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Danielle Davis

Moving Toward Change: A Shift from Silence to Parent Engagement

Faculty Sponsor
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Abstract

The push for increased academic achievement among urban schools has been at the forefront of political agendas nationwide. Strengthening the families and communities that serve the school empowers parents to become active participants and collaborators in their students' academic achievement. Funded by the University of Memphis's 2015 Summer Research Fellowship, this qualitative single site case study investigated eight parents whose students attended a low-income urban elementary school located in southwest Tennessee regarding their level of involvement and their needs to become more engaged. The current study used an open-ended survey and individual interviews as a way to identify appropriate school programing to support moving parents from passive followers to active and equal partners. Using a constant comparative method of analysis along with inductive open coding and deductive axial coding four themes emerged: (1) need for community; (2) knowledge about child's development and education; (3) behavior management strategies; and (4) job skills. This study was intervention focused, resulting in the creation of both parenting and school programs geared toward the specific needs of parents in order to increase parent engagement schoolwide. The project received support from the Tennessee Arts Commission's Arts Builds Communities grant. This research project's interventions and seed funding have positive implications for parents, educators and administrator's interactions and communications. Moreover, this research also has implications for students in terms of learning, development, and academic achievement.

Introduction

The push for increased academic achievement among low-income urban schools has been at the forefront of political agendas nationwide. Federally, various approaches to increase student achievement have included restructuring schools, mandateding state testing, and increasing teacher accountability, whereas states and local school districts are struggling to keep up with the new mandates (Zhao, 2009). While there are many debates surrounding the effectiveness of these particular strategies, in many cases they fail to include and engage parents (Kahan, 2013). Instead of solely focusing on a top to bottom approach (i.e., improving schools to impact home life) policymakers, administrators, and educators should consider a bottom-to-top approach (i.e., improving home life in order to positively impact schools). Shifting the emphasis toward improving students' home life can improve the degree of parent engagement which is proven to be effective (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Hong, 2011). Strengthening the families and communities that serve the school empowers parents to become active participants and collaborators in their students' academic careers. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, involvement is defined as having or including (someone or something) as a part of something. Engagement, on the other hand, is the act of coming together and interlocking with someone or something. While parental involvement is necessary in order to maximize student achievement it is parental *engagement* that is optimal, since it is shown to increase students' academic achievement and persistence (Ferlarro, 2009).

Being an at-risk, urban, low-income school can generate several areas of concern (e.g., access to educational materials, funding, and the recruitment high quality teachers) (Kahan, 2013). The lack of congruent and effective interaction and communication between parents, children, teachers, and administrators created a degree of disconnect in which parents at the school being studied felt left-out, isolated, uninformed, and ill-equipped. In this case, parents perceived administrators as not understanding the challenges of raising children while also being economically disadvantaged (Jeynes, 2003); this resulted in a lack of interaction and communication between administrators and parents. As a result, the community this school served was unable to provide what was needed to ensure success. Therefore, the focus of this research was to bridge the gap that parents are experiencing.

Funded by the University of Memphis' summer research fellowship, this qualitative single-site case study explored the effects of moving parents from passive followers to active and equal partners at a low-income urban elementary school located in Memphis, TN. The purpose of the study was to work in conjunction with the school's administrators, teachers, and parents to understand the level of parent engagement. We sought to understand parents' perspectives regarding their roles and willingness to become engaged. As a result of the parents' identified needs, a future goal is to be able to construct programming for the school, and possibly use this research as a working model to address parent engagement in other schools within the local urban area. The implications of this study could affect the way educators, administrators, and policymakers view teaching, learning, and development.

