Preservice teacher education in family engagement: An emerging model

Kathy B. Grant

The University of Montana
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PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:
AN EMERGING MODEL

By

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This mixed methods research study investigated four NCATE accredited schools of education in a western state to determine the extent to which elementary teacher education curricula incorporated knowledge, skills, and understanding of family engagement. Literature demonstrated the need to broaden teachers’ awareness of the critical role parents play in supporting academic achievement through enhanced partnerships.

Additionally, the study sought the recommendations of key stakeholders in pursuit of family engagement: deans of schools of education, teacher educators, teachers, student teachers, parents, principals, and family counselors. Therefore, the dual purpose of the research was to explore current elementary curricula and to seek input to improve knowledge, skills, and understanding.

The mixed methods paradigm employed relied on the triangulation of sources from 183 respondents through student teacher survey results, focus group interview recommendations, and teacher educator questionnaire responses. Syllabic evidence of elementary course work and required field experiences was coupled with teacher educator indicators. A pilot study field-tested questionnaire instruments for clarity, succinctness, and topical applicability.

Teacher educators supported infusion of family engagement strategies throughout elementary programs. However, a credit cap of 128 was cited as a constraining factor for the addition of a stand-alone course. Approximately 82% of teacher educators confirmed family engagement coverage, often not explicitly reflected in syllabi. On the average, student teachers listed 2 to 4 courses pertaining to family engagement. Moreover, approximately 60% surveyed commented upon either a lack of or very little preparation to interact with parents. Focus groups stressed facilitative communication. An open door policy for all families, especially those of diversity, was a repeated theme.

A Model for Preservice Teacher Education in Family Engagement emerged through a grounded theory approach that highlighted four potential roles:

- Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner
- Teacher as Parent Facilitator
- Teacher as Cultural Liaison
- Teacher as Resource Intermediary

An extension of the model suggested strategies teacher educators might utilize in their courses to enhance parent engagement.

Recommendations included capitalizing on NCATE parental involvement standards; providing authentic family-focused field experiences; evaluating knowledge, skills, and understanding; promoting dialogue amongst groups with vested interests and strengthening awareness of family partnering benefits.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

"The education of teachers is one of the most vital aspects in improving the education of America's youth and ... cannot be based on yesterday's realities for tomorrow's schools" (Houston & Houston, 1992, p. 265). Schools of education can adopt models from exemplary "promising practices for teachers related to infusing parent involvement into their university instruction" (Hiatt-Michael, 2001, p. 2). Davies (2002) believes "prospective educators must be prepared to work positively with parents...learn through instruction and experience that partnerships with parents...need not diminish their professional expertise or status but in fact can enhance them" (p. 390). When elementary teachers enter a classroom equipped with the experiential and knowledge bases to become reflective practitioners eager to engage parents in partnerships a step will be made towards strengthening student achievement (Houston & Houston, 1992).

A realization of the need for family-school partnerships to support student achievement in school should develop during preservice teacher education (Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Fero & Bush, 1994; Foster & Loven, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; McBride, 1991; Robinson & Fine, 1994; Swap, 1993; Tichenor, 1998; Young & Edwards, 1991). As supported in the research findings of two decades or more, parental attention to student learning has been linked with higher student achievement accounting for "10% to 20%" of the variance in achievement as demonstrated by correlational research (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998, p. 20). In addition, Hiatt-Michael (2001) and Epstein (2001) reviewed studies from the past two decades indicating teachers' efforts to
involve families. Hiatt-Michael (2001) noted the benefits of family engagement in the form of:

- better student attendance;
- higher graduation rates from high school;
- fewer retentions in the same grade;
- increased levels of parent and student satisfaction with school;
- more accurate diagnosis of students for educational placement in classes;
- reduced number of negative behavior reports;
- and most notably higher achievement scores on reading and math tests. (p. 1)

