Transition to Kindergarten and Parent Involvement in Schools:

A Phenomenological Study about Parents' Perceptions and Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in school has proven its effectiveness (Jeynes, 2012). Students whose parents
are involved tend to present better behavior at school and achieve higher quality of homework
and schoolwork (Cancio, West & Young, 2004; Epstein 2001). In the case of children
transitioning to kindergarten, parent involvement can help them overcome adjustment difficulties
and receive the support they need to succeed (Patel & Corter, 2013). In order to increase parent
involvement among parents of children transitioning to kindergarten, school counselors, teachers
and other school personnel can benefit from understanding how parents perceive parent
involvement and what experiences they are having as their children transition to kindergarten.
The purpose of this study was to describe, using a qualitative approach, how parents of children
transitioning to kindergarten perceive parent involvement and how they have been experiencing
parent involvement during this transition. This study included the participation of ten parents
whose children were enrolled in kindergarten in a public school in Southern California. Semi-
structured interviews were conducted and analyzed through the process of coding. Findings
showed that there are different ways of parent involvement and that such involvement is the
result of a teamwork that happens through interactions between the parent, the child, and the
school. Moreover, discussions of the findings also revealed that schools that offer services and
support to parents during the kindergarten transition help them become more involved parents.
Lastly, it was brought to knowledge that parents of children transitioning to kindergarten do not
always know about the existence or the role of the school counselor, who could be serving as an

important support to these parents and their children. Important implications are offered for school counselors, counselor educators, and kindergarten teachers, as well as recommendations for future research.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Parenting can be quite a complex task (Akister & Johnson, 2004), yet a valuable one considering its importance and influence in a child's growth and development (Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik & Shamah, 2012). More specifically, when it comes to academic development, the role of parents is crucial (Epstein, 2008; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004) and their involvement in their child's schooling can have short- and long-term significant consequences (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013), especially when starting as early as in kindergarten (Herbers, Cutuli, Lafavor, Vrieze & Leibel, 2011; Patel & Corter, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999).

The positive consequences of effective parent involvement with their children's schooling can be observed in the child's development and educational outcome (Barnard, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 1997; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro, 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Students whose parents are involved tend to show better behavior at school and present higher homework and schoolwork quality (Cancio, West & Young, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Smith, et al., 2011). Specifically in the case of children transitioning to kindergarten, parent involvement can help them overcome many adjustment difficulties and receive the support they need from their parents (Patel & Corter, 2013). As a long-term effect, parent involvement can help the child build pro-learning self-concepts and aim for higher educational goals in the future (Hartas, 2008).

The current view of parent involvement and even parents' responsibility for the children's growth, however, has not always been widely held. Parents' roles in their children's education have undergone innumerous modifications throughout the centuries (Anfara &

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Mertens, 2008). The definition of parent involvement continues to be reshaped as we redefine our values and family systems in the 21st century (Hartas, 2008). Looking back through the history of children's education and the switches observed in parents' roles and responsibilities can help us understand how parent involvement has developed over the years.

History of Parent Involvement

Children's Education in the Past Centuries

In ancient cultures, parents were the primary educators of their children and it was not until the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2000-1700 B.C.) that formal education outside the home was first introduced (Berger, 1991). In Greece, philosophers such as Plato (427-347 B.C.), started warning the members of Greek society about the importance of childrearing and character formation—children were the future—and regulations about parents' responsibilities in their children's education started to emerge. Children were educated for the benefit of the state or to join the military, and not because parents believed they had the right to education; therefore, fathers were given the autonomy to decide which children would be educated and which would not (Berger, 1991). During the Middle Ages (400-1400 A.D.), as the feudal system emerged, children were expected to help their families and perform daily tasks; the education they received was limited to basic skills taught by their parents. Childhood lasted until they turned seven, at which point children were seen as little adults and expected to socialize, behave, and dress like their elders (Ariès, 2006; Berger, 1991). It was not until the 17th century that, in Western societies, childhood began to be recognized and valued as an important phase in life. Parents and society became aware of how education can shape and contribute to the growth of the child (Berger, 1991).

In the 18th century, roots to what is currently perceived as parent involvement arose. Philosopher and writers Rousseau (1712-1778) and Pestalozzi (1747-1827) both advocated for the importance of parents educating and cultivating their children's needs (Berger, 1991). By the 19th century, parents started to view their children as important and loved members of the family—they received love, affection, care, and education—and in the 20th century the children became the focus of the family's dynamic (Ariès, 2006). Printed publications targeted at parents in the 1890s and early 1900s discussed the importance of love, affection, and positive role models as ways to help the development of their children's characters. Between 1910 and 1930, parents learned about their roles in disciplining their children and, later on, they were reading about children's self-regulation (Berger, 1991). Children gained a place in society, as well as their right to safety, respect, and education, besides benefiting from medicine, psychiatry, law, and pedagogy (Day et al., 2003; Guerra, 1985).

Parent Involvement in the 20th Century

In the 1920s there was a considerable growth of new parent education groups, along with publication of manuals about parent education, study groups, and curriculum guides. Parents were interested in learning more about how to get involved in their children's development. The Child Study Association of America (CSAA) sponsored, in 1920, the first of many courses in parent education and, in 1925, the National Council of Parent Education was formed (Berger, 1991). In the 1930s, however, after the financial crash of 1929, changes started to emerge: agencies were organized to help families during the Depression and, with World War II, childcare services emerged, allowing mothers to work. From the 1920s to the 1950s childrearing suffered a radical change and the schools took prominent roles in the children's education (Berger, 1991). In the 1950s, after the war had ended and families were reunited, the United

States experienced what is known as the "Baby Boom" era when, with the increase of population, society focused more on its children's needs and education. Different structures were established and the advance of specialized knowledge in the schools brought the misconception that parents were not qualified enough, in comparison to teachers and other staff, to contribute to the curriculum of their children (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). During this period, parental involvement could be characterized more as parents supporting the schools rather than parents providing education to their individual children (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Serpe-Schroeder, 1999).

In the 1960s, U.S. parents became even more focused on developing their children academically (Berger, 1991). With the advancement of research came the knowledge that early education was of great importance, and Head Start programs were established along with federally funded programs that now mandated parent involvement in schools (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Berger, 1991). However, it was not until the 1970s that parents began to question school programs, and the concept of parental involvement underwent another transformation as parents started to advocate for power to implement changes in their children's education (Serpe-Schroeder, 1999). It was the beginning of a new way of parent involvement in which parents wanted to take ownership of the choices in regards to their children's academic paths.

Changes in economy, family structures, values, and even politics caused considerable shifts in the involvement of parents in their children's education in the past century. As the world continues to evolve today and society continues to reshape the value-systems and family structures, new roles, responsibilities, and meanings of what we call parent involvement also continue to emerge.

Parent Involvement Today

Nowadays, most educators no longer believe that parents are not qualified to contribute to their children's curriculum and instruction, and that teachers are the only ones with specialized knowledge (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Schools are aware of the benefits of parent involvement, and parent-teacher collaboration is valued (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Epstein, 2001; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which was signed into law in 2002 by the American President George W. Bush with the purpose to improve students' educational equity, has parent involvement as one of its key components. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), the NCLB mandates all school districts to develop programs to involve parents in their children's schooling. The value placed on parent involvement today is at federal, district, and local schools levels (Hoang, 2010).

Several recent studies support the importance of parental involvement in schools (Hoang, 2010; Patel & Corter, 2013; Young, Austin & Growe, 2013). Research has shown that parent involvement can help students improve their attendance in school, achieve higher grades, gain sense of well-being, reach greater achievement, and produce higher quality homework, among other outcomes (Myers & Monson, 1992). Studies defend the importance of school-initiated programs to promote and increase parent involvement (Patel & Corter, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Vera, et al., 2012). However, parent involvement is not happening at the frequency and level as expected by schools and teachers (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005).

Challenges of Parent Involvement

Unfortunately, barriers and challenges are frequently present when it comes to parent involvement (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Plevyak, 2003; Smith et al., 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013; Vera et al., 2012). Some parents are busy working long shifts and believe they do

not have the time or capability to be more involved (Smith et al., 2011); others may have health, financial, or family issues that keep them from reaching out to the schools (Plevyak, 2003); others do not have the necessary self-efficacy developed and assume they are not skillful for such a task (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Patel & Corter, 2013); still others perceive the school as a threatening and non-welcoming environment (Anfara & Mertens, 2008); and finally, there are those parents that simply lack guidance and information on how to assist with their child's schooling (Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012). The lack of a clear definition of what parental involvement means can also be a barrier for those parents looking to become more involved (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Parental involvement is not a new concept, but there are different expectations between what parents believe parent involvement should entail and what teachers actually expect from them (Smith et al., 2011).

Ultimately, developing programs to involve parents is not an easy task. Besides the barriers faced by parents themselves, there are the challenges faced by teachers, who may hesitate to involve parents. Some of these challenges are lack of time, absence of external rewards, and fear of being blamed or questioned about their professional competency (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). School counselors may be an alternative to develop such programs, as they are not only professionally competent but also collaborate with teachers and administrators and connect with parents and families (Nassar-McMillan, Karvonen, Perez, & Abrams, 2009).

School Counselors

Several studies reveal the competence of school counselors in working with families, including families with multicultural background (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). According to Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007), school counselors are skillful in collaborating with others, knowledgeable about family matters, and competent in managing

meetings with families and school staff. Cripps and Zyromski (2009) reinforce school counselors' competency by affirming that they provide comprehensive intervention programs, create links between students and other individuals, such as family members, involved in their education, promote healthy student-adolescent relationships, provide curriculum guidance, offer counseling interventions, and promote parent involvement.

In order for school counselors to excel and continue to develop their competency in promoting and increasing parent involvement in schools, especially in the context of a child's transition to kindergarten, it is important that they understand what the parents' perceptions, beliefs, and feelings are in regards to parental involvement. Not only do researchers and educators lack a clear definition for parent involvement (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013), there are also different expectations between parents, teachers, and school counselors about such involvement (Smith et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Context

Researchers agree on several benefits of parent involvement in children's schooling and academic performance (Jeynes, 2012; Patel & Corter, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012). Furthermore, studies support the need for parental involvement during a child's transition to kindergarten (Patel & Corter, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011) for both its short-term and long-term benefits (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Nevertheless, barriers often keep parents from getting more involved in the children's schooling (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Plevyak, 2003; Smith et al., 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013; Vera et al., 2012) and teachers are not always successful in their communication with parents (Anfara & Mertens, 2008).

In order to increase parent involvement among parents of children transitioning to kindergarten, school counselors, along with teachers and other school personnel, can benefit from understanding how parents perceive parent involvement and what experiences they are having as their children transition to kindergarten. Because parents come from different backgrounds, they can have different perceptions, beliefs, and expectations about parent involvement and can experience their children's transition to kindergarten in very different ways. Parents of children transitioning to kindergarten may express some anxiety and need some clarifying information about kindergarten and the transition process (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Therefore, it is important for kindergarten teachers and school personnel, especially school counselors, to know how to initiate a dialogue with these parents and assess their needs and expectations. Offering programs for parents during transition to kindergarten is a way to open a communication channel between the school and the parents and promote parent involvement (Patel and Corter, 2013). Thus, being aware of the parents' challenges, experiences, and expectations can help schools communicate more effectively with parents and develop the necessary programs.

Some research studies have already been done about the teachers' perceptions, children's achievement, and parents' concerns and involvement during transition to kindergarten (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). However, there are few published studies that have explored parents' perspectives and experiences of parent involvement during the transition process to kindergarten (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

Considering the importance of school-initiated programs to promote parental involvement (Jeynes, 2012; Patel & Corter, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012), and considering the need to work with parents of children during the kindergarten transition (Patel & Corter, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011), the present study's key purpose was to describe how parents whose first child is transitioning to kindergarten perceive parent involvement and how they are experiencing this phenomenon. As Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) assert, "If schools are to communicate effectively with parents concerning transitions, it is essential that parents' voice be heard" (p.48).

Research Questions

The central research questions guiding this study were:

1.   How do parents of children transitioning to kindergarten conceptualize the term "parent involvement"?

2.   How are these parents experiencing parent involvement?

Summary

In every school there are children struggling with adjustment and behavioral difficulties, whether they are in elementary school, middle school, or high school. The year in which they start kindergarten is, however, specifically challenging as they are transitioning to formal schooling for the first time (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Parent involvement has proven effective in different school ages (Jeynes, 2012) as well as during the kindergarten transition (Patel & Corter, 2013). Schools can help promote parent involvement by offering services and programs to parents (Jeynes, 2011; Patel & Corter, 2013). Understanding parents' perspectives and experiences in regards to parent involvement during the

kindergarten transition can assist on the development of such services. However, not much research that explores parents' perspectives and experiences with parent involvement during transition to kindergarten has been published.

The present study is significant for its contribution to the counseling, school counseling, teaching, and counselor education profession, providing insights on how parents can feel, perceive, and experience parent involvement. Such awareness can help these professionals work with the parents in a more understanding way, establish an open communication channel, develop the necessary strategies to support their needs during the kindergarten transition, and promote parent involvement. Ultimately, this study can contribute to increasing parent involvement not only during transition to kindergarten but also in years to come.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms is offered to help clarify the meaning of some important concepts present in this study.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is defined as any behavior or effort made by parents with the intention to support their child's academic development, such as communicating with schools, taking interest in their child's academic and personal growth, participating in school activities, helping their child with homework or school projects, and providing opportunities for their child to engage in any educational activity inside or outside of the school.

Transition to Kindergarten

Transition to kindergarten refers to the entire academic year that the child is enrolled in kindergarten for the first time, usually between August/September and May/June. It is the child's first experience in formal schooling.

Document Organization

This document represents a qualitative study about how parents perceive and experience parent involvement during their children's transition to kindergarten and it is organized into five chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, provides an overview of the subject and some background information, along with the purpose of the study, research questions, and assumption for the research study. Chapter Two, Literature Review, discusses relevant literature in the topic. Chapter Three, Methodology, describes the research design, theoretical framework, and procedures that were utilized in this research. Chapter Four, Results, presents the findings of this study, guided by each research question. Chapter Five, Discussion, concludes with a discussion of the results, limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

For many years, researchers have proven the benefits of parental involvement (Barnard, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen 2001; Jeynes, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 1997; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Smith et al., 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Parent involvement is associated with improvement in school attendance, behavior, homework quality, academic performance (Cancio, West & Young, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Smith et al., 2011), and self-esteem (Mapp, 1997). Hartas (2008) found that parent involvement in school brings benefits that go beyond the child's schooling performance itself; parent involvement helps the child both aspire to reach higher educational goals and to build pro-social and pro-learning self-concepts. In addition, parent involvement in the child's schooling may have a positive impact on child's emotional and social adjustment, boosting their autonomy, increasing their sense of security and competence, and helping them internalize the value of education (Hartas, 2008; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013).

Conceptualizing Parental Involvement

Despite the growing amount of research being done in parent involvement, measuring and qualifying such involvement remains a challenge, due to the inconsistencies in the researchers' definition and procedures (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Vera et al., 2012; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Not only are there different types and forms of parent involvement, there is also a lack of clear definition as to what parent involvement consists of, leading to misunderstanding and divergence in the conceptualization of parent involvement (Jeynes, 2011; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). In addition, when evaluating parent involvement, researchers have

found that parents, teachers, and school administrators can have different perspectives and, consequently, perceive the quality and need of the involvement very differently (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). First, some parents may report their involvement in the school as being much higher than what the teachers would report (Smith et al., 2011). Second, even among parents who actively try to stay involved in the school activities, the type and quality of involvement can differ from what parents believe is sufficient and what teachers and school administrators actually expect from them (Smith et al., 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Some parents believe that their involvement consists of keeping the children safe and bringing them to school on time; however, teachers may expect a lot more from the parents (Smith et al., 2011), such as help with their children's homework and participation in school meetings.

According to social scientist and educator Joyce Epstein (1995, 2008), parent involvement is a partnership between school and parents in which they share responsibilities for the children and work together to create programs and opportunities for their development as students; the ultimate goal for everyone is helping the child succeed, not just in school, but also in life. Epstein articulates that her goal is to help engage parents to participate in the school programs and children's activities and develop a beneficial relationship that will bring achievable goals to the students.

Epstein's framework consists of six types of parental involvement. Such types are not exclusive and can have significant connections with combined effects between them. Type 1 is *parenting* and it consists of helping families create a home environment that supports their child's development and assesses their child's needs, by addressing some of the challenges parents may be experiencing. This type of involvement focuses on strengthening parents' skills as well as helping schools understand the family's culture. Type 2 is *communicating*, which

focuses on developing effective communication from home-to-school and school-to-home about the school's programs and the child's progress, conduct, or challenges. Communication helps parents become more understanding of the school programs, policies, and career planning, as well as more aware of their child's progress; it also helps teachers count on parents' support when necessary. Type 3 is *volunteering*, which refers to activities promoted by the school that facilitates parents' involvement in serving as volunteers by helping with school activities, mentoring, coaching, interpreting, or even by sharing their own career experiences and talents to other students. This type of involvement assists parents in becoming more involved in their child's education and in understanding more of the educational process happening in the schools. In addition, volunteering makes parents feel valued in the school setting and helps students develop communication skills with adults and learn more about their occupations and talents. Type 4, *learning at home*, is about providing information to help families become aware of their child's learning process and career possibilities and involved in their child's homework and other curriculum-related activities. This type of involvement helps parents learn how to be supportive and encouraging. It also helps students gain a more positive attitude towards homework and school-related activities. Type 5 is about *decision-making*, which refers to the inclusion of parents in the school decisions by helping them become active in parent organizations, committees, and parent leadership activities. This type of involvement contributes to parents by allowing them to acquire ownership of the school and express their voice; and it helps teachers include and respect parents' opinions on school decision-process and policy development. Finally, Type 6 is *collaborating with community*. This type of involvement in Epstein's framework is related to identifying and integrating resources from the community that could benefit the school programs, the students' learning processes, and the family practices. This

involvement contributes to parents by bringing them awareness of the school's role in the community and of how the community contributes to the schools.

In their study on the definition of parental involvement, Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) observed that various theorists define parent involvement as one of the following: (a) partnership between parents and school (parental participation); (b) communication between the parents and the teachers; (c) parents helping their children with their homework; or (d) any parental attitude or behavior that supports the children's success in their academic performance. The authors conducted a qualitative study with 100 school administrators about their definitions of parent involvement, specifically asking, "How do you define parental involvement?" The qualitative data collected were analyzed through coding, a process in which they reduced the data into themes, condensed the codes, and analyzed them in figures, tables, or discussion. Based on their research findings, Young, Austin, and Growe suggested that the definition of parent involvement could be organized into four major categories. The first category relates to *active engagement*, which is defined by parents participating in school-based activities, attending conferences, volunteering in schools, etc. The second category is *parental support*, which suggests home-based activities that support the child's education, such as parents helping their children with their homework, creating an environment at home for studying, valuing and promoting the importance of education, investing in the child's education, motivating the child to reach academic goals, and so forth. The third category, *communication*, refers to both the school needing to communicate more effectively with the parents and the parents needing to communicate better with the educators and their children. Finally, the fourth category is *parents being advocates*, a category that relates to parents taking initiative and learning more about their children's social, psychological, and emotional needs, beyond just academic development. In this

final category, parents seek out knowledge and information and become advocates for their children's well-being.

At the conclusion of their study, Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) question what school administrators really want when they refer to the term "parental involvement." The researchers recommended that school administrators should decide on a definition of parent involvement and develop the definition in a way that suits their schools' beliefs of successful parent involvement. Once the definition is established, school administrators and teachers should communicate it effectively to parents in order to have their involvement. Therefore, Young, Austin, and Growe explain that they are not interested in providing a solid or singular definition of parental involvement; on the contrary, their objective, when discussing the definition of parental involvement, is to help school administrators and researchers develop their own strategies for achieving parent involvement in schools.

Similar to Young, Austin, and Growe (2013), when Epstein (1995, 2008) communicated how she perceives parental involvement by presenting her typology, her focus was not to establish an exact definition of parental involvement either. Epstein aims to contribute to the field by sharing her thoughts on the subject in order to initiate dialogue and awareness. Epstein (2008) and Young, Austin, and Growe are in agreement that the purpose of developing a partnership between schools and parents is to increase parents' participation, develop more effective parenting skills, and help the children's development and academic outcome.

Jeynes (2011) also discusses how parent involvement is in fact considerably broader and more complex than what prior theories about parent involvement have acknowledged. After carefully considering various meta-analysis from earlier studies, the author came to the conclusion that parent involvement does not happen in a single and rigidly defined form. On the

contrary, there are different ways parents can be involved depending on the need of the child, the dynamic of the school, and the availability of the parents; each way has its value and complements the other. Some ways of involvement are more explicit while others are subtle, such as parental style and parent-child communication (Jeynes, 2011). By "subtle aspects of parent involvement," Jeynes refers to parental expectation, communication between parents and children, and parental style. Parental expectation is the general agreement between parents and children regarding the value of education and hard work. Communication between parents and children is key for a loving and tension-free environment and is significantly effective in helping children succeed academically. Parental style, another subtle facet of involvement, is the combination of expressions of love and support with discipline and structure that provides a healthy environment for the children to grow (Jeynes, 2011). The author further explains that subtle aspects of parent involvement can, sometimes, be more important than some explicit expressions of involvement, such as checking homework and volunteering at school.

In order to allow participants in this study to develop their own conceptualization of the term, parent involvement is defined as generally as possible. It is defined as any behavior or effort made by parents with the intention to support their child's academic development.

Promoting Parental Involvement in Schools

Besides the challenges of defining and measuring parental involvement, actually getting parents involved can also prove challenging (Smith et al., 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Not only are parents busy, often working multiple jobs or shifts and juggling other responsibilities while raising their children, some do not know how to approach the school, how to get involved in their child's academic development, or even if their involvement is important or necessary at all (Smith et al., 2011). Additionally, some parents' low self-efficacy as

contributors to their children's academic success has been keeping their involvement in schools low (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Patel & Corter, 2013; Smith et al., 2011).

According to Jeynes (2011, 2012), social scientists agree that parent involvement can make a difference in improving behavior and raising grades and test scores of the child. Epstein and Jansorn (2004) explain that parental involvement can be an effective way to increase children's academic growth, even when parents have limited time. Nevertheless, not much is known about what schools can do to motivate parents to be involved and help their children. Jeynes found in previous studies on the topic that although some social scientists may believe that schools are not able to force parental involvement, many do believe that schools can inspire and help parents learn how to be more engaged in their children's education, develop more parental skills, and, consequently, contribute to considerable improvement in the educational outcomes of their children. Other studies in the field of parent involvement also defend the argument that schools can motivate, educate, and assist parents to learn how to be more involved and develop the capability to help their children in their academic achievement (Patel & Corter, 2013; Young, Austin & Growe, 2013; Vera et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, Smith et al. (2011) acknowledged that parent involvement actually falls along a continuum and not every school sees parent involvement as a goal. On one end of the continuum, schools keep parents informed of what is going on at the school; in the middle, parents are involved in home and school activities that support the students' learning progress; and on the other end of the continuum, there are parents engaged in educational programs at school and in developing school policy.

Smith et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study with 12 urban charter schools across six states in the U.S. with the purpose to examine parent involvement strategies utilized by urban

charter schools. In order to achieve a national sample, researchers selected states for geographic diversity and interviewed charter school authorizers to locate urban charter schools with strong parent involvement. They conducted pilot tests of the interview protocol before refining the instrument to ensure the questions were addressing the intent without bias. The interview protocol consisted of 11 semi-structured questions (during sessions 45 to 60 minutes long) related to parent involvement activities, the goals of parent involvement at the school, techniques used to obtain high level of involvement, the way parent involvement is monitored, and challenges faced by the school in relation to parent involvement. Coding and analysis of the data were done with three members working together as a team to increase reliability. Their first code list derived from Epstein's typology (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community) as well as topics generated by the interview. During the second coding, new codes were added as new ideas emerged. In the third and final iteration of coding, themes were assessed and labeled as either part of Epstein's typology or not, labeled as "new" when they fell outside of Epstein's typology.

In their study, Smith et al. (2011) found that parent involvement activities generally fall within the six types of parental involvement stated by Epstein. They noticed that, unlike the traditional model used by most public schools, the charter schools in the study implemented innovative ways of attracting parents to become involved. For instance, to achieve parents' participation in parent-teacher conferences (Type 2), these charter schools offered incentives, as well as flexibility such as meetings by phone, meetings at night, or meetings at the family's homes. To engage parents in becoming more active parents in the school decisions (Type 5), these charter schools also went beyond what is typically found in non-charter public schools: they empowered parents to participate in decision-making process at school. The authors

concluded that in response to several barriers that keep parents from being more involved, such as lack of time or lack of motivation, the schools should be executing meaningful opportunities for getting parents involved in their child's education.

It must be noted, still, that there are some limitations in this study, as the authors limited their interviews to the school leaders, without hearing what parents would have to say about the subject. Also, the geographic location of the schools or the parent population could produce differences in results if the same interview were to be conducted in other schools. Nonetheless, this study added to the field by showing that schools can contribute to the growth of parental involvement.