Given the climate of the school and the lack of parent participation, the administration wanted to address four main research questions: 1) Do the parents of the children attending the school view themselves as engaged? 2) What do the parents of the children attending the school need in order to be more engaged? 3) How can we move toward actively engaging the parents of the children attending the school? 4) What knowledge and/or skills do parents think can help them become more engaged in their child's development and academic success? Based upon these four research questions, a list of questions was created to guide the parent interviews and surveys. The research questions guiding this research are as follows:

Research Questions	Parent Interviews and Surveys Questions that address the four particular research questions
Do the parents of the children attending the school view themselves as engaged?	Are you engaged in any of the school activities or opportunities? If so, which ones? (interview) What are your perceptions of Newfield K-8[1]? (Interview) Are you affiliated with the Newfield library? Community center? (interview)

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What do the parents of the children attending the school need to be more engaged?	What do you need to become a more successful parent? (survey)
	What are your individual needs aside from time and money? (interview)
	What would make you attend the events offered at Newfield? (interview)
How can we move toward actively engaging the parents of the children attending the school?	What is hindering you from becoming a successful parent? (survey)
	What do you envision for the Newfield community and school? (interview)
What knowledge and/or skills do parents think can help them become more engaged in their child's development and academic success?	What are your career and life goals? What skills do you need in order to accomplish these goals? (interview)
	What topics or real life issues would you like the Parent University to address? (interview)

Table 1. Research Questions

Theoretical Framework

The *Ecological Systems Theory* developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner recognizes that children develop within five contexts that are both bi-directional and dynamic (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The smallest level and most adjacent to the developing child is the microsystem which consists of family members, teachers, peers, and other individuals who directly impact the child's development. The ways in which these individuals and institutions interact (e.g., parent-child; parent-teacher; parent-school) and collaborate have an effect on the child; this second layer is known as the mesosystem. The third layer, known as the macrosystem involves a broader context to incorporate the cultural identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic) of the same individuals, groups, and organizations with persistent emphasis placed on the specific interaction and the impact on the individual (in this case the child). As a child grows and develops,

the scope and range of the macrosystem also expands and becomes multidimensional and complex in that it begins to include extended family, church groups, parents' workplace, and beyond, to other indirect but still relevant entities. For example, educational policymakers' decisions can directly affect children's education, therefore, relationships between children, families, schools, and communities function in a reciprocal pattern in that what positively or negatively impacts one can also have an effect on the others (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The role of parents and families are instrumental to children's life-long success as they provide the foundations that schools (i.e., teachers and administrators) build upon. Lastly, the outer most chronosystem addresses environmental, contextual, and historical events and changes that occur in an individual's life (e.g., divorces, death, parenting shifts, family relocation resulting in a change of schools). Applying the idea of a chronosystem to real world events can be seen, for example, through the negative effects of divorce on children (Amato & Keith, 1991; Kaye, 1989; Kurdek, 1981). Changes in social-historical circumstances such as these can afford both positive and negative effects on the developing child.

The *Ecological Systems Theory* has helped educators, administrators, and researchers understand the importance of a child's development within various contexts (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Therefore, strengthening and empowering the families and communities to be involved and actively engaged in their child's learning, growth and development is critical. Studies show that low-income African American children are better able to conduct themselves appropriately in the classroom, interact with peers, and anticipate the consequences of their behavior when they have supportive and involved mothers (Hill & Craft, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* has significant relevance to this particular qualitative case study in understanding the level of parent engagement constructing interventions and future programming that will address the parents' levels of engagement.

Review of the Literature

A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve cli-

ents but to gain partners (Ferlazzo, 2011) by moving beyond involvement and focusing on parents' strengths to build engagement. A strengths–based approach does not focusing on changing or forcing parents to participate or be active; instead it focuses on engagement by strengthening parents' abilities to support their children's learning.

