valued and encouraged in the school. While confidentiality and safety policies and procedure
must continue to be prominent, schools must also work towards creating and maintaining an environment where parents feel welcomed and valued in the school.

3. Teachers play a large role in involving parents in the classroom as they are the primary person of contact. It is strongly recommended that teachers communicate with parents early on in the year and use multiple methods of communication. One possibility is taking advantage of technology to help with language barriers and ease of access, while also ensuring that is not the only methods as to not exclude those without access to technology. Finally, it is recommended that communication be an ongoing process, rather than incited only by discourse or issues arising in the classroom. An ongoing method of communication will help build a positive relationship between parents and teachers and allow for a more holistic view of the child, and may lead to better outcomes when supporting children in school.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The current study has served to expand on the existing literature within the area of parental involvement in schools and has aimed to fill the gap in the research by gathering data on teachers’ perspectives and experiences. It should also be noted that there are still areas that require further research to better fully understand the dynamics at play and the challenges that are still being faced. Further research should aim to look at perspectives of parents and their view of how schools involve them in their children’s education and what barriers they face. Due to the ethical limitations of this study, the experiences of parents were not taken into account when looking at the topic of involvement. Future research looking at both parents’ perspectives, as well as comparative research looking at the convergence and divergence of perspectives of
parents versus teachers, would benefit the educational community in coming to conclusions that support all parties in education.

Furthermore, research should be conducted with children; looking at how they perceive parental involvement at different ages and stages in their lives. Research looking into how children view and experience parental involvement is important because they are a vulnerable population, often not given a voice in their own education. As stated above, comparative research should also be conducted with children, parents, and teachers, looking at how their perspectives may align or differ and how to find a common ground that supports all stakeholders.

5.5 Conclusion

The present study is significant because it serves as a reminder that a child’s education does not happen independent of their family and community. The school is a part of the child’s wider community and, when all people in that community work together, that child can achieve their best. A parent is a child’s first teacher and when a child enters school, the educator should not replace their parent in that respect, but instead parents and teachers should collaborate in order to support the child and expand their circle of teachers. The participants in this study all saw the value in parental involvement in supporting children academically and in aspects outside of academics, such as social and emotional well-being. This research should serve as a springboard for future research to continue to look into the strategies that support parental involvement and ultimately, best support students.

The findings in this study are beneficial to teachers, principals, school administration, and the Ministry of Education by providing data and analysis around teachers’ perspectives and experiences in relation to parental involvement. This study indicates that there are multiple benefits of parental involvement, but it is not without challenges that need to be addressed on all
levels of education. Parental involvement will likely shift with time, and be an ongoing factor in education in the future. While this research provides information into the present state, it is vital that this area of research continue to develop over time in order to look into the future state of schools and parental involvement.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear ______________________,

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 involved conducting a small-scale research study. My research will focus on elementary teachers’ perspectives and experiences with involving parents and families in the classroom to support academic achievement. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research project 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 the 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 conferences presentation 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 may 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 Research Coordinator Ken McNeilly. 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 presentation 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,
Alison Hanko

Research Coordinator’s Name: Ken McNeilly
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 be by Alison Hanko and agree to participate in an interview for the purpose described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study and for your time today to engage in an interview. This research study aims to look at teacher perspectives and experiences with parental involvement in school and its relationship to student academic success. It should be noted that during this interview, the term “parent” will be used as the overall term for any parent, guardian, or family member that is directly involved in their students’ life. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes in which I will ask you a series of question around your beliefs, practices, and experiences around parental involvement. I wish to remind you that you may refrain from answering any questions and you also have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time at which point the information gathered will no longer be used in this study. As outlined in the consent form, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

(1) Background Information
1. What grade do you currently teach and at what school?
2. What grades have you taught in the past?
3. How long have you been working as a teacher?
4. Are you a parent?
5. Do you have any other experiences in the field of education, aside from being a classroom teacher?
6. Did you receive any training in pre-service education around involving parents?

(2) Teacher Practices
7. Do you involve parents in your classroom? In what ways?
8. How do you communicate with parents? What ways have you found work best?
9. What goals do you have for parental involvement in your own classroom?

(3) Beliefs and Values
10. What are some ways you believe parents can be involved in a students’ academic life? At home? In school?
11. What are the best ways to have parents involved?
12. What are some positive aspects of parental involvement?
13. What are some negative aspects of parental involvement?
14. Do you see a connection or link between parental involvement and student academic success? How so?
15. Do you see a connection or link between parental involvement and other aspects of student success?
16. What do you believe are the most effective ways to have parents be involved?
17. Have you faced any challenges to parental involvement? In what way?
18. Overall, do you believe parental involvement is important for student academic success?
(4) Influencing Factors

19. What is your school’s current policies and/or practices around parental involvement? Do you agree with them?
20. Do you believe your school facilitates parental involvement? How so?

(5) Next Steps

21. Moving forward, are there any changes you would make with regards to parental involvement in your classroom?
22. What changes, at any level, could be made to help facilitate parental involvement?
23. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher looking to include parents/families in their classroom?

Thank you for your participation in this study.