Jeynes (2012), who developed a meta-analysis study that examined the relationship between parental involvement programs and kindergarten-twelfth grade school achievement, found results that corroborate with the findings of Smith et al. (2011) on how school-initiated programs can help increase parent involvement. For this study, Jeynes initially searched every major social science research database (such as ERIC, Wilson Periodicals, and Sociological Abstracts), using a total of 60 databases. His search yielded hundreds of articles and obtained 73 that addressed the relationship under study, but only 51 studies contained a sufficient degree of quantitative data to include in this meta-analysis study. There were approximately 13,000 subjects among the 51 studies selected. The author conducted a coding of the studies by looking at report characteristics, sample characteristics, intervention type, and research design. He also calculated the average effect size, defined variables, and calculated tests of homogeneity in order to gain some consistency of specific parental involvement measures across studies. The findings of this meta-analysis study indicated that not only mother-and-father-initiated parent involvement have an impact on a child's educational outcome, but so do school-initiated

programs, including Head Start and ESL training for parents. Jeynes argues in his conclusion that educators should be aware of which elements of parental involvement programs are more efficient in order to instruct parents accordingly. He recommends, however, that further research would be necessary to understand why certain parental involvement programs have more of an influence than others. In addition, considering the limitations of meta-analysis studies, such as the restriction of addressing only the research questions focused in the selected studies, it is recommended to explore other views and angles of parental involvement and school services (Jeynes, 2012), such as parent motivations and challenges for involvement.

Vera et al. (2012), who exclusively studied the involvement of parents of English Learners (EL) by interviewing 239 parents of EL students from 28 different cultural background across four elementary school districts in a Midwestern metropolitan area in the U.S., found that the most common barrier for EL parents were linguistics, lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system, and the desire not to interfere with the way teachers do their jobs. Therefore, the authors concluded that it is useful for schools to provide not only education for parents about the U.S., but also education about the expectations for parent involvement. However, there are some limitations in this study that should be taken into consideration. Although this research was conducted with diverse sample of participants, the parents who took the time to participate in the study may have a higher level of interest and involvement in their children's education in comparison to parents who chose not to participate. Also, the recruitment method utilized may not have been sufficient to reach illiterate parents. Therefore, not all parents' perspectives were represented in the study. Finally, it would have been useful if the study had compared and analyzed the parental involvement of parents with children entering school for the first time and

parents whose children had started kindergarten in previous years in order to observe any

difference in their behaviors and attitudes in regards to involvement in the school.

Patel and Corter (2013), who focused their study more specifically on parent involvement

of children transitioning to kindergarten, came to similar conclusions as Jeynes (2012), Smith et

al. (2011), and Vera et al. (2012) in regards to the importance of the school role when aiming for

parents to get involved. Patel and Corter had initially read related literature which stated that

programs encouraging parent involvement that are offered at school entry (even during

preschool) are exceptionally important in developing parental capacity for engagement.

Successful transitions to kindergarten not only require the child to be ready, but they require the

family to be ready as well. With their research, Patel and Corter corroborated the previous

findings that the school's initiative is important in developing parent involvement. More

specifically, they found that schools that provide services, such as family support, make parents

feel more comfortable, welcome, and able to develop communication with the school and

participate in their child's progress at school. In their study, Patel and Corter surveyed 206

parents (immigrant and non-immigrant) of children between four and five years old enrolled in

kindergarten programs across eight different schools in Canada. In the survey, they included

demographic items such as parent gender, level of education, marital status, and country of birth.

The schools selected were characterized in three different categories according to the services

they offered: the first category is for schools that offer multiple services, including family

support programs and school-based preschool services; the second is for those schools with only

single family support program; and the last category is for the schools with no services offered.

The surveys were analyzed for normality through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and by looking

at skewness and kurtosis values. Generalized linear modeling was utilized when analyzing the

results and comparing the models. In summary, the researchers found that parents in the school sites that offered multiple services were more likely to be involved in the schools and in their children's transition to kindergarten than parents in the other school sites with either no services or a single support program. Immigrant parents across all school site types reported fewer invitations for parent involvement, yet the ones in the multiple services school sites felt more responsible for communicating with the schools. Interestingly, at sites with multiple support programs the disparities in parental self-efficacy for immigrant and non-immigrant families appeared to be eliminated.

Patel and Corter's (2013) research brought additional contributions to the field, especially regarding the transition to kindergarten. However, their study did not provide a deeper understanding about how parents of children transitioning to kindergarten perceive and experience parent involvement. Qualitative and in-depth interviews with these parents could have offered a different perspective with richer details on the subject.

As noted, previous researchers have found how important a school's role is in inspiring, promoting, and helping parents become more involved in their children's education (Jeynes, 2012; Patel & Corter, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012). Schools should know which programs are more successful in increasing parental involvement (Jeynes, 2012) and should be creating meaningful opportunities for getting parents involved (Smith et al., 2011). Programs about the school's expectations of parent involvement can be especially important for EL parents (Vera et al., 2012) and schools that offer multiple services have greater chance of developing parent involvement among parents whose children are transitioning to kindergarten (Patel & Corter, 2013).

Transition to Kindergarten

Kindergarten is an important step in the academic life of the child and may bring substantial implications in the development of the student (Herbers et al., 2011; Nathanson, Rimm-Kaufman, & Brock, 2009). It is usually the first experience of the child in a formal school setting with explicit academic and social goals, and because of this it establishes the beginning of new relationships between the school and the families (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005), even for the ones who previously experienced daycare or preschool settings (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999).

Preschool/daycare missions are very different from kindergarten missions. While preschools/daycares exist to provide families with daytime care and support, and while they do help children with their social and behavioral development, it is kindergarten that offers academic skills and behavioral development that will prepare the child for future years of schooling (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). In kindergarten there usually is a lower adult-to-child ratio in comparison to home, daycare centers, and most preschools (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Additionally, there is also a more rigid requirement for children to sit still, follow the norms, be quiet, and perform good behavior (Herbers et al., 2011). Adjusting to such new experiences can be challenging and requires the development of many skills. Therefore, family involvement with the school is essential to promote the support the child needs during this transition year (Patel & Corter, 2013).

Parent involvement becomes even more crucial in situations where there may be differences in the culture, experiences, and expectations of the family and the school (Herbers et al., 2011; Joe & Davis, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). A national survey found that almost 50% of the typically developing children presented difficulty adjusting to kindergarten

(Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Some of the difficulties in adjusting can be manifested in the child's struggle to pay attention for a sustained period of time, trouble with articulating words, and an inability to communicate effectively (Zill & West, 2001).

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) developed a 2-year-long study about teacher-family relationships in preschool and kindergarten programs. The researchers did cross-sectional analyses of the logs of 35 preschool and kindergarten teachers about the family involvement of a total of 290 students in year 1 and 71 students in year 2. They found that in kindergarten there is more formality in family-school communication and longer face-to-face conversations, such as parent-teacher conferences. While the teacher-family contact in preschools tend to occur more briefly and informally than in kindergarten programs, it is more frequent and direct. Such frequent and informal contact in preschool facilitates a non-threatening environment for more open communication and involvement of the parents. As a result, there is a noticeable diminish in the contact between parents and schools as the child enters kindergarten. According to the authors, there are several explanations for this decrease in the family-school contact. First, the child is older and the parents may not feel the need to be as involved anymore. Second, the setting of the school and the pick-up/drop-off system may not facilitate the informal and frequent contacts that happen more easily in the preschool setting: in preschool the children tend to be dropped-off and picked-up directly in and from their classrooms, but once they enter kindergarten, some children start taking the bus. Third, elementary school policies and priorities may be restraining family-school communication during kindergarten. This last explanation highlights the important role that school administrators have in increasing parent involvement.

Despite the important contributions of Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta's (1999) 2-year cross-sectional analysis, some limitations in their study point to suggestions for future research. First,

this study relies on the teachers' perspectives and impressions of the contact with the parents. Therefore, problems with validity could emerge, as the reporting is only one-sided. Moreover, hearing the parents' perspectives in regards to their communication with the schools and how they experienced the transition from preschool to kindergarten would also be a valuable contribution to the study. Another suggestion is to understand how and what schools can do to create an environment that increases communication and promotes parent involvement. Lastly, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta did not investigate the role of the school counselors as another communication channel between the parents and the school. School counselors can serve as a valuable tool in developing such communication (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

Parent Involvement Programs during Transition to Kindergarten

A potential area for intervention by professionals supporting children and families is to help families improve their quality experiences during the kindergarten transition period, such as clarifying kindergarten academic and development expectations; lowering parenting anxiety; and improving communication between the parents and the schools (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). One way of achieving such goals could be to develop kindergarten transition programs by offering a menu of service options and parenting classes at schools, which can bring great benefit to all families including immigrant families that face culture and language barriers (Patel & Corter, 2013; Vera et al., 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Patel and Corter (2013) found that parents of children transitioning to kindergarten tend to feel more open and more willing to develop communication with the school when there are services being provided.

Wildenger and McIntyre (2011), who interviewed parents of children in kindergarten, found, among their results, that parents with children in that school age group expressed the need for various information about this transition period. The researchers intended to investigate

family experiences and involvement during transition to kindergarten for typically developing children, more specifically to understand parents' perceived needs and concerns during the kindergarten transition and parent involvement in kindergarten preparation activities. They interviewed parents of 86 students enrolled in their first semester of kindergarten. The students included in the study were typically developing and were receiving no special education assistance, had not repeated a grade, and were living with their parents for at least one year. The five elementary schools selected for the study were located in two adjacent counties in the Northeast United States: three in rural school district, one in suburban district, and one in urban district. As part of the interview, the parents completed the revised version of the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition survey (FEIT). For the part where parents were asked to specify how concerned they were with different transition issues, a Total Family Concerns score was create to help calculate and analyze the results. Similarly, a Total FEIT score was created to analyze the items related to family involvement.

Although the study was trying to limit the participants to family with typically developing children, the researchers were unable to bring cultural, ethnical, racial, and other diversity aspects into consideration. For instance, a majority of the children (77.9%) and parents (81.4%) in the sample were White/Caucasian. There is no significant representation of typically developing children born in other countries, raised with different cultural backgrounds, or representing different racial-ethnical groups. Needless to say, the population in the study is also limited as those interviewed are part of a small range of schools (only five schools in the Northeast U.S.).

Despite the limitations in their study, Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) brought interesting contributions to the field. They found, among their results, that the concerns most often cited by

families were related to the socio-behavioral area, such as adapting to new rules and expectations, following directions, and having behavioral problems. In the same study, 50% of the parents also expressed that it would have been helpful for them to have had more information about academic expectations in kindergarten and their child's skills, while 25% expressed that it would have been helpful to get information about the transition to kindergarten. Overall, parents were concerned not only with the transition aspect of entering elementary school, but they also wanted to know more about the expectations and skills related to it, as well as behavioral issues that their children were displaying or could begin to display.

Moreover, strengthening parental involvement with schools right from the start, during the kindergarten transition, can be of great benefit to the child both in short and long terms (Patel & Corter, 2013; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Patel and Corter (2013) agree that working on parents' feelings of efficacy in their involvement helps parents build a continuing relationship with the school and contribute to greater learning outcomes for their children later on.

Barnard (2004) found a significant and positive correlation between parent involvement and long-term effects. The author developed his study based on data collected in 2000 from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, a longitudinal research study of over 15 years with a sample of 1165 children. He found significant association between parental interventions during early school years with later academic success of the child up until age 20. For instance, the more years the parents were rated by their children's teacher as participating at an average score or higher, the greater the association of their children with higher rates of high school completion, more years of school completed, and lower school dropout. Barnard's finding is strengthened by the large sample size, the quasi-experimental design, the longitudinal design, and the ability to control for complicating factors. However, his study had some limitations, such as a non-causal

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correlation between the parents' participation in the research program itself and parents being involved in their own child's school.

The kindergarten transition provides an opportunity for schools and families to develop partnerships and communication about the academic and behavioral expectations of the children, and to work on effective interventions that can increase positive experiences and greater learning outcomes for the children. In fact, parental participation tends to be more appreciated by parents when their children are in the lower grades rather than in the higher grades; also, it tends to be easier for the school to arrange engagement with parents while the students are still attending elementary school (Jeynes, 2012).

Conclusion

In a recent study about family involvement during transition to kindergarten, Kang (2010) found that parents whose children are transitioning to kindergarten do wish to be involved in their children's schooling but face many challenges. The study found that what promotes greater parent involvement and, consequently, positive outcomes for the children, is the understanding of the needs of the families while their children transition to kindergarten. According to the author, there is a demand for more studies that would focus on understanding what families need, but more specifically, studies that encompass families from different backgrounds. "As our early childhood classrooms are becoming more diverse than ever, more efforts to understand all families regardless of their backgrounds should be made" (Kang, 2010, p.66).

There are few published studies that investigated the parents' perspective on the subject. Vera et al. (2012), who interviewed parents of EL, and Patel & Corter (2013), who focused on parents of children transitioning to kindergarten, are examples of quantitative studies that

investigated parent involvement from the parents' perspective. The lack of a deeper understanding of the parents' perspectives, experiences, and expectations about parent involvement lead to the purpose of this study. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to investigate how parents perceive parent involvement and how they are experiencing it as their children transition to kindergarten. Such understanding can assist counselors, school counselors, and teachers in improving their approach and communication with the parents and in promoting services in order to increase parental involvement, especially during transition to kindergarten.

Starting kindergarten is not an easy transition (Herbers et al., 2011; Patel & Corter, 2013); it is an important developmental milestone for both the child and the family (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011), and therefore can be a sensitive period crucial for academic success later on (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Hence, there is a need for studies that would aim to understand parents' perception and experiences with parent involvement during their children's transition to kindergarten, more specifically parents whose first child is transitioning to kindergarten.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to listen to parents whose first child was transitioning to kindergarten and describe how they perceived parent involvement and how they were experiencing parent involvement during this transition. Considering the numerous benefits of schools promoting and improving parent involvement (Jeynes, 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012) specifically in the context of children transitioning to kindergarten (Patel and Corter, 2013), this study aimed to provide school counselors, counselor educators, kindergarten teachers, and other school personnel in-depth understanding of how parents may perceive and experience parent involvement during the kindergarten transition. This study added to the literature by using a qualitative phenomenological approach that allowed a deeper understanding of the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and expectations of the parents being interviewed.

Parents whose first child is transitioning to kindergarten may present anxiety and questions about the transition (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011) and may bring ambiguous feelings in regard to parent involvement. Their understanding of what parent involvement entails may also be unclear and mixed with expectations very different from the school's. Previous social experiences can influence how parents perceive or handle parent involvement (Barnett & Taylor, 2009). Understanding what parents think about parent involvement can facilitate the dialogue between the parents and the school and, consequently, set grounds for the development of effective parental involvement while their children transition to kindergarten.

Research Design and Research Questions

Qualitative research permits the participants to talk more freely about their thoughts and how they feel, and it is not limited to what researchers alone wish to discuss. The purpose of a

qualitative study is to learn what is important for the participants and to explore their world and experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The interviews in this study were conducted in an informal, familiar, and relaxed atmosphere, allowing participants to feel safe and comfortable sharing their feelings, thoughts, and emotions about the subject. Participants were encouraged to talk honestly and openly and the interviews followed a semi-structured design in order to allow time for questions to be processed.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed the researcher and participants to stay focused on the subject and yet provided space for the participants to shape the interview in significant ways. Participants were given the opportunity to explain their thoughts and experiences and build their own responses (Creswell, 2007), allowing both researcher and participant to engage in the dialogue (Groenewald, 2004). When needed, the conceptual framework was, therefore, expanded, modified, or refined throughout the interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). During this study, from design to conclusion, ethical considerations were made to ensure that the participants' rights were protected, including their emotional, physical, and social welfare. This protection is not only a responsibility of the researcher, but also a requirement from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

An interview protocol (Appendix A) developed by the researcher provided common open-ended questions that were asked to all participants and ensured that the research questions were addressed. Interview guides assure that data is collected, analyzed, and reported in an organized and impartial manner (Clark and Creswell, 2010). A parental background questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to explore cultural and demographic information about the participants, such as age, race/ethnicity, gender, among other factors. With the purpose to guarantee a trustworthy qualitative investigation process, the recorded interviews were

transcribed into a Word document and sent by email to the participants providing them an opportunity for member checking their responses and to add any additional information if appropriate. The process of member checking is to ensure that participants are being interpreted accurately and that little or no bias from the researcher is evident.

After the process of member checking, the researcher looked for common themes in the interviews through the process of coding. Coding is used to help qualitative researchers examine data by identifying words, phrases, or short sentences and assign labels to create categories (or themes) that represent concepts (Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The data was coded more than once, since recoding allows the researcher to refine the categories and add new ones (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). With the first iteration, the researcher analyzed the interview transcripts line-by-line, looking for key words or sentences, and establishing the initial codes. During the second iteration, the researcher compared the new data with similarly coded data from other studies, using the constant comparative method, consolidated, added or deleted categories, and produced subcategories. At this point, coding of the data was also peer reviewed by a research colleague enrolled in the same doctoral program and by the researcher's doctoral adviser. The researcher emailed all the transcribed interviews to her researcher colleague who randomly selected half of them to read through and analyze. The researcher and her colleague discussed via Skype their point of views on the data. As to the researcher's doctoral adviser, in addition to reading though a couple transcribed interviews and offering her own interpretation, she also reviewed a list of the codes and categories produced by the researcher. Both peer reviewers helped by identifying blind spots, discussing categories, providing different perspectives, offering possible interpretations, and reducing bias. A final iteration allowed the researcher to use axial or thematic coding, in which previous codes were revised and critiqued,

categories were refined, and themes were generated (Hays & Singh, 2012). The themes were established in accordance to the research questions used to guide this study.

The research questions that were investigated in this study were:

1. How do parents of children transitioning to kindergarten conceptualize the term "parent involvement"?

2. How are these parents experiencing parent involvement?

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology was a philosophical movement in the 20th century initiated by Edmund Husserl (followed by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and other philosophers) and characterized by its fidelity of understanding the essence of the phenomenon, understanding what is experienced in the conscience of the individual (Lima, 2008). According to Husserl (1900), phenomenology is the description of the phenomenon as it is seen in the intentionality of consciousness. Consciousness is understood as the area in which reality is shown or becomes present to each individual.

Giles (1975) explains that, according to Husserl, the phenomenon is simply what is offered to the intellectual gaze as the pure observation, and phenomenology is presented as a purely descriptive study of the experience of the lived thoughts and the knowledge derived from this observation. To accomplish such a goal, Husserl created the phenomenological reduction, which is the suspension of biases, values, or any preconceptions that keeps one from noticing and getting in touch with the real sensations of the experience, the phenomenon. To engage in a phenomenological reduction is to get to the essence of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1900). Phenomenology is to see the world as it is presented to each individual with all of its uniqueness, emotions, feelings, and meanings (Holanda, 2003).

Phenomenological research, therefore, allows researchers to learn what people experience and how each individual interprets the world. To engage in phenomenological research is to search for the in-depth meaning of a particular facet of experience, believing that through the interview process, through the conversation and reflection, the real meaning of the experience in question will be discovered (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Bruns and Holanda (2003) explain that, in phenomenological research, the discourse is received in its own intentionality. According to the authors, the phenomenological researcher should also ask himself/herself what the interviewee meant by any given response. The responses should not be accepted for what they seem to be to the researcher, but for what they really mean to the participant. What is searched for in the conversation is the experience of the interviewee. It is the interviewer's role to remain present and active during the interview and to assist the participants in sharing not only what they intellectually know, but also what they have experienced. It is during the dialogue, explains the authors, that the opportunity to access the lived experience, to reflect, and to share deep thoughts emerges. The researcher's active role is fundamental during the interview, as many participants have probably never had the opportunity before to truly reflect on the experiences and beliefs in question. Thus, phenomenological research is usually characterized by a constructive, active, and flexible interview process, in which the participant and researcher are partners as they build and live the interview dialogue together (Bruns & Holanda, 2003).

Participants

The participants for the current study were parents of children transitioning to kindergarten. The focus was on parents' first experience of parent involvement during kindergarten transition, so one of the selection criteria was that the child transitioning to

kindergarten was the parents' oldest (or only) child. Another criterion was that parents have demonstrated some type of interest in parent involvement by agreeing to participate in the research study. In a phenomenological study, it is important to have participants who are having or have had experiences with the phenomenon to be investigated (Kruger, 1988). Participants were required to be above 18 years old. They could be married, divorced, partnered, widowed, or single and of any socioeconomic status (SES), religious, or ethnical background and have one or more children. In addition, there was the criterion of participants sharing the same household (for more than half of the week) with their child transitioning to kindergarten in the academic year of 2014-2015. Finally, the study was limited to parents whose kindergartners were enrolled in public schools, due to differences in the resources and programs offered by public schools in comparison to what may be offered by private and charter schools. Plus, there may be differences in the expectations of parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten as well as differences in the role of the school counselors among public, private, and charter schools.

To recruit participants maintaining research ethnics, the researcher asked the school counselors and school superintendents from the local elementary schools to send out invitation letters (Appendix C), prepared by the researcher, inviting participants for the study. Potential participants had to match the criteria of the study. The invitation letters mentioned the topic of the study, the length of the interview (up to 60 minutes), the voluntary nature of the participation in the study, the confidentiality, compensation for meeting for an interview (a raffle ticket to win a $25 gift card), and the willingness of the researcher to arrange childcare for any children that may be accompanying the participant during the interview.

Because of the large percentage of Hispanics in Southern California, the invitation letters were sent out both in English and in Spanish and a note communicated that interviews could be

conducted in either language, according to the preference of the participant. The purpose of writing the invitation letter and offering interviews in both languages was to assure that language is not a barrier for including Hispanic parents in the study.

Procedures

Once granted a first approval from IRB for the procedures of this study, the researcher contacted the Superintendents of three School Districts in Southern California to ask permission to distribute the invitation letters to the parents of their kindergarten students. The Superintendents supported this study and helped with the distribution of the letter (see Appendix D with approval letters from Superintendents).

Before the invitations to recruit participants for the study were distributed, a pilot study was conducted to help define the time needed for the interview, ensure that the interview questions chosen provided the data needed to answer the research questions, and practice interviewing techniques. The pilot study also helped generate ideas and identify errors before the research interviews started. The researcher reviewed, reformulated, and reordered some of the interview questions after conducting the pilot study and final approval from the IRB (Appendix E) was granted to the changes in the interview protocol and the invitation letter.

The participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling and convenience. Purposeful sampling is a technique that consists of previously establishing specific criteria for the sample of the study, which requires intentional thought from the researcher, based on the purpose of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this study, the researcher selected only participants who met the study criteria. The convenience aspect was based on location; the researcher resided in Southern California and, therefore, decided to limit the study to this area. Since phenomenological researchers benefit from face-to-face interaction with participants and

do not gather the same desired in-depth information when conducted long distance via phone or Internet, the researcher only selected participants that lived in the area and were available to meet in person. In addition, it followed a first-come basis as the participants voluntarily responded to the recruitment made through invitation letters sent home from their child's school or through snowball technique. The researcher selected the first parents who met the criteria and contacted the researcher demonstrating interest and availability in participating in the research. Some of the participants in the study were recruited through the invitation letters sent home from the school, however most of the participants were gathered through snowball technique.

Interviews took place in a private and quiet room arranged by the school counselor at the school site w here the child was going to school, at the participant's residence, or at the researcher's residence. Being in a comfortable and private place helped achieve a relaxing atmosphere, which contributed to a more in-depth conversation. Childcare for any accompanying child was offered to the participants in order to avoid interruptions and assure a calm atmosphere for the parents to talk. The researcher offered to pay for childcare. An informed consent (Appendix F) was given to each of the participants on the day of the interview reminding them about the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. For potential Spanish-speaking participants, an informed consent written in Spanish was made available and the researcher was ready to conduct the interviews in Spanish. All the participants were English-speakers and the interviews were conducted only in English. Interviews were audio recorded once the participant granted permission and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes each.

The interviews were scheduled according to the convenience of the participant and conducted privately with each participant. Rapport was established prior to starting the interview by offering a welcoming setting and asking simple questions about the participant's day, making

participants feel relaxed and comfortable in the presence of the researcher. Developing trust through the establishment of rapport helps diminish any defensive mechanism or barriers that could keep the participant from sharing more openly. During the interview, follow-up questions were common to allow conversations to flow naturally and the researcher to clarify meanings and feelings. Although such design may not always ensure uniformity of data collection across participants, it captures the participant's voice and allows the researcher to obtain a richer understanding of the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, all the participants seemed open and comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and the interviews followed the protocol of the semi-structured questions without disruptions. The researcher took field notes after the interviews were conducted to avoid distraction or interruption during the conversation. Taking field notes is an additional method of qualitative data collection and helps to ensure that details were retained (Lofland & Lofland, 1999).

The phenomenological researcher explores the meaning of individual lived experiences and only a small number of people are investigated (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). A sample of up to ten participants is suggested in phenomenological research studies (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, ten participants were selected to participate in the study. The total number of participants was determined based on saturation as saturation is used in most qualitative studies to determine sample size (Mason, 2010). A researcher reaches the saturation point when the gathering of new data does not offer supplementary information to the investigation. The point of saturation, however, can be difficult to identify since it is such an elastic notion; therefore, the decision of adding or not adding more data to the existing findings is subjective (Mason, 2010). In this study, the point of saturation was identified when responses started to become "repetitive" and new data gathered was not offering additional information.

By interviewing different parents and looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives, the researcher improved reliability and ensured trustworthiness. Another strategy used to establish trustworthiness was member checking, which happened after the transcription of each interview when participants were contacted by e-mail to read through the transcript and asked to clarify, if needed, any aspect of the interview.

Trustworthiness of Results

"To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of results in qualitative studies can be done through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings. It is comparable to what is known as internal validity in quantitative studies, which is a way of assessing whether the findings of the study are true and certain (Guion, Diehi, & McDonald, 2002). In order to enhance credibility (or truth-value), this study used triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation is one of the techniques used to improve reliability (Golafshani, 2003). It establishes credibility in a study by looking at an aspect of the study from multiple perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation was done by examining the consistency of different data sources using the same method or, in other words, by comparing people with different perspectives. Member checking, another strategy to establish credibility, was done by e-mailing the participants a few days later and asking them to read the transcripts of their interviews (typed into a Word document) and to clarify any aspect of the interview. In addition to the e-mail, a phone call with follow-up questions was made to one of the participants. Finally, peer debriefing, which explores aspects of the study that may have remained unnoticed by the

researcher or may have been affected by the researcher's biases and assumptions during the data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) also took place. This technique can be a very effective strategy to improve reliability as it allows the researcher to become aware of his or her posture toward the data and analysis. In this study, peer debriefing was done by a research colleague enrolled in the same doctoral program and by the researcher's doctoral adviser.

Transferability is used to determine whether or not the findings have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is comparable to what is known as external validity in quantitative studies. In order to enhance transferability, this study provided information about the participants (while still keeping them anonymous), the questions asked, and the context. With the information provided, readers are able to decide whether or not the results can be transferred.

Dependability is used to determine that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, it evaluates whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data. External audit, which is the examination of both the process and the product of the research by another researcher, is conducted to enhance dependability. Because this is a phenomenological study, external audit may have an interpretative aspect that may lead to different understandings of the data and provoke disagreements on the conclusions. For this reason, external audit was not conducted.

Confirmability is used to determine neutrality, or in other words, the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. In this study, triangulation (the same technique used to enhance credibility) was used to enhance confirmability.

Author Reflexivity

This study was motivated by my interest in this topic primarily as a school counselor. Prior to starting my doctoral studies, I worked as an elementary school counselor in Brazil. During that time, I saw several children who needed the support of their parents to succeed academically, change behaviors, or overcome adjustment issues, especially when transitioning to kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten marks an important step for both children and parents. For the child, it is the start of formal schooling, adjustment to new rules, and preparation for a long journey of academic and personal growth. For parents, it is also the beginning of a new journey, a journey of learning how to support their children and how to be good parents and balance work and family life as their children transition to a new educational environment. In other words, they are learning how to become effectively involved in their children's schooling and academic progress.

Working with parents can be a challenging task and achieving the necessary level of parent involvement is not always easy. With time, I was able to learn some about what Brazilian parents can feel and think about parent involvement in schools. It helped me develop more appropriate strategies to approach them, although I learned that parents have very different thoughts and experiences about parent involvement. Remaining flexible, non-judgmental, and open to listening was always important.

After I moved to the United States, I had the opportunity to do an internship as an elementary school counselor intern in Virginia as part of my doctoral program. This experience provided me the opportunity to observe how parent involvement in the U.S. could be somewhat different from what I had experienced before in Brazil—different in some ways but somewhat similar in others. Ultimately, most parents have the same goal: they simply want what is best for

their children. Thus, since then, I have been interested in learning more about parent involvement, not just about how parents conceptualize parental involvement, but also what they think are the main challenges and benefits. By understanding more about the parents' perspective, I believe I can be more prepared to approach parents in schools and work with school counselors in training here in the U.S.

However, no matter where we are, parents always come with their own previous experiences and will always have preconceptions of what they think parent involvement entails; their behavior and attitudes can also be very different from each other. As a counselor, my theoretical perspective has been based on the humanistic phenomenological-existential approach in which each client is seen as unique with his or her own way of perceiving and experiencing the world. Each person is who he or she is based on his or her own life experiences (Forghieri, 2007). So, while there may be parents very involved and proactive in their children's academic development, there may also be parents that just do not know how to be involved, or if their involvement is necessary at all. Therefore, because this is a very subjective field and responses can be quite diverse and difficult to quantify, my desire to learn about parent involvement in a qualitative and more in-depth way has guided this study into using a phenomenological research method.

For over four years, I also worked as a psychotherapist and play therapist. I was a licensed clinical psychologist in Brazil and, when counseling and listening to my clients, I based my work in the phenomenological-existential approach. During that time, I developed listening skills, developed self-awareness to bias, exercised abstaining from personal judgment, and learned to focus on the feelings and true meaning of experiences presented by each client. I believe that such experience not only emphasized my desire to guide this study using a

phenomenological approach, but also helped with the interview process and data analysis, such as when building rapport with the participants, engaging in the dialogue, listening to the meanings of the feelings and experiences being shared, and reducing bias during interpretation of the data.

Finally, I must add that my interest in this topic stems from the fact that I am a parent myself. I am a mother of two young children. My oldest child is four years old and will transition to kindergarten in one year. Moreover, other parents whose children are, or will soon be, transitioning to kindergarten surround me. Conversations related to this topic frequently arise, which increased my interest in acquiring more knowledge and understanding about this phenomenon. Very soon I will be a parent of a child transitioning to kindergarten. I was very aware of my personal stance and beliefs when interviewing parents, analyzing the data, and discussing the results in order to control for biases during this study.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to describe how parents perceived and experienced parent involvement as their first child was transitioning to kindergarten. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do parents of children transitioning to kindergarten conceptualize the term "parent involvement"?

2. How are these parents experiencing parent involvement?

This chapter encompasses the findings and analysis of the data. It begins with a demographic overview of the participants in the study followed by data analysis procedures and a discussion of the results guided by each research question. Results are presented through the themes that emerged after the interviews with the participants were analyzed.

Participants

The sample consisted of ten mothers ranging from 27 to 44 years old with an average of two children in each individual household. They were all married and residents of Southern California. One of the mothers was born and raised outside of the U.S. Eight were Caucasian and two were Asian/American. All the participants were English speakers. All participants had completed high school, from which eight had a bachelor's degree, and two out of those had also completed a master's program. Seven of the mothers worked outside the home. All kindergarteners referred to in the study had attended preschool prior to starting kindergarten.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This phenomenological study was guided by semi-structured interviews. Data was gathered from parents of kindergarteners from five different public elementary schools located in

Southern California. The criteria were parents above 18 years old whose oldest child (or only) was currently enrolled in kindergarten in the public school system during the time of the interview and who were living in the same household of the child (for more than half of the week). A small sample size of ten participants allowed this qualitative researcher to acquire deeper understanding of the parents' feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The sample size was determined by saturation, a point in which data collection was no longer generating new categories or themes. The data collected from those parents enabled the researcher to gather information and understanding about their perspectives, feelings, and experiences. The data was analyzed through the process of coding and identification of themes.

Prior to starting the data analysis process, the researcher transcribed each interview into a Word document and carefully reviewed those documents to ensure accuracy of the data prior to member checking them with each participant by email or phone. Next, the researcher read each transcript in its entirety with the purpose of completing a surface analysis; the researcher then read each interview question across each of the transcripts to identify patterns, similarities, and initial codes within each interview question.

During the process of analyzing data, patterns became prominent, which included similar responses regarding the participants' perceptions, thoughts, and experiences. Identification of common statements, meaningful sentences, and significant units of responses were annotated, reviewed, analyzed, and recorded into charts. Such patterns in their responses were registered as themes. In phenomenological analysis, themes are the results of meaningful statements that were coded into open codes, categorized, and linked to the research questions. The themes illuminated to the findings and allowed for a better understanding of how these parents perceived and were experiencing parent involvement when the children were transitioning to kindergarten. With the

purpose of reducing bias and assumptions during the coding process and improving trustworthiness of the results, the researcher consulted with a peer and her doctoral advisor to compare and discuss codes, reflections, perceptions, and themes.

The researcher read each interview question and answer across all ten transcripts several times while analyzing the data. Three iterations of the data were conducted, which incorporated methods such as the constant comparative method (compare new data with data from previous studies) and axial coding (compare codes to identify relationship and connections among them). Revisiting the data repeatedly allowed the researcher to confirm codes, recode, refine categories and sub-categories, review themes, and establish that themes emerged with accurate meanings.

Findings

This section describes findings outlined by each research question. Chapter 5 will provide implications and discussion of the results.

Research Question 1: How Do Parents of Children Transitioning to Kindergarten Conceptualize the Term "Parent Involvement"?

In order to understand how parents of children transitioning to kindergarten conceptualize the term parent involvement, during the interview the researcher asked participants to share what comes to their minds when they hear the term "parent involvement". As the interview continued, they were asked for examples of parent involvement and parent involvement during the child's transition to kindergarten. Participants were brought to reflect on the term of parent involvement more than once throughout the interview and not only in a general way, but also in the specific context of the transition to kindergarten. The following section describes the major themes that emerged, along with quotes from the participants used to give voice to these lived experiences.

Themes

Helping at school. This theme was the first shared by the participants when asked about what comes to their mind when they hear the term parent involvement. By helping at school, participants referred to many activities that relate to helping the teachers, volunteering in the classrooms, participating in school events, volunteering at field trips, getting involved in parent-teacher association (PTA), helping at the library, becoming a "Room Mom", and other functions offered for parents who wish to be involved. Overall, parents immediately associated parent involvement with volunteering and helping out at school:

"Parents finding some way to helping however they can, like they can sign up to bring stuff or to come and volunteer."

"Getting involved in the parent-teacher organization."

"Supporting school, you know, their fundraisers, and activities like that."

"Being in class and being able to help."

Supporting the child's learning process. For some parents, it was not until they were asked for examples of parent involvement that they reflected among their answer and expanded their response from "helping at school" to "supporting child's learning process" as another way of parent involvement. All participants were clear about their belief that supporting their children in their learning process is an important aspect of parent involvement. Parents explained that they can support their children's learning process by helping with their homework, promoting activities at home that support their learning, asking about what they have learned at school, providing a space for them to work on homework activities at home, enrolling them in enrichment classes after school, and making sure they have balanced and healthy meals, a

consistent schedule, and a good night's sleep to be fully focused on learning. Participants expressed that their goal is to help their children succeed academically:

"Doing activities that would stimulate her brain to enjoy learning."

"Making sure that they are eating a good breakfast…and packing good healthy snacks…and making sure that when they come home that they have enough time to rest and decompress. If the parent is not involved, the child is not going to succeed."

"Actively finding out what the teacher was trying to teach and then supporting that at home with whatever extra activities you can do."

"Parents have to reinforce that at home, which is huge, 'cause if kids don't hear it at home, they don't really learn that much."

Communicating with the child. Another major theme that emerged among participants when reflecting about parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten was developing communication with their children. Many parents, even the ones who believe their children adjust to new situations easily and were ready for kindergarten, shared the belief that talking and preparing their children for the transition was of utmost importance. Parents explained that communicating with their children is a way to follow up on their feelings and progress in school and to know more about what is going on. Parents also mentioned that developing communication with their children now might help maintain good communication in the future. According to these parents, it is important to talk to the children about the school, the routine, the teacher, the friends, and so on:

"Talking to him about going to school…telling him all about it."

"If you already have that communication developed, it will hopefully, my hope, is that it's going to continue on."

"It's a new school, it's going to be fine, just like you started a new school in preschool."

"Preparing them before they even get started at school…that whole summer, talk about it and explain what to expect."

"Prepping her for the differences in, you know, to the structure in her new school. So, like, talking to her and explaining to her, like, there's a lot of kids, this is how they do lunch, you know, explaining every step of the process so that she knows that even though it's different she's going to be ok, and they are going to help her, so it's not scary."

Fostering independence in the child. Fostering independence in the child was a common theme among parents. When brought to reflect on their children's transitions to kindergarten specifically, some parents shared that it is important to provide the opportunity for the child to navigate on his or her own. Some parents shared that their children were ready to face the transition on their own and therefore did not need much help:

"He's so sociable, he's not afraid, not shy, so I think because of that, his personality traits just help him, so it becomes, you know, easy to adjust to certain situations."

Other parents explained that it is valuable for parents to step back sometimes and trust the teacher, allowing the children and the teacher to connect without the parents' constant interference:

"He needs his space to learn how to do those things on his own."

"You have to let them be responsible for themselves….So you kind of have to trust the teacher, that she's doing what is best for the students."

"In my case, 'cause mine is so attached….We needed to step back."

"Some parents are too involved [physically]. That's not really helpful."

Overview of the Findings Related to Research Question 1

The themes related to the first research question offer a comprehensive overview of how parents perceive parent involvement. According to the participants, there are different ways of parent involvement. Moreover, parent involvement occurs through different interconnections between the parent, the school, and the child. The first theme (helping at school) happens between the parent and the school. The second theme (supporting the child's learning process) occurs with the interconnection of all three elements: parent, school, and child. The third theme (communicating with the child) is developed between the child and the parents. The fourth theme (fostering independence in the child) happens between the child and the school, when the parent intentionally steps back to allow the school to act and the child to navigate on his or her own.

Research Question 2: How Are These Parents Experiencing Parent Involvement?

The purpose of the second research question was to describe how parents were experiencing parent involvement. It aimed to gather understanding regarding their feelings and actions as their children transition to kindergarten, as well as their experience related to the support offered (or not offered) by the schools.

During the data analysis, as the coding process was being done, categories were added, deleted, and refined. Nine categories about the parents' experiences were found and then built into three themes, aiming to answer this second research question. The nine categories were (1) good/easy transition, (2) difficult transition, (3) parents are communicating with their children, (4) parents are being actively involved in the schooling process, (5) having to work and having younger children are the main challenges for parent involvement, (6) teachers are attentive to the children and accessible to parents, (7) school offered orientation meeting to parents, (8) parents would like more information about their children, and (9) has not met the school counselor. The

first and second categories were built into the first theme, which refers to the parents' feelings during the kindergarten transition. The third, fourth, and fifth categories were built into the second theme, which refers to the parents' actions as their children transition to kindergarten. Lastly, the sixth, seventh, eight, and ninth categories were built into the third theme, which refers to how parents experienced the support received from the schools.

Themes

Parents' feelings. This theme refers to how parents felt about their children's transition to kindergarten. For some of the parents interviewed, their children's transition to kindergarten was an easy step and all went well. They shared that they felt ready and that their child was ready for it too:

"It was good, he was ready for it. He was excited, I was ready."

"Overall it was pretty easy."

"It was really easy."

Other participants, however, shared feeling some type of anxiety or concern about the transition, especially in the beginning. Some parents explained that it was related to not knowing what to expect while others mentioned having concerns about their children's ability to navigate social situations:

"Putting her into kindergarten…was very difficult cause we really didn't know what to expect."

"I was very worried at first because I didn't know, um, I didn't know how difficult it would be for them."

"Not being sure how the new teacher would be or how the new school would be, you know, because you just never know when it's a new situation."

"I was worried about him starting kindergarten because he can be kind of shy."

Parents' actions. This theme refers to what parents have done to help their children with the transition to kindergarten. Parents shared that one of the major things that they have done, as a way of being involved and helping their children succeed, was developing communication by talking directly to their children and listening specifically to their children's impressions and experiences. The participants said that they explained to their children about the new school and the changes that would possibly happen in their routine:

"Obviously talked about it a lot….it's a new school, it's going to be fine."

"When you tell them how it's going to be, then they know that's what happens."

Participants also stated that they believe it is important for parents to promote a good dialogue with their children on a regular basis in order to know how to assist them:

"A lot of communication with her…trying to help her with her confidence…and just helping her feel better about herself."

"Talking to her everyday about her day….If there's anything going on that raises a red flag."

"He talks to me a lot about how he feels at school and, um, I just try to listen and see what he needs from me to do for him."

Besides developing communication with their children, the parents said that another way of helping their children's transition was getting involved in the schools by volunteering in the classroom or helping the teacher:

"I volunteer in his class."

"I think being in the classroom has kind of helped him."

"I helped out the teacher by doing things at home, like, you know, helping her sort out papers and all that. So [my son] knew that I was involved and I knew what they were going to be doing ahead of time, and he felt good about that."

Other parents mentioned that their involvement has been through supporting their children's learning process by helping with homework and being aware of what the school is doing.

"We try to stay, um, very much involved in, on top of, you know, of all the information that comes from the school. Like, you know, just being very pro-active about her homework."

"I read all the materials."

Ultimately, all parents interviewed said that there are challenges that keep them from volunteering, participating more in the schools' activities, and being more involved overall. The main challenge they shared was a lack of time, due primarily to work demands and the care of younger children. Despite the challenges presented, participants in the study offered several examples of their involvement and expressed wishing that they had time to do more.

"I'd love to be more involved but I can't because I work."

"If it wasn't my new baby, I could do a lot."

"I'm just crazy with work and it consumes a lot right now."

"I've got my other daughter and when I don't have her, when she's in daycare, I'm working. So that makes it harder, you know, so I think that's probably the main thing."

"I just have my hands full with the twins. They are 4 months old, so, um, yeah, I mean that's really the only thing that is setting me apart from that, because I would love to."

Support from schools. This theme talks about the support the schools have or have not offered to parents. Participants said that the kindergarten teachers had been the most helpful resource from the school. Many parents shared that their child's teacher was caring, attentive to the children, well prepared, and easily accessible to the parents:

"The teacher is extremely nurturing and really loving….I think the teacher in general really, really helps."

"The teacher was really good and well prepared and she gave us actually this list of books to read."

All parents mentioned that they had the teacher's e-mail and they could talk to the teacher whenever they needed to about their children's progress or challenges:

"I can easily contact the teacher."

"I trust the teacher. She's talked to me before about him and I can talk to her about my concerns….I feel like she knows what she's doing. She would tell me if there's a big concern."

"We've had a good situation with our teacher.…[We] discuss, you know, the challenges that she's seeing and she, she's been really helpful!"

Moreover, when talking about supports received from the school, parents also mentioned having had an orientation meeting in the beginning of the school year that was very helpful. They said that during the orientation meeting they had the opportunity to meet the kindergarten teacher, the classmates, and other parents:

"They had like, you know, an orientation on the beginning of the year so that all the kids could meet each other and parents could meet the teacher. That was helpful."

"They showed a little slide-show and explained, you know, the structure of the school, how it worked, and how we would contact them for any information and stuff like that."

Parents explained that the orientation meeting served to lower their anxiety and clarify expectations. It provided them with information regarding the school rules, policy, guidelines, curriculum, what the children would be learning, what to expect during the kindergarten transition, how to contact the school, and so forth:

"She kind of put my mind at ease on how they ran things and how everything was gonna go."

"Went over…routine of the school, dismissal, what happens, the dress code, all of the policy and procedures, and then we went over things that the previous students had done so we know what to expect. As far as when they would start reading, what to expect from them, you know, what kind of things would they learn and what time period to expect it. So that was very helpful."

"She handed out a booklet and just went over the guidelines, you know, what she expects out of the kids and everything else, the different things they do in the classroom, what they are going to be learning."

Even with all the information and support received from the teachers and the school during the orientation meeting, some participants shared that they wish the school would keep them informed about how their children are doing on a more regular basis. These parents said that they wish to have more detailed information about what their children do at school and how they are doing in comparison to other students:

"I would like to know more about their time, who they played with, and, you know, maybe, maybe, maybe have some pictures or even videos."

"Being able to know them individually, like how your kid is doing on a more regular basis."

"A meeting about their report card to see if there's something I need to be doing more of....I don't really know if we are behind or we are ahead."

"I feel like I'm not being informed enough."

Lastly, it was also gathered during the interviews that none of the participants had been introduced to the school counselor yet. They shared that they did not know who the school counselor was and some said that they were not even sure if there was one in their school:

"I do not know if there's one."

"I have no idea who it is."

"If there's a counselor, I'm not quite sure who it would be."

"I don't know.…I know they have a school nurse who is really sweet. I don't know if they would use her also as the counselor."

Overview of the Findings Related to Research Question 2

The themes related to Research Question 2 demonstrate understanding about the participants' experience with parent involvement during their children's transition to kindergarten. The three themes that emerged summarized (1) how parents felt during their children's transition to kindergarten; (2) what they did to help their children during the transition; and (3) what kind of support the schools have (or have not) offered to the parents.

Summary

There were significant key findings that resulted from this study of parents' perceptions and experiences of parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten, represented ultimately by a total of seven themes.

First, it was found that parents conceptualize the term parent involvement as a phenomenon that happens through the interconnection between parent, child, and school. These interconnections were represented by the first four themes that emerged: (1) helping at school; (2) supporting the child's learning process; (3) fostering independence in the child; and (4) developing communication with the child. Concluding that parent involvement is not limited to explicit interactions between the parent and the school, such as parents volunteering or being part of the PTA, but it also happens through subtle interactions between the parent and the child at home, such as parents developing communication with the child and promoting a supportive learning environment at home.

Second, regarding the parents' experiences as their children transition to kindergarten, it was found that their experiences are composed by different complex factors that were represented by the remaining three themes that emerged: (1) parents' feelings; (2) parents' actions; and (3) support from schools. Parents' experiences can be permeated by positive and challenging experiences that depend not only on the parents or the children, but also on the schools and the support they offer to the parents.

Chapter Five

Discussion

In this chapter, results of the current study are discussed. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding and be able to describe how parents of children enrolled in kindergarten perceive the term "parent involvement" and how they are experiencing parent involvement during this transition. Few studies have explored the perspectives and experiences of parents regarding parent involvement during transition to kindergarten and, to this date, no published study has investigated this phenomenon using a qualitative research method. A brief overview of the study is provided below, followed by a discussion of the results guided by each research question and a summary of major findings. Next, potential limitations of the study, implications of the study, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion are presented.

Brief Overview of the Study

The role of parents during academic development is fundamental (Epstein, 2008; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004) and can offer important contributions to the child's academic achievements (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Starting parent involvement as early as in kindergarten can contribute to even greater benefits (Herbers, Cutuli, Lafavor, Vrieze & Leibel, 2011; Patel & Corter, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Parent involvement can be a way for parents to offer support to their children, attend to their needs, and help them overcome many challenges (Patel & Corter, 2013).

Schools have a major role in promoting parent involvement (Jeynes, 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012), and can be quite effective in increasing parent involvement, especially during kindergarten, by taking the initiative to reach out to parents and offer services (Patel & Corter, 2013; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). During the transition to kindergarten, parents are

not only concerned about knowing how their children are doing, but also about receiving information regarding kindergarten and academic expectations (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Parents' expectations can be quite diverse during the transition to kindergarten, and schools need to understand these expectations in order to promote services and increase parent involvement (Kang, 2010).

With the purpose of understanding parents' perspectives and definitions of parent involvement, the current study gathered the voices of ten parents whose children were transitioning to kindergarten. These parents shared their thoughts and feelings about parent involvement and how they were personally experiencing this phenomenon.

Discussion of the Results

The semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher with each participant of this study was guided by the two research questions. Discussions of the findings are presented based on each of the research questions.

Research Question 1: Summary of Major Findings

Research Question 1 aimed to describe how participants in this study conceptualized parent involvement. After analyzing the interviews, four themes emerged as the major aspects of parent involvement. Such findings show how the participants understand parent involvement as a phenomenon that happens during different interactions between the parent, the school, and the child. Each theme represents an interaction. The graphic below (Figure 1) illustrates these interactions.

Figure 1. Interactions among parent, child, and school.
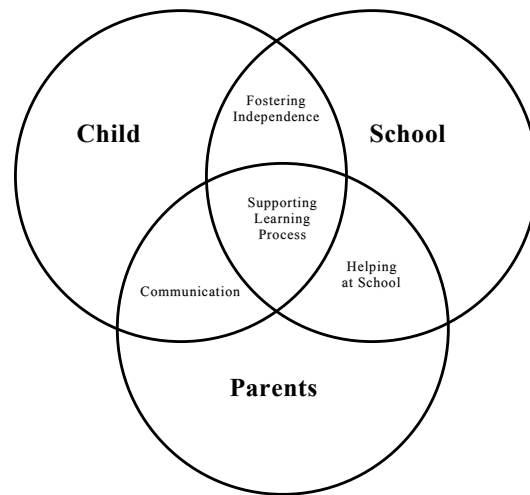
The themes were: (1) helping at school, (2) supporting the learning process, (3) communicating with the child, and (4) fostering independence in the child. The first theme, *helping at school*, referred to parents being actively involved in the schools through activities such as volunteering; the second theme, *supporting the learning process*, indicated parents connecting with the school, being aware of how their children are doing, and reiterating what their children have learned at school; the third theme, *communicating with the child*, referred to when parents talk to and listen to their children, providing space for both parents and children to share thoughts, expectations, and feelings; and the final theme, *fostering independence in the child*, meant stepping back and allowing the school to take charge of the children and the children to navigate on their own without the parents' constant interference.

Based on the themes emerged from this first research question, the researcher observed three major findings related to how parents of children transitioning to kindergarten perceive parent involvement. The first finding is that parents recognize that there are different ways of parent involvement. Parent involvement can happen explicitly, such as by parents volunteering at

school, engaging in PTA, and participating in school events; or subtly, such as parents communicating with their child, supporting the learning process at home, and helping their child develop independence.

The second finding is that parent involvement is a collaborative work that happens through the interaction between school, parent, and child. Parent involvement does not depend on the effort of the parent, the school, or the child alone; it requires all three to take initiative and connect with each other in direct and supportive ways. Parent involvement happens, for instance, when parents volunteer and help at school; when parents develop a communication channel with their child; when parents support, at home, what their child has learned at school; or when parents know when to step back and allow their child to navigate on his or her own while at school.

The third finding is that the way participants in this qualitative study define parent involvement correlates to how parent involvement is defined in other studies, corroborating previous findings. More specifically, they correlate to five, out of the six, types of parent involvement found in the framework developed by Epstein (1995, 2008), and to the four categories of parent involvement presented by Young, Austin, and Growe (2013). In addition, they correlate to how Jeynes (2011) understands the different types of parent involvement.

In the framework developed by Epstein (2008), the six types of parent involvement are (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with community. The first, which refers to parents working on parenting skills and connecting with their children, correlates to *supporting the learning process*, *communicating with the child*, and *fostering independence in the child*. In all three ways of parent involvement there is the presence of parenting skills that promote the ability to connect

with the children, listen to their feelings, understand their behaviors, and assess their needs. The second and the fourth types of parent involvement, which are the communication between parents and school and parents being involved in the learning process, are both associated with *supporting the learning process*, as they both require parents to be aware of what their children are learning at school and to provide support at home. The third type, volunteering, and the fifth, which refers to parents actively participating in school committees, are both related to *helping at school*, which can be through participation in events or active involvement in committees. The sixth, collaborating with the community, is the only type of parent involvement in Epstein's framework that was not mentioned by the participants in this study, which may have been due to the fact that the children in the study are still in kindergarten and such activities are more likely to happen when they are older.

The categories used by Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) for defining parent involvement are (1) active engagement, (2) parental support, (3) communication, and (4) parents as advocates. The first category, which is parents participating and volunteering in schools, relates directly to *helping at school*. The second category, which indicates home-based activities that promote the child's learning process, matches the theme *supporting the learning process*. The third, communication, can be associated with both *supporting the learning process* and *communicating with the child*, since it means the communication that happens between the parents and the school when parents support their children, and the communication that is developed between the parent and the child. The final category, parents being advocates, is related to *fostering independence in the child*, as it refers to when parents seek out information, make decisions, and become advocates for their children's well-being. For example, if the presence of the parents in the classroom is not what will help their child transition, then parents

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may step out and help in other ways, but they are still aware of what is going on at school and are advocating for their children's well-being.

Jeynes (2011) believes that some ways of parent involvement are explicit, like checking homework and volunteering at school, while others are subtle, such as parental style and parent-child communication. This study corroborates Jeynes' understanding of parent involvement, as the participants mentioned some examples of parent involvement that are explicit and others that are subtle.

Research Question 1: Discussion of Major Findings

Participants in this study understand that there are different ways of parent involvement and that parent involvement happens when parents are connected with their child and with their child's school. Moreover, the way this group of parents perceives parent involvement is consistent with what was found in other studies. Thus, talking about the needs, the expectations, the different types of involvement (even the most subtle ones), and the importance of parent involvement, are all possible endeavors.

Therefore, when talking with parents and promoting parent involvement, school counselors, teachers, and other school personnel should be aware of the multiple ways in which parent involvement can happen and how they depend on the effort of both the school and the parents together. In addition, these professionals should be able to communicate to parents about how subtle ways of involvement, such as communicating with their children and fostering their independence, can be as important (if not more) than other explicit ways, like volunteering in the classroom. Parent involvement happens not only when parents are involved in the schools, but when parents are involved with their children's learning process. Parent involvement starts at

home, during day-to-day parenting, while parents build a loving, disciplined, encouraging, and peaceful environment for their children to learn and blossom.

Research Question 2: Summary of Major Findings

Research Question 2 aimed to explore participants' experiences with parent involvement as their children transition to kindergarten. After analyzing the interviews, three themes emerged to answer this research question. The themes summarize the parents' feelings and actions during the children's transition to kindergarten, and reflect how these parents have experienced the support offered from their schools.

The first theme, *parents' feelings*, indicated that some parents experienced their children's transition to kindergarten as being good and easy, while others shared feeling worried and anxious. The second theme, *parents' actions*, revealed that the participants in this study were involved parents, as they offered several examples of what they had done to help their children with their transition to kindergarten, such as communicating with their children, knowing what is going on at school, and helping with homework. It also revealed that participants have challenges (lack of time due to work demands and the care of younger children) keeping them from being more involved. The third theme, *support from schools*, showed that participants have experienced the orientation meeting offered in the beginning of the school year and the connection with the kindergarten teacher as the major support received from the schools. It also showed that, even feeling supported, some parents still demonstrated the need for more support when they expressed their wish for more information about what was going on with their children while they were at school. Lastly, this theme revealed that none of the participants in this study knew who the school counselor of their child's school was, or if there was one at all.

Based on the themes emerged from this second research question, the researcher observed four major findings related to parents' experiences with parent involvement during their children's transition to kindergarten. The first finding is that parents' experiences are composed and influenced by several factors that can be presented in different ways to each parent. First of all, there are the feelings parents have about the transition, the teachers, and the school, for instance, which can be manifested to some parents positively and to others in a more challenging way. Second, there are the things that parents do to help their children (their involvement as parents), which can also happen in many different forms and can be affected by challenging circumstances in the parents' lives. Third, there is the support that parents receive (or do not receive) from the schools. Parents' experiences with parent involvement depend on how each parent perceives and experiences the support offered to them by their child's school in each circumstance.

The second finding is that what participants shared they had been doing to help their children during the kindergarten transition was consistent with what they shared when they were asked to conceptualize parent involvement. This consistency indicates that participants in the study were confident in the choices they were making as parents and in their level of involvement. These parents were communicating with their children, were volunteering in their children's school, were supporting their children's learning process, and were encouraging and fostering independence in their children; in other words, they were behaving in accordance to what they believed parent involvement to be.

The third finding is that besides demonstrating being involved parents, the participants in this study also demonstrated feeling supported by their children's schools, corroborating with previous studies about the importance of schools in offering support to parents during transition

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to kindergarten in order to promote parent involvement. Parents of children transitioning to kindergarten benefit and feel more comfortable when the school offers information and support to the parents (Patel & Corter, 2013; Vera et al., 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). The participants in the current study mentioned the attention they received from the kindergarten teachers, along with the information they gathered from the orientation meeting as the main support received. Parents explained that their children's kindergarten teachers were easily accessible and supportive to parents, and caring to the children. According to the participants, right from the start, teachers demonstrated the warmth and care they had toward the children and the openness they had toward the parents, making parents feel safe by knowing they could easily e-mail or talk to the teachers about their children. In regards to the orientation meetings offered in the beginning of the year, parents said that they helped them by lowering their anxiety of not knowing what to expect and by showing what the children would be doing and learning at school. Both the kindergarten teachers and the orientation meetings were perceived as the support the schools offered that helped participants feel confident with the school and trusting of the process. Schools can promote parent involvement by reaching out to the parents, offering them services, and developing a caring, friendly, and supportive environment for the parents (Jeynes, 2011).

The fourth finding is that, among all participants, a lack of knowledge in regards to the role and existence of the school counselor was observed. When asked, none of the parents in the study knew who the school counselor of their child's school was, or if there was one at all. There was no knowledge about how resourceful the school counselor could be to them.

Research Question 2: Discussion of Major Findings

Participants in this study shared how they have experienced parent involvement by expressing how they felt during the transition, talking about what they did to help their child

(their involvement as parents), and discussing the support they have received from the school. Overall, despite some divergence regarding the feelings about the transition, expectations for more information about their child on a regular basis, and challenges that kept them from being more involved, these parents were involved parents that demonstrated feeling confident in their involvement. The examples they gave of their involvement were consistent to the beliefs they shared about what parent involvement should entail. Such confidence and good level of involvement could be due to the fact that these parents have experienced receiving satisfactory support from their children's schools. The participants in this study shared that they received support from both the schools and the teachers. Previous studies have found that schools that offer support and services to the parents are contributing to the parents' experiences by helping parents overcome insecurities, build confidence as parents, and become more involved in their children's schooling (Jeynes, 2011; Patel & Corter, 2013). This qualitative study corroborates with previous findings that schools that offer support to parents help promote parent involvement.

Moreover, findings from this study indicated that parents of children transitioning to kindergarten might not always be aware of the role or the existence of the school counselor in their schools. Therefore, this study can bring awareness to school counselors and counselor educators about such lack of knowledge among these parents. School counselors should also be aware that they play an important role and serve as a valuable resource to assist both parents and children during their transition to kindergarten (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when discussing the results of this study and when planning future research. First, as the purpose of this study was to acquire a

phenomenological in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and not to generalize to the rest of the population, there were a small number of participants (ten mothers) and, therefore, the findings represent only the experiences of those interviewed and cannot be applied to all parents of children transitioning to kindergarten. Also, participants were volunteers who met the criteria and chose to participate in the study. Therefore, by taking the time to respond to the recruitment invitation and meet for the interview, the participants indicated interest in the topic, some level of parent involvement, or desire to share experiences about their children's transition to kindergarten. However, there are benefits in this in-depth semi-structured research method with only few participants, as it voices the participants' unique and personal perspectives and experiences, allowing them to share their feelings and deeper thoughts about parent involvement and their children's transitions to kindergarten.

Second, because this phenomenological research bases its findings in the self-reported narrative of the participants, it can only be trusted, but not guaranteed, that the participants are sharing authentic feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Yet, since there was consistency in each of the participant's narration, it is believed that what they shared was authentic and reflects their true experiences. However, there is the possibility that the participants shared their thoughts, beliefs, and what they said they were doing based on what they thought the researcher wanted to hear, rather than on the actual truth.

Third, results of this study were based on what was gathered through the lens of the researcher and were subject to interpretation. Nonetheless, to guarantee trustworthiness of the results, reduce bias, and increase reliability, the researcher used member checking after transcribing the interviews and relied on the assistance of two co-researchers when coding and analyzing the data.

Implications

Schools can help promote parent involvement. The need to identify ways in which schools can support parents and promote parent involvement during the kindergarten transition remains among school personnel. The current study offers implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and kindergarten teachers regarding awareness and knowledge related to parent involvement during the kindergarten transition.

School Counselors. This study offers important contributions to school counselors. First, it brings knowledge and awareness of how parents' experiences during the kindergarten transition can be permeated by different factors, including challenging ones, and that it is important for schools to offer support to these parents. School counselors can serve as an important tool in offering services and support to the parents. Second, it helps school counselors understand how parents are conceptualizing parent involvement and what they have been doing to help their children. Discussing parent involvement strategies with parents is a possible endeavor and school counselors can help promote school-parent partnership and increase parent involvement. Lastly, it brings awareness of how the existence (or role) of school counselors in the schools is not always known by parents whose children are transitioning to kindergarten. In this study, none of participants (who were educated and involved parents) knew about the existence of the school counselor in their child's school. School counselors could develop ways of introducing themselves to the parents right from the start.

Counselor Educators. One of the major roles of counselor educators is to prepare future school counselors. In order to help school counselors in training become qualified professionals, counselor educators can benefit by learning how parents of children transitioning to kindergarten are experiencing and perceiving parent involvement, becoming aware of the lack of knowledge

that these parents may have regarding the school counselor, and acquiring knowledge about the role of the schools in promoting parent involvement. Therefore, counselor educators can prepare future school counselors to promote parent involvement and help families during the kindergarten transition.

Kindergarten Teachers. Not only is it beneficial to promote awareness about the kindergarten transition and parent involvement to school counselors, but also to kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers work directly with the children on a daily basis and are, most of the time, the most direct and frequent contact between parents and schools. Therefore, these professionals should be aware of the level of their impact in promoting parent involvement. By being caring, warm, welcoming, and accessible not only to the children, but also to the parents, teachers are opening doors for the parents to enter the education process of the their children and accompany them on their life-time journey. Teachers are also important for other professionals, such as the school counselors, by helping identify atypical behaviors, recognizing progress, and assisting with information for possible diagnosis.

<div align="center">

Future Research

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Recommendations for future research are presented based on the findings of this study. First, this study only looked a very small sample of parents in Southern California. Future research could explore the perspectives of parents in different school districts, in different states in the U.S., or in different countries, including parents with different educational levels, race, ethnicity, and SES.

Also, this study only explored the perspective of the mothers. It would be interesting to investigate the experiences and perspectives of the fathers, other caregivers, and even the children. Moreover, future studies could research the perspectives and experiences of parents

who have had previous experience with the kindergarten transition with their older children. In addition, future research could investigate how the school counselors conceptualize parent involvement and how they perceive the importance of their role in the schools regarding parent involvement.

Lastly, it would be useful to conduct a longitudinal study that would examine the relation between how parents perceive and experience parent involvement during the kindergarten transition year and in future academic years of their children, observing the continued experiences of their involvement and how it relates to their children's academic performance each year.

Conclusion

From a qualitative perspective, the current study offers evidence that, for parents, there was not a single definite way of being an involved parent. Instead, parents perceived that there are several ways of being involved, either more explicitly such as volunteering at school or sometimes as subtle as talking with the child about his or her day. Furthermore, parent involvement usually happens through the interaction of the parents, the child, and the school, as it is not an effort that should be initiated by either the parent or the school alone, but a collaborative work involving both, as well as the child. Additionally, the concept of parent involvement shared by the participants in this qualitative study correlates to the definition and understanding of parent involvement offered in previous studies from Epstein (1995, 2008), Young, Austin, and Growe (2013), and Jeynes (2011). Even though these authors did not use a qualitative approach to listen directly to the parents, as in the current study, it is most interesting to notice the similarity of the findings in how parent involvement is conceptualized. Therefore, parent involvement is a known subject that can be approached and discussed by the schools.

Additionally, findings of this study showed that different factors, such as feelings, actions, and support received from the schools, permeated parents' experiences with parent involvement during transition to kindergarten. Moreover, this study showed that these experiences could be perceived as positive (e.g. when parents felt supported by the school), or challenging (e.g. when a lack of time prevented them from being more involved). Worth of mentioning is that participants showed noticeable consistency between what they shared they believed parent involvement should be and what they shared they did regarding parent involvement. Such consistency is a sign that they had confidence in what they were doing as parents and in how involved they were.

Also, based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that schools can support parents and help increase parent involvement. Parents can benefit from services and programs offered by the schools, helping them assimilate feelings, develop confidence, and, ultimately, promote parent involvement. Participants in this study, who demonstrated being involved and confident parents, also shared feeling supported by the school. Parents shared being involved through volunteering in the classroom, helping the teacher, communicating with their children, helping their children with their homework, and so forth. Regarding the support received from the schools, they did mention wishing for more information from the school about their children on a regular basis, but they still shared feeling supported. All the participants across all five schools in this study reinforced how caring, attentive, and easily accessible the kindergarten teacher was and how helpful the orientation meeting had been. Such finding suggests that schools that offer support to the parents help promote parent involvement, corroborating previous studies.

Lastly, the findings showed that during kindergarten transition, parents might not always be aware of the role of the school counselor, or even the existence of such professional in their

school. Participants in this study were not communicated about the presence of a school counselor in their schools and, therefore, had no knowledge of how this professional can serve as an additional support during the kindergarten transition and during the years to come.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about your personal experience as a parent during your child's transition to kindergarten. How did you feel?

    • From your perspective, how is your child experiencing his/her transition to kindergarten (first time in formal school)?

2. What have you been doing that could be helping your child's transition to kindergarten?

3. Would you say that there might be any barriers or challenges that may be keeping you from being more involved in your child's schooling?

4. Are you aware of anything that the school has been doing that is helping your child's transition to kindergarten? And anything that is helping you as a parent during your child's transition?

5. Did your child's school offer any kind of orientation meeting or preparation for transition to kindergarten to parents and/or children in the beginning of the school year?

    • If so, tell me about your experience and recollections from this meeting.

6. What comes to your mind when you hear the term "parent involvement" regarding schools?

7. Can you give me some examples of parent involvement?

    • Can you give me some examples of parent involvement in the context of children transitioning to kindergarten?

8. Do you think that parent involvement can be beneficial (helpful) to a child who is transitioning to kindergarten? Can you give me some examples?

9. What other kind of support (for you and for your child) would you like to receive (or wish you had received) from the school during this transition period?

10. Have you had any interaction with any staff or teacher of your child's school so far? Tell me about this interaction.

11. Have you had any interaction with the school counselor? Tell me about this interaction.

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B

Background Information about the Parent

Age:
___

Marital Status:
__ Single
__ Married
__ Separated / Divorced
__ Widow
__ Partnered

Race/Ethnicity:
_____

Your highest attained educational level:
__ Did not complete high school
__ High school
__ Associate Degree
__ Bachelor's Degree
__ Master's Degree or higher

Have you attended (as a student) an American public school in the US when growing up? If so, which grade groups? Mark all that apply.
__ Elementary school
__ Middle school
__ High school
__ I have never attended an American public school in the US

Languages you speak at home:
Main language: _____
Secondary language: _____
Others: _____

How many children do you have?
_____

Do you work outside of the house?
__ Yes, part-time
__ Yes, full-time
__ No

Appendix C

Invitation Letter in English

Dear parent,

I am a doctoral student and I am here to invite you to participate in my study about parents' experience during transition to kindergarten.

In order to be selected for this study you must meet the following criteria:
- Be a parent (male or female) with at least one child currently enrolled in kindergarten;
- The child enrolled in kindergarten must be your oldest (or only) child;
- You must be living in the same household as your child who is enrolled in kindergarten;
- You must be above 18 years old.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact me to schedule a meeting. It will be a one-on-one interview that can last up to 60 minutes. All your personal information will be kept confidential throughout the study.
Participants selected for this study will have a chance (1 in 12 odds) to win a $25 gift card from Target.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me at:
Phone: 540-557-7218
E-mail: beatrizflima@gmail.com

Your participation is voluntary and will bring valuable contributions to my study.

Thank you,
Beatriz Kodnovich

Invitation Letter in Spanish

Estimado padre/madre,

Mi nombre es Beatriz Kodnovich. Soy una estudiante de doctorado y quisiera invitarlos a participar en mi estudio acerca de su experiencia como padre (o madre) de un niño(a) en transición al *kindergarten*.

Para poder participar en este estudio usted debe cumplir con los siguientes criterios:
• Ser un padre (o madre) con por lo menos un hijo(a) matriculado(a) en *kindergarten*;
• El niño(a) matriculado(a) en *kindergarten* debe de ser su hijo(a) mayor (o hijo único);
• Usted debe de estar viviendo en el mismo hogar que el niño(a) que está inscrito en *kindergarten*;
• Usted debe de ser mayor de 18 años de edad.

Si deseas participar en este studio, por favor póngase en contacto conmigo. La entrevista será uno-a-uno, puede llevarse a cabo en inglés o en español y puede durar hasta 60 minutos. Toda su información personal será confidencial durante todo el estudio.
Los participantes seleccionados para este estudio tendrán la oportunidad de ganar una tarjeta de regalo de $25 de Target.

Si deseas participar en este studio, por favor póngase en contacto conmigo através del:
Celular: 540-557-7218
E-mail: beatrizflima@gmail.com

Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria y aportará valiosas contribuciones a mi estudio de investigación.

Muchas gracias,
Beatriz Kodnovich

Appendix D

Approval Letter from the Superintendent of Buellton Union School District

Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>

Re: Doctoral Study

Bryan McCabe <bmccabe@buelltonusd.org>   Wed, Oct 15, 2014 at 10:23 AM
To: Jennifer Tatum <jtatum@buelltonusd.org>, Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>
Cc: Lisa Maglione <lmaglione@buelltonusd.org>

Beatriz,

Your study should provide some interesting and valuable insight into this critical area of school success. I approve your use of of Oak Valley families for this project and I look forward to learning about the results.

Thank you.

Bryan

Bryan McCabe, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Buellton Union School District

(805) 688-6992 x1201
bmccabe@buelltonusd.org

From: Jennifer Tatum
Sent: Friday, October 03, 2014 9:28 AM
To: Beatriz Lima Kodnovich
[Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]

Approval Letter from the Assistant Superintendent of Orcutt Union School District

Gmail by Google

Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>

RE: New Email from Beatriz Kodnovich.

Holly Edds <hedds@orcutt-schools.net>   Fri, Nov 21, 2014 at 11:04 AM
To: Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>

Hi Beatriz,

Your documentation looks good and we are happy to assist you with you research. I am at the district level, would you like to distribute the request to all of our Kindergarten parents, or only parents at one of our schools? I can facilitate letting the site principal(s) know the study has been approved once I know that information.

Thank you,

Holly

Holly Edds, Ed.D.

Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services

Orcutt Union School District

500 Dyer Street

Orcutt, CA   93455

(805)938-8929

(805)938-8941 (fax)

hedds@orcutt-schools.net

Approval Letter from the Superintendent of Solvang School District

Gmail
by Google

Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>

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research study with parents of kindergartens

John Karbula <johnk@solvangschool.org>   Thu, Nov 20, 2014 at 9:46 AM
To: Beatriz Lima Kodnovich <beatrizflima@gmail.com>

Hi Beatriz,
Thank you for providing me with this information.
I tried to call you but the number said the voice mail box was full.
I would be happy to work with you on this.
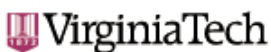Let me know what to do to proceed.
Thanks - JK
[Quoted text hidden]
--
Dr. John Karbula, PhD
Superintendent/Principal
Solvang School
johnk@solvangschool.org
970-768-3993 - cell
805-697-4454 - Solvang School

Appendix E

IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	October 20, 2014
TO:	Nancy E Bodenhorn, Beatriz Furtado Lima
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ABOUT PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES
IRB NUMBER:	**14-822**

Effective October 17, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date:	**October 17, 2014**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**October 16, 2015**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**October 2, 2015**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix F

Informed Consent in English

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Act as a Human Participant

For the study you are being invited to participate in, the researcher will ask about personal experiences and thoughts related to you as a parent of a child transitioning to kindergarten. You are eligible to participate in this research because you have a child enrolled in kindergarten this academic year who resides in the same household as you (for more than half the week), and because this child is either your oldest or your only child. Sharing your experiences and perceptions is vital to this study. Your and your child's names will remain confidential in the publication and presentation of results, meaning that no one else, besides the researcher, will have access to your name and information.

This one-on-one interview will take no more than 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed to a Word document. Once transcription is completed, the audio files will be deleted. If needed, there will be either a second meeting or some e-mail exchange to verify the transcripts and other information gathered from this interview. The interview consists of questions about your thoughts and personal experiences related to your child's transition to kindergarten. Among risks of participation, it is possible that some questions may cause emotional discomfort. Should this occur, you may consider consulting a trusted colleague for support (see attached list of resources). The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board has approved this research study and has determined that participation poses minimal risk to participants.

Benefits of participation include the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences as a parent during your child's transition to kindergarten.

As a token of appreciation for your time and interest, the researcher will donate a $25 gift card from Target to be randomly given to one of the participants.

Participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will not be identifiable or connected to you in any way.

You have the right to refuse to participate. You also have the right to interrupt the interview and withdraw from participating at any time. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way.

By signing your name below, you are agreeing that you have read and fully understand the information provided to you, and you are indicating your consent to take part in this study and have this interview recorded. In addition, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and that you are a parent of a child enrolled in kindergarten in at Oak Valley Elementary School in the current academic year. You are also confirming that the child enrolled in kindergarten is either your only child or your oldest child.

If you should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, you may contact:

Nancy Bodenhorn, Associate Director

School of Education, Virginia Tech

(540) 231-8180 / nanboden@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore, Chair

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

(540) 231-4991 / moored@vt.edu

Office of Research Compliance, 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497), Blacksburg, VA 24060

I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in the research study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Informed Consent in Spanish

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Consentimiento para participar como Humano

Para este studio, el cual está siendo invitado a participar, el investigador le preguntará acerca de sus experiencias personales y pensamientos, como padre (o madre) de un niño(a) en transición al *kindergarten*. Usted es elegible para participar en esta investigación porque usted tiene un(a) niño(a) inscrito en el *kindergarten* este año académico, reside en el mismo hogar que usted (durante más de la mitad de la semana) y porque este niño(a) es su hijo(a) mayor (o hijo único). Compartir sus experiencias y percepciones es de vital importancia para este estudio. Su nombre y el de su hijo(a) permaneceran confidenciales en la publicación y presentación de los resultados, lo que significa que nadie más, aparte del investigador, tendrá acceso a su nombre e información.

Esta entrevista personal no tomará más de 60 minutos. La entrevista será audio grabada y luego transcrita a un documento de Word. Una vez que la transcripción se ha completado, se eliminarán los archivos de audio. Si es necesario, habrá una segunda reunión, o intercambio de correo electrónico, para verificar las transcripciones y otra información obtenida durante la entrevista. La entrevista consta de preguntas acerca de sus pensamientos y experiencias personales relacionadas con la transición de su hijo(a) al *kindergarten*. Entre los riesgos de la participación, es posible que algunas preguntas puedan causar malestar emocional. Si esto ocurre, usted puede considerar consultar a un compañero professional de confianza para apoyo emocional (ver lista adjunta de los recursos). El *Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board* ha aprobado este estudio de investigación y ha determinado que la participación supone un riesgo mínimo para los participantes.

Los beneficios de la participación incluyen la oportunidad de compartir sus pensamientos y experiencias como padre (o madre) durante la transición de su hijo(a) al *kindergarten*.

Como muestra de agradecimiento por su tiempo e interés, el investigador va a donar una tarjeta de regalo de $25 de Target que se dara al azar a uno de los participantes.

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria y sus respuestas no seran identificables o conectadas a usted de ninguna manera.

Usted tiene el derecho a negarse a participar. Usted también tiene el derecho de interrumpir la entrevista y retirar su participacion en cualquier momento. Si se retira, no le afectará en modo alguno.

Al firmar su nombre a continuación, usted acepta que ha leído y entendido la información proporcionada a usted, y usted está indicando su consentimiento para participar en este studio y tener esta entrevista grabada. Además, usted acepta que tiene 18 años de edad o más y que usted es el padre (o madre) de un niño(a) inscrito en el *kindergarten* en *Oak Valley Elementary School* en el presente curso academico. Usted también confirma que el niño(a) inscrito en el *kindergarten* es su hijo(a) mayor o su único hijo(a).

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre la protección de los participantes en la investigación con seres humanos sobre este estudio, puede comunicarse con:

Nancy Bodenhorn, Associate Director
School of Education, Virginia Tech
(540) 231-8180 / nanboden@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore, Chair

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

(540) 231-4991/ moored@vt.edu

Office of Research Compliance, 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)

Blacksburg, VA 24060

Por la presente reconozco lo anterior y doy mi consentimiento voluntario para participar en el

estudio de investigación.

Firma del participante: _____ Fecha: _____