Parent Involvement and Engagement

Involvement is to have or include (someone or something) as a part of something (Webster). Parent involvement can be viewed as volunteering in a child's classroom, going to Christmas parties, etc. Studies show that, when family involvement levels are high from kindergarten through fifth grade, the achievement gap in average literacy performance between children of more and less educated mothers is nonexistent (Dearing, et.al, 2006). While parent involvement is helpful in increasing student achievement, it is not enough. Involvement is a low-level participation in which parents may be physically present but do not commit or feel connected to the group or activity (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Engagement, on the other hand, seeks to get and keep (someone's attention, interest, etc.); to interlock with (Webster). In order to move beyond involvement to parent engagement in an at-risk community, the goal is to build a sense of trust and a line of communication. Examples of parent engagement might include creating a parenting group that addresses the school needs, providing feedback and advice in particular school decisions, and creating events to capture and engage other parents. This goal is a direct implementation of Urie Bronfrenbrenner's systems of ecological development. *Figure 1* depicts the need for parents' ownership of their children's academic careers, (allowing them to be engaged and maintain a positive relationship) as well as the need to create a sense of ownership among teachers to both communicate engage with the parents and communities they serve. Additionally, administrators are responsible for maintaining positive relationships and providing an environment in which parents are welcomed to collaborate and become engaged. It is not until each entity (i.e. parent, teachers, and administrators) begin to show a sense of ownership that the child will begin to experience increased benefits (i.e. improved literacy, language growth and development, increased motivation, prosocial efficacy, and sense of community. The aim of this case study is to move parents beyond silent, passive involvement to active engagement.
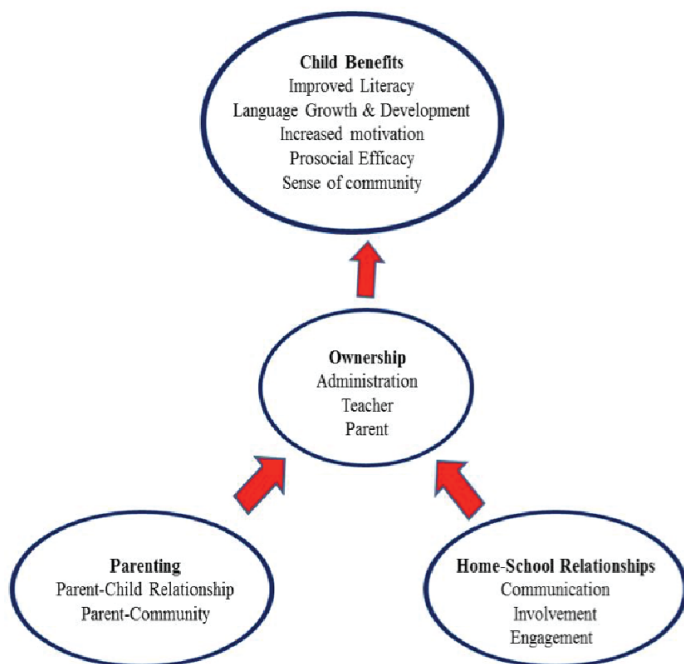
Figure 1.Theoretical Framework (adapted from Caspe (2006))

Method

This study is an interpretive qualitative single-site case study that explors the effects of moving parents from passively involved to actively engaged and equal partners at a low-income urban elementary school located in Memphis, TN. Case study research is most appropriate when there is a need to understand the complexity of specific processes, needs or behaviors; and when an in-depth understanding can inform that which is already known as a result of previous research (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). The case study design in this research focuses on parents' current level of involvement, what they need to become more engaged as members of the school community, and strategies to develop the parent-school relationship.

Qualitative approaches have been critiqued as being less rigorous than more measurement-focused quantitative methods; however, according to Yin (2003), case study research should be understood as empirical inquiry because it uses multiple types of data as evidence toward explor-

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ing authentic real world relationships in context. Despite the interpretive nature of qualitative case study investigations, a protocol of rigor, credibility, dependability, transferability and trustworthiness are present in this study (See Figure 2 adapted from Creswell, 2007). Adhering to Creswell's (2003) steps for conducting credible and dependable research we ensured alignment of the research problem, purpose, and research questions; and we collected multiple data sources (i.e., open-ended survey and interview). Further, we established a data analysis protocol using a constant comparative approach and thematic coding including five levels of analysis, and interrater reliability across two raters (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

CASE STUDY DESIGN

Meaning Making
Synthesize findings and lessons learned

Data Analysis
Embark on case description including Levels of coding/categories/themes

Determine Data and Data Collection
Select participants and sources of data

The Purpose of the Study
Can be explored in-depth to identify solutions, goals, and/or strategies

The Statement of the Problem
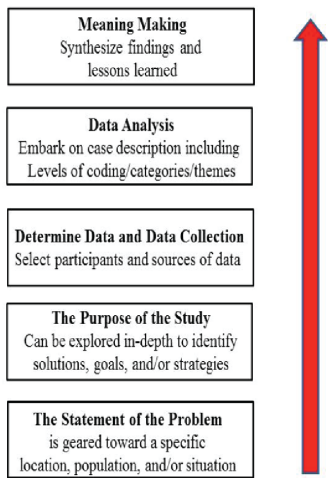is geared toward a specific location, population, and/or situation

Figure 2. Case Study Design Framework (adapted from Creswell (2007))

Setting

This study took place at an urban elementary school located in Memphis, TN. in 2013, the U.S. census reported that more than 50% of the children living in Memphis were living below the federal poverty line. In 2012, Memphis' primary school district, LaSalle County Schools, in conjunction with the State of Tennessee Department of Education, targeted at-risk schools that demonstrated 5% student achievement scores on standardized measures. These schools were labeled Innovation Zone (iZone)

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schools and were in jeopardy of being closed by the state due to their poor performance. The iZone identification allowed the 69 affected schools in Memphis five years to obtain an above-50% performance rate in comparison with other schools across the state of Tennessee.

The school identified in the current study was targeted as an iZone school in 2012; this identification involves some benefits to the school and students but imposes some additional challenges and stresses too. For instance, on the positive side, the school was assigned a principal with a proven track record for outstanding performance within the LaSalle School system. The principal is afforded the task of hiring staff and faculty consistent with his/her visions and goals; and with similar perspectives and teaching efficacy for the population. iZone schools were given a substantial budget through a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) to takeover schools operating in the bottom 5%. The funds are a way to obtain resources, professional development, and programming to equip the staff, faculty, students, and families with appropriate resources to be successful. Further, and most important to the scope of this research, the principal independently makes decisions on the research, interventions, and programs implemented in his/her school. This privilege was paramount to this research because it built on an existing relationship of trust and mutual respect between the school, the principal, and the families involved through previous collaborations. On the challenging side, as an iZone school, there was substantial pressure to constantly and persistently demonstrate proficiencies on the standardized tests with a steady student achievement score above 55%. Added stresses included: (1) the five year clock; (2) implications for the students and community if the school closed; (3) sustainability of academic achievement without the additional iZone funds if the goal were met; and (4) reintegration to the LaSalle School system.

Newfield PK-8th grade school, is located within an urban low-income community and is surrounded by tight-knit neighborhood that has a rich history and strong ties to with its 400+ alumni. Mirroring the city of Memphis, Newfield is 97.9% African American; the majority of whom are educationally and economically disadvantaged. During the 2014-2015 academic calendar year, Newfield was named a reward school which indicated a substantial academic gain compared to all other iZone schools in the state of Tennessee.
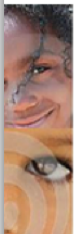
Participants

The participants of this study were parents of 1st through 8th grade students. Initially 442 parents were solicited to participate in an open-ended survey. Out of the surveys distributed, 52 were returned. Surveys were anonymous; no identifying information was required for participation. Additionally, we asked the principal to provide a contact list of 15 parents that we could solicit for individual interviews. This resulted in 6 interviews. All participants were African-American women ranging in age from 26-59 years old. Five were the biological mothers of the students, and one participant was the grandmother of a student. Three of the participants dropped out of high school while the other three had completed high school as their highest level of education. This study represents preliminary findings from the 52 completed parent surveys and thematic findings from the six parent interviews.

Measurement and Procedure

Open-ended surveys. In March of 2015, a two item open-ended survey was sent home to all parents of students enrolled in 1st through 8th grade at Newfield School (see Figure 3). The two prompts were: (1) What do you need in order to be a successful parent? and (2) What gets in your way of being a successful parent? After the initial solicitation, two additional attempts were made to get parents to complete the survey at school-sponsored "Snacks for Stats" events. There was also a school-wide reminder that was distributed to encourage parents to complete the survey and return it to the school. The anticipated sample size was 150 responses, but only 52 were returned.

Figure 3. Open-ended Parent Survey

Individual parent interview. Based on the 52 open-ended parent surveys that were returned, we asked the principal to provide a list of 15 parents who might be willing to participate in an individual interview. The list provided included 12 women and 3 men. All 15 parents where contacted by phone to generate interest and willingness to participate. There were nine parents who scheduled interviews (6 women and 3 men). As noted above, of the initial 15 potential participants, 6 completed the interview process.

The individual interviews were semi-structured and lasted approx-

imately 60-90 minutes. They were held at Newfield School in the parent resource room and were audiotaped for later transcription and analysis. An interview guide was constructed from preliminary findings of the open-ended survey (see Table 1). The questions were informal and focused on the following themes: (1) parent's affiliations within the community, (2) perceptions of the school and community, (3) child development, (4) parenting skills and strategies, (5) job skills, and (6) technology skills. Due to the general nature of the topics the sample interview guide represents the broad questions; appropriate probing was less structured and varied across parents.

1.	What are your perceptions of Newfield K-8? Strengths? Needs?
2.	What type of community do you envision for Newfield?
3.	Are you affiliated with any of the Newfield churches? Community Centers? Libraries?
4.	What topics or real life issues would you like the Parent University to address?
5.	What are your career/life goals? What skills do you need in order to accomplish those goals?
6.	What access to technology do you have? How often do you use the internet?

Table 2. Sample Interview Guide

Analysis

This study utilized a constant comparative method of analysis during a process of three levels (see Figure 4) in which preliminary findings from one data source were used to inform investigation of another data source in a comparative manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Level 1 coding resulted in preliminary findings of in two areas: (1) what parents need to be successful; and (2) what prevents parents from being successful. The categories from level 1 analysis aided in the development of the semi-structured interview guide. Level 2 analysis resulted in categorical coding. Level 3 involved combining the categories from level 1 and level 2 to identify emergent themes in the data. Throughout the levels of analysis there was a process of interrater reliability of 96% agreement of the coding across two members of the research team.
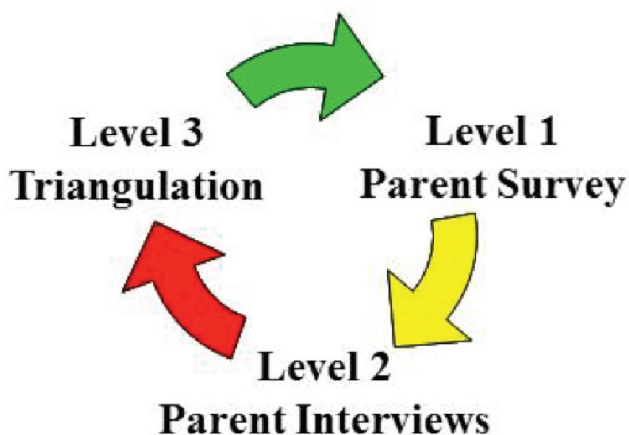
Figure 4. Constant Comparative Levels of Analysis

Level 1. In this case, the open-ended survey was the initial data source and was inductively coded for topics and ideas. For example, there were codes for faith, community, knowledge of child, time, and communication (see Table 2). Based on these codes, broader categories were identified in order to construct guiding questions for the individual parent interview.

Initially the 52 surveys were analyzed using open-coding with an emphasis on the actual text, broken down into concept codes and then broader categories. Each survey response was coded in preparation for analysis. After the responses were coded they were analyzed for common responses and charted. This was followed by a process of axial coding in which the researchers double checked all of the codes and categories and then explored how they were interrelated. These preliminary findings were the catalyst for the interview items and the foundation for level 2 analysis.

Level 2. There were six individual interviews. The same process of open and axial coding took place. The transcripts were initially open coded based on the categorical analysis from the survey. Axial coding explored more of the individual parent's experiences, and specific patterns, explanations, and perspectives repeated until saturation where there were no new ideas being identified.

Table 2. Level One Sample Coding Scheme

	What do you need to be a successful parent?	Level 1 CODE	What gets in your way of being a successful parent?	Level 1 CODE
1	Prayer, hope, a chance to help better myself instead of being in charge of a large family.	Prayer. Self-improvement. Overwhelmed.	Handling a big family since mother passed away last year. Have to control a bunch of grown people and can't please myself.	Family stress. Overwhelmed. Death. Self.
2	Quality time with my child. Patience and understanding.	Quality time. Patience. Understanding.	Work hours. Impatience. Not empathizing.	Job. Tolerance. Sensitivity.
3	Communication skills	Communication skills.	My lack of communication with my child. Sometimes anger.	Lack parent-child communication. Lack parent-child interaction.
4	Focused mind frame. Keep up with my child's progress. Participating more. More involvement with the pictures.	Knowledge. Attention. More involvement. More engagement. Child's schoolwork.	Working too much.	Job.
5	Making sure that they have the proper tools to work with.	Resources.	Not being able to provide for them.	Limited provider.
6	We need to know the language of the curriculum (e.g. 'regrouping' in math).	Curriculum. Math skills.	Busyness. I am busy all of the time.	Time manage-ment.
7	Patience with my child, strategies to help my child study better. How to ap-proach my child and reward doing better at school.	Patience. Study strategies. Behavior strategies.	My child's attitude. Lack of understanding in how children learn.	Child disposition. Lack of knowl-edge about child development.
8	To be a successful parent I feel I need a heart, love, patience, a good education, a good head on your shoulders, and a support team.	Parenting skills. Affection. Patience. Knowledge. Support.	I feel not having a college degree gets in my way of being a successful parent.	Lack of education.
9	To be informed about how our surroundings are changing. Also, pay close attention to our children. Sit down and talk to them.	Knowledge of change in environ-ment. Know what child is doing. Communication with child.	Work and not enough time in the day.	Job. Time manage-ment.

Level 3. The survey categories and the patterns found in the interview data were triangulated, that is compared and broad themes were found to be consistent. At this point in the analysis the researchers revisited the research questions in order to make meaning of the patterns.

Results

The aim of the current research was to learn and understand the current level of parent engagement, as well as their perspectives and needs to become more engaged with their children and the school. Examining both the survey and interview data through inductive analysis (i.e., interpretive) and deductive reasoning (i.e., grounded in the literature on parent engagement) we identified four ways that schools could work toward engaging parents by addressing their needs: (1) a need for educational and job related skills; (2) a need for knowledge regarding their children's education and development; (3) a need for alternative behavioral strategies; and (4) a need for community.

Educational and Job Related Skills

Many parents felt that without a degree they were unable to help their child(ren) succeed in school. One parent wrote, "I feel like not having a college degree gets in my way of being a successful parent," while another parent felt like school was what they needed in order to be successful. Additionally, parents were seeking jobs, but lacked the skills to pursue a career such as computer and technology knowledge, resume and interview tips, etc.

Knowledge of Child's Education and Development

The lack of knowledge regarding their children's education and development seemed to present a common area of concern among parents as well. Responses to the question, "What gets in your way of being a successful parent?" included, "My child's attitude" and "Lack of understanding in how children learn." Additionally, when asked "What do you need to be a successful parent?," one parent felt that in order to be successful they needed "patience with my child, and strategies to help my child study better. How to approach my child and reward doing better at school." Another parent stated "We need to know the language of the curriculum. Example: regrouping in math."

Effective Behavior Strategies

Parents expressed that they were unable to communicate, understand, and discipline their child(ren). A commonality was that many parents resorted to spankings as the main method of discipline. When asked, "What do you need in order to be a successful parent?", parents responded by saying that they needed, "communication skills", and "to spend time with their child to teach them how to study and right from wrong." Other parents felt that the "lack of communication" and resulting anger was what was in their way of becoming a successful parent.

Community Support

The need for community support was not only an issue identified by parents but also by the schools' administrators. Newfield K-8 has always served as a tight-knit community, however in recent years there has been a shift and an influx of young teenage parents. One parent stated that, "I think what gets in the way is people on the outside judging without knowledge of the inside of what's going on in parent's and children's lives. It is very stressful." Overall, parents were looking for more support and guidance in raising their child.

From the four common themes gathered from the data an intervention plan was created to address the needs and concerns among the parents at Newfield K-8. In order to address the need for a closer community, art is being used as a catalyst to create a sense of community among the Newfield K-8 family. Art classes, taught by University of Memphis art students will provide the opportunity for parents and students to create works of art. To date the art project has secured a $4,000 seed grant by the Tennessee Arts Commission: Art Builds Community grant. The grant will be used to fund not only after school art sessions, but also a cumulating art festival. A portion of the artworks will be placed in a silent auction.

Additionally, parenting workshops will be provided throughout the school year that will address the parents' other areas of concern inducing: lack of education and job related skills, lack of knowledge regarding their child's development and education, and the need for alternative behavioral strategies.

Discussion

This study is important because of the direct link between parent

engagement and student achievement (Ferlazzo, 2011). When parents are engaged in their children's education, growth, and development, the children are more motivated, active, and successful in their academic careers and their contribution to society (Caspe, 2006). However, knowing how to move parents from being involved to being engaged ultimately varies based on their needs; and this study focused on one group of parents in an at-risk, low socioeconomic urban school. This study holds relevance and implications for stakeholders from the top of the education food chain, including policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Many of the broader themes from the survey items are transferable to other schools and other populations. Unfortunately, many urban low-income schools are struggling with the lack of interaction, communication, and connections with the parents that they are serving. In the era of school reform, the need to increase student achievement is vital (Dearing, et al., 2006).

Implications

Moving forward, teaching educators and administrators to focus on engagement rather than involvement so that parents feel more connected and relevant in the educational process is vital to future success. When teachers actively promote parent engagement in their classrooms, parents have more opportunity to ask questions, learn skills, and support their children. For example, when parents are engaged in active classroom experiences they can understand the importance of safety, reading and math skills; and discuss social and emotional elements of development (Lopez & Caspe, 2014). Parent engagement in the classroom can provide teachers with the opportunity to know and understand the parents' challenges and the students' home environment so that teachers can more effectively address individual student needs. The continuity that parent engagement has on teachers and parents can positively affect student performance and foster cognitive, social, and emotional development (Lopez, 2014).

Learning implications for students are well-documented in the literature on parent engagement. There is evidence that shows that when parents are more engaged their children have better achievement; the impact is seen in the children's attitudes and behaviors (Halgunseth, 2009). They are more willing to attend school and do homework when parents seem to have a genuine investment in the activities at school (Halgunseth, 2011). All of these components of learning foster retention and aspirations

for future goals and career options for students (Lopez, 2014).

Developmental implications due to parent engagement tap into areas that also promote and ensure academic achievement. For instance, children whose parents are actively engaged with components of their child's teaching and learning demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem and a healthy self-concept (Halgunseth, 2009). These students are more highly motivated and excel in early reading and math skills (Halgunseth, 2009). Moreover, students with engaged parents get along better with others and can sustain friendships with their teachers and peers (Caspe, 2006). Their outlook on their future is also more optimistic, goal-oriented, and stable over time. Their dispositions are more compassionate and patient which results in better behavior and sensitivity toward others (Brody, 2002). When parent engagement is high, children's cognitive, social, and emotional development is more apt to follow a positive trajectory that can impact the economics of a community and future generations. This is particularly salient in this study since the community has a strong history and has aspirations to thrive in the future, but they need the next generations to step up and be contributing members of society.

Limitations

Consistent with all research, this study has some limitations. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the sample size is small; however, the perspective is in-depth and lends a voice to what parents need to be more engaged. Knowing the perspectives and the words of the parents has potential to be transferrable to other parents. Overall, the number of surveys returned was less than 10% (52 out of 442). Although the compliance was disappointing, it did provide background knowledge about the level of parent engagement in the school. Due to the limited education level of many of the parents it was apparent from the two-item survey that some of the parents did not fully understand the nature of the questions. We included these in the analysis because we observed it more than once but it was not consistent enough to generate a theme. However, it did alert the investigators toward perspective-taking and item writing.

Future Directions

The purpose of the study was to understand the level of engagement at Newfield School K-8 in order to develop future interventions that

will bolster parents to be more engaged. The rationale is if there is an understanding of the parent's needs and some of these needs are addressed; then parent engagement will increase. Therefore, a plan has been set in motion including future projects at Newfield K-8.

Following the funded art initiative set in place by this study, a future goal is to continue to look for larger grants to develop a sustainable parent organization at Newfield that includes the community. The creation of the art workshops and a mural created there address the sense of community that the parents of Newfield K-8 are seeking. Parents of Newfield K-8 have the opportunity to become engaged partners with their child(ren) in order to create art, as well as become engaged partners to restore the rich history of the Newfield community for future generations.

A second project that builds on this initial study develops informational and training parent workshops. Thus far we have secured 10 laptop computers and constructed a schedule of workshops that will take place during Spring 2016. The parent workshops will include topics such as social and emotional development, behavioral strategies, and résumé and career building techniques. These workshops will be held at Newfield School in the parent resource room one evening per week for six weeks. To foster parent's knowledge and experience, we have solicited vendors to provide educational and training resources and this has been a successful endeavor thus far.

There is also a plan to conduct a book drive for the students through the University of Memphis' Alpha Lambda Delta honor society this spring. This project began in 2015; the organization was able to provide the school with 150 books for parents and children.

Another project that has derived from the current research is a collaboration between a local artist and the school principal to create a school mosaic that can engage the staff and faculty, the parents, and the students as well as the community. Further, this project will rejuvenate school and community morale and efficacy to bring back some of the strength and spirit that has been misplaced during the struggles as a community to maintain the community school. The mosaic will be constructed based on the theme "Past, Present, and Future," with ideas being generated from the current Arts Builds Communities grant. Grades PK-1 will represent the future, grades 2-8 will represent the present, and the Newfield Alumni will represent the past. Art work and writing samples created in the

after-school art classes, funded by the Tennessee Arts Commission, will provide direction and inspiration to the design of the mosaic which will be located in the entryway of Newfield PK-8 School. The mural will serve as a constant reminder of the efforts to repair a strong community and the school it serves.

A final and more ambitious goal resulting from this research is to initiate some of the parent engagement strategies in other iZone schools within the school district to give other schools, parents, and students the opportunity to be more actively engaged. Many other urban low-income schools are seeking methods to increase parental engagement in order to untimely impact student achievement. The future of the study with appropriate funding can produce positive effect on student achievement. The data collected in this study addresses what parents need in order to become engaged and successful and each of these future projects provides the opportunity to meet the needs of parents to move them beyond silence to engagement.

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