Moreover, research documented a lack of undergraduate teacher preparation in the knowledge, skills, and understanding to build working relationships with parents (Edwards & Young, 1992; Evans-Schilling, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand, Kreider, & Erickson-Warfield, 1994; Stallworth & Williams, 1981; Williams & Chavkin, 1984). Tichenor (1998) stressed, “In order to effectively work with parents and families, teachers need knowledge, skills, and confidence to direct the parent involvement process” (p. 237). The School of education, as an institution setting the standards for the knowledge and attitudes preservice teachers must attain, should take steps to restructure teacher education to deal with the realities of families today (Kochan & Mullins, 1992). DeAcosta (1996) argued for the value of “broadening student teachers’ understanding in family and community involvement ... [based on] family involvement research findings” (p. 9).

Kaplan (1992) concluded, “The assumption [behind] family-school interactions is that the efforts of school and families are linked, that they can either support and reinforce each other or they can compete and undermine each other” (p. 273). Davies (2002) painted a picture of the current culture of schools:
Visit 10 schools randomly in the United States and you will discover in nine of them that most teachers and administrators still hold parents at arm’s length. You will see many of the tried-and-true forms of parent involvement—an open house in the fall, two or three short parent conferences a year, parents attending student performances and sports events, some teachers calling parents when a child is misbehaving, an annual multicultural fair, a parent association that raises money, and a business partnership that donates equipment. But you’ll observe few if any parents...actively involved in the school’s efforts to make changes in curriculum, teaching, student rules, homework policies, or scheduling. (p. 388)

Statement of the Problem

The central goal of this study was to explore a western state’s schools of education elementary teacher preparation curricula for evidence of instructional strategies that promoted knowledge, skills, and understanding of family engagement. More specifically, the purpose of this mixed method survey study was to examine the existing opportunities for preservice elementary teacher training in strategies promoting family engagement at the four universities located in a western state which received accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and held membership in the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Training (AACTE).

Additionally, the study sought to understand the recommendations of key stakeholders in the pursuit of family engagement: teacher educators, education department chairpersons, deans of schools of education, teachers, student teachers, parents, family counselors, and elementary principals. The suggestions of key
stakeholders in the pursuit of family engagement provided the context for developing plans for implementation throughout schools of education. By seeking their judgment in respect to various dynamics of family involvement, perceptions from those intimately involved in forming partnerships were authenticated (Williams, 1992).

Based on those recommendations, the three essential components of the “ideal” elementary teacher education program: knowledge, skills, and understanding in developing family-school partnerships with parents, were specified. To generate elements of an exemplary elementary teacher preparation program the inquiry explored the following:

1. the current extent to which elementary teacher education curricula from the four state universities incorporated existing knowledge, skills, and understanding of best practices promoting parental engagement; and

2. the recommendations of the key stakeholders—teachers, education department chairpersons, teacher educators, deans of schools of education, student teachers, parents, and principals concerning knowledge, skills, and understanding of family-school partnerships in elementary teacher preparation.

Therefore, the study explored curricular offerings for preservice teachers in their work with families, and subsequently, examined suggestions that could contribute to teacher growth. A linkage between family engagement best practices generated through insight from key stakeholders culminated in a model adaptable to schools of education.

Importance of the Study

Recent teacher education reform literature has documented the need to prepare teachers in family engagement techniques before they enter the classroom (Davies, 2002;
Gallego, 2001; Popewitz, 1987; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez, 1997; Tom, 1997; Zeichner, 1999). In spite of this well-documented need, Zeichner, Melnick, and Gomez observed that community field experience interacting with families is mentioned only once in the entire 900 pages of Houston’s *The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (1990) (Zeichner, Melnick & Gomez, 1996). Since 1990, expanded awareness of the efficacy of parental engagement has resulted in increased dialogue, further research studies, and strong advocacy in the area of family involvement (Davies, 2002).

Clearly, recognizing the potential of the home-school learning environment was an important facet of a teacher’s disposition. Hiatt-Michael’s (2001) Pepperdine University study reported follow-up evaluations from recent graduates noted working with families as a missing component. Additionally, Hiatt-Michael (2001) stated, “If teachers do not receive training in teacher education programs prior to entering the classroom, opportunities to acquire such training within the school setting are limited” (p. 2).

Moreover, teacher training failed to address the need for preparation of teachers for the economically depressed, culturally and racially diverse sections of society in which many now live (Edwards & Young, 1992; Ginsberg & Clift, 1990; Grant & Secada, 1990; Jones & Bledinger, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Popewitz, 1987). “There is some evidence that certain kinds of community experiences facilitate the development of positive attitudes towards poor parents that are contrary to the deficit attitudes that still are dominant in many public schools” (Zeichner et al., 1996, p. 179). Therefore, “basic knowledge of family structures and values should be included in teacher education programs” (Houston & Houston, 1992, p. 265).

In a top-down effort to encourage and increase the participation of parents in their children's schooling, Congress added an eighth goal to the National Education Goals calling on schools and teachers to institute policies and practices that actively engage parents and families in partnerships to support the academic work of children at home (Carey, Lewis & Farris, 1998). Although well intentioned, both Goals 2000 Parental Participation objectives and Title 1 Parental Involvement provisions which have been restructured to encourage partnerships with families (Epstein, 1995) have been impeded, for "in spite of two decades of federal support for parent involvement... traditional educational governance had not yielded significant participation of parents" (Fruchter, Galletta & White, 1992, p. 5).

The notion of a partnership between families and schools, endorsed by various constituencies, held promise (Davies, 2002; Dryfoss, 2002). Seeley (1984) believed his "Educational Partnership Model," which redirected the thinking of educators from viewing students as "clients" or "targets" of a school service delivery approach, to considering students as members of families, peer groups, and communities, part of the larger organism of the school, necessitated a positive shift in teacher perspective (p. 386).
In this partnership model, "education is seen as a shared responsibility of the home, school, and community" (p. 386).

Educational reformers have recognized the critical ingredient of family-school relations as pivotal to student success. John I. Goodlad, in his book *Educational Renewal: Better Teacher, Better Schools* (1994), delineated seven generalizations about strong schools that appeared to have held up over time. Goodlad (1994) concluded:

The good school appears to be connected to homes and parents in positive ways. Parents report knowing their children's teachers and meeting with them. They claim to know what the school is doing, in part because the school efforts to keep them informed. Parents in poor schools [those not encouraging family engagement] are more likely to report not knowing or talking to their children's teachers. They claim not to know much about the school their children attend and complain that the school does little to keep them informed. (p. 214)

Another noted educational reformer, Lawrence Cremins (in Goodlad, 1994), wrote "that it is folly to talk about the excellence in American education without including, in addition to schooling, the education proffered by families, day-care centers, peer groups, television broadcasters, and workplaces" (pp. 17-18). Cremins (in Goodlad, 1994) maintained that "educative communities," of which schools are a minor part, are at the core of educational systems (pp. 17-18). In other words, the dynamic interrelationships within a child's life strongly affected chances of success in the classroom. Lezotte (1997) stated, "The education of a child is much broader than the learning that takes place in the school, even under the best conditions" (p. 54), and parents should be considered implicit
partners in education, with these partnerships being made explicit, especially for children of poverty.

“Research…is converging that confirms that educators need to know how to work with families and communities…these competencies are required every day of every year of every teacher’s professional career” (Epstein, Sanders & Clark, 1999, p. 24).

According to Morris, Taylor, Knight and Wasson (1996), “Teachers entering the profession today must possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and strategies that will enable them to work effectively with … families from diverse backgrounds” (p. 20). These researchers concluded that the “theme of family involvement in education should be the focus of a required course for all prospective teachers, as well as a topic to be infused in coursework throughout the teacher preparation program” (Morris et al., 1996, p. 20). A Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement was developed by the researcher based on recommendations of participants in the study.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms applied:

1. **Accreditation**- A process for assessing and enhancing academic quality through voluntary peer review. “The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation informs the public that an institution has a professional education unit that has met national standards of educational quality” (NCATE, 1995, p. 70).

2. **Community Field Experiences**- Gallego (2001) defined this educative experience as an opportunity for students to actively work at community centers, after-school programs, and service activities within localities. “Contrasting
settings...[were instrumental] in [preservice teachers’] understanding the multiple sources of influence that create both opportunities and constraints to teaching and learning” (p. 312).

3. **Family**- The traditional family structure of a two natural parent system of support for children is now the exception rather than the rule. Family structure may now be comprised of single mothers, a mother and a stepfather (or a surrogate), single fathers, a father and a stepmother (or a surrogate), grandparents acting as parents, or other natural relatives acting in the parental role. In addition, adoptive families and alternative lifestyle family configurations should be considered.

4. **Family Engagement**- For the purposes of this study, the general term “family engagement” promotes positive communication between families and educators. By engaging families in dialogue about student learning, educators can nurture productive ties to families. Terms such as “parent involvement,” “family-school partnerships,” “family involvement in education,” or “parent relations,” as used in the original literature will remain.

5. **Family-School Partnerships**- Specifically between parents or families and teachers connotes a mutually collaborative, working relationship serving the best interests of the student, either in the school or home setting for the primary purpose of increasing student achievement (Epstein, 1991).

6. **Family Resource Centers**- A family-friendly room in a school building used as a location for parents to congregate; it may contain a parenting library, food and beverages, a clothing closet, and computer access (Bush & Wilson, 1997).
7. **Knowledge**- “Information, facts, principles, theories, or models concerning parent engagement in education that teachers need to be acquainted or familiar with” (Chavkin & Williams, 1984, p. 10).

8. **Parent Involvement**- The focus will be on the evolving complementary roles of the teacher and parent in supporting the student’s academic achievement at school and the ensuing at-home learning (Epstein, 1991).

9. **Preservice Teachers**- Preservice teachers are those elementary education undergraduates who have yet to student teach under the supervision of a cooperating teacher.

10. **Skills**- “The abilities, competencies, techniques, or expertise that teachers need to develop as preparation for involving parents in education” (Chavkin & Williams, 1984, p. 10).

11. **Strategy**- “A method or approach to training teachers in the successful acquisition of certain parent involvement knowledge, understanding, or skill” (Chavkin & Williams, 1984, p. 10).


13. **Typology of Parent Involvement**- Epstein’s (1987) widely accepted model of the six classifications of school-family-community involvement structured possible development and implementation of a comprehensive parent partnership program. These included:

   a. Parenting: the basic obligation of families

   b. Communicating: the basic obligation of schools
c. Volunteering: family involvement at school

d. Learning at home: family involvement with children on academic activities

e. Decision-making: family participation in school governance and advocacy

f. Collaborating with community: exchanges with community organizations (p. 705)

14. Understanding- “Personal interpretations based upon comprehension, awareness, or cognition of relationships among various variables or factors by teachers that are needed as part of their preparation for involving parents in education” (Chavkin & Williams, 1984, p. 10).

Assumptions Inherent in the Study

For the purpose of this study, the following were assumed:

1. Researching both coursework and field-based experiences as viable opportunities for knowledge, skill, and understanding of family engagement hold equal potential for the future teacher.

2. Epstein’s (1987) “Typology of Parent Involvement” provided the basis for diverse categories of family engagement, specifically in partnership with schools. However, this typology limited partnerships to traditional configurations of teacher/parent relationships. The current study endorsed a broader vision of family/educator collaboration based on a comprehensive review of literature.
3. The four NCATE accredited schools of education investigated evidenced no significant programmatic differences that necessitated exclusion of any site from the study.

The Role of the Researcher

Reflexivity is the researcher’s awareness of biases, perceptions, and prior experiences that are implicit in a research study (Creswell, 1998). The researcher’s extensive prior experiences included elementary, middle school and high school teaching while interacting both positively and negatively with parents of students. During employment as a Title 1 Parent Involvement Coordinator from 1994 through 2000 at a local school district, she developed an understanding and appreciation of the role of family engagement. As an educational consultant through a Goals 2000 federal grant promoting preservice teacher training on issues of parent engagement, her role was to present strategies and ideas preservice teachers could utilize to interact more effectively with parents. In remaining cognizant of possible biases, the researcher’s varied experiences as teacher, parent, educational consultant, and parent involvement coordinator were tempered by adherence to the research design and a commitment to objectivity (Phillips in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 29). Phillips (in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990) defined a researcher’s objectivity as “opened up to scrutiny, to vigorous examination, to challenge. It is a view that had been teased out, analyzed, criticized, debated, in general, it is a view that has been forced to face the demands of reason and evidence” (p. 30).
In this particular study, the researcher remained unbiased and adhered to the highest standards of professional ethics that included “privacy, avoidance of deception, confidentiality, … and informed consent” (Soltis in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 256).

Limitations

Three limitations of the study will be discussed:

1. Multiple definitions of parental engagement
2. Limited number of research sites
3. Focus group composition

One obvious limitation of the study concerned the meaning attached to the term “family or parent engagement”—which was formerly viewed or measured only by “bodies in the building” (Epstein, 1995, p. 707). Participants, including principals, parents, teachers (novice and veteran), student teachers, college teacher educators, field directors, and curriculum and instruction department chairpersons held divergent ideas on the essence of family engagement in education. “Such differences in definitions and measurement of parent engagement…must [be] made explicit in order to create a coherent understanding of the importance of different aspects of involvement” (Baker & Soden, 1999, pp. 3, 5).

While choosing to focus on schools of education located within a large western state, the researcher was aware of the relatively small sample of colleges holding NCATE accreditation and maintaining AACTE membership involved in the qualitative study of the sparsely settled state (Mullan, 2000). The rationale for limiting the research sites was justified by NCATE issues:

1. Citing NCATE as “not merely an accrediting agency- [but] a force for
reform of teacher education” (NCATE, 2000, p. 1).

2. Noting “the language of NCATE standards has been adopted and adopted as state standards in most states” (NCATE, 2000, p. 2).

In other words, in the near future, the remaining schools of education in this state will be adopting, under state mandate, the NCATE standards of fostering partnerships with families to support the academic learning of children (NCATE, 2000).

Another possible limitation was whether focus group participants were representative of two distinctly different normative cultures—that of the school culture, and that of the family culture. Stallworth and Williams (1981) asserted that in the larger systemic realm of family-school relations, there existed interdependency between the focus groups comprised of parents, teachers, and principals; therefore, changes in one group may necessarily affect the others. The researcher aimed for equal representation between the two cultures: three school personnel participants were represented by one principal and two teachers, and three community participants were represented by three parents in the focus group. Morgan (1997) noted that insufficient recruitment efforts were often the source of problems in focus group interviews. Six participants would be the ideal number designated for the focus groups, but the researcher remained cognizant of “whether a particular group of participants can comfortably discuss the topics in ways that [were] useful to the researcher” (Morgan, 1997, p. 38). On the other hand, although diverse, the heterogeneous samples of teachers, principals, and parents who comprised the focus groups met multiple interests and needs (Creswell, 1998) and ultimately presented a multitude of opinions.
Delimitations

The focus of this research was on preparing elementary teachers for family engagement. Although a great need existed for additional research on the dynamics of middle school and high school parent-teacher relationships, the reasons for a focus on the elementary (K-5) level included:

- many educational problems began to surface at this level;
- many major parental engagement efforts were initiated at this level;
- the beginning of sustained and long term home-school partnerships originated in the elementary grades;
- teachers and parents solidified the crucial kinds of partnerships necessary for ensuring success in future schooling; and
- most parents developed the essential skills needed to continue exploring family-school partnerships throughout their child's school career (Williams, 1992).

Two auxiliary groups of stakeholders, school boards and superintendents, were not included as focus group participants in the current study. Although these groups valued family engagement, they tended to be involved in drafting local school district policy, disseminating the policy information to teachers and parents, and enforcing or encouraging family-school collaborations (Davies, 1987). Moreover, this research did not focus on parent involvement on site-based management teams, developing school-business partnerships, taking part in advocacy for district reform, or promoting the full-service school model. Also, no post-baccalaureate certification candidates were factored into the study. The central idea of the study examined direct parent-teacher
communication with respect to the academic progress of the student and the training of
teachers to pursue this objective.

Supplying the definitions of “knowledge, skills, and understanding” (Chavkin &
Williams, 1984, p. 9) concerning family engagement in education delimited the study by
focusing participants on the framework guidelines of the “essential components for an
ideal teacher training program” (Williams & Chavkin, 1984, p. 8).

Furthermore, variables such as parental expectations for a child’s success strongly
affecting academic achievement (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998) were not factored in to this
study. The focus of the study reflected preservice teacher education as lacking extensive
opportunities for development of skills needed to communicate and engage parents (Rich,
1998). A cumulative review of literature that follows explored multiple dynamics that
impacted the developing relationship between new teachers and families of their students.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The primary purpose of this mixed methods research design was to explore the preparation of preservice teachers to effectively partner with families and then seek recommendations from key stakeholders to suggest programmatic changes in elementary education. The central goal of the investigation culminated in a schematic for use by teacher educators that advanced through a grounded theory approach preservice preparation in family engagement. Through an exploration of the existing topical literature, an understanding of the dynamics influencing teacher/parent relations surfaced.

Although the NCATE preparation standards for collaboration with families were first revised in 1996, a push for stronger teacher preparation in family engagement surfaced in the literature much earlier. This earlier groundbreaking research prior to the 1990s presented compelling arguments in support of teacher training in family engagement. In addition, current research indicated a need to seek effective programmatic revisions promoting teacher skills in family engagement.

The framework of the inquiry related to prior research is summarized.

Framework for the Study Related to Prior Research

The examination of existing literature "relates to the larger, ongoing dialogue...by listening to informants...to build a picture based on their ideas" (Creswell, 1994, p. 21). In the field of family engagement, an integrative and theoretical review of literature established a framework for the research by focusing on:

1. critical theoretical perspectives encompassing diversity issues
2. state and national level research and existing prototypes
3. multiple dynamics within the university setting
4. preservice teacher attitudes and opinions concerning parental engagement
5. certification factors influencing curriculum development
6. model parental engagement programs and recommendations

Fundamental to the realities of preparing teachers for their future interactions with families, theoretical considerations provided scaffolding for solid relations with families.

Critical Theoretical Perspectives on Family Engagement

Critical theory may "challenge...prevailing positivist approaches that conceal and hide key assumptions" (p. 82) about institutions of teacher education, and furthermore impart an explanatory stance for their resistance to change (Creswell, 1998). Critical theorists endorse radical change in the method of teacher training which rejects the status quo, the interests of the state, and neo-conservative agendas. Giroux and McLaren (1987) envisioned the teacher as:

a transformative intellectual who defines schooling as fundamentally an ethical and empowering enterprise dedicated ... to the exercise of greater social justice and to the building of a more equitable social order. [Any] adequate understanding of this language has to reach outside of school life into more encompassing social and community relations. (pp. 269-270, 293)

The critical theorists put forth the idea of a "hidden curriculum" in teacher education. "Limited attention in the explicit university curriculum for preservice teachers to social issues, such as class, gender, and race concepts sends the message that these issues are unimportant for prospective teachers" (Ginsberg & Clift, 1990, p. 457). The
ways in which teacher educators act with their students resulted in a limited focus, from the perspective of schools of education, on at-risk families, issues of poverty, gender discrimination, and disparities of race (Ginsberg, & Clift, 1990). Moreover, societal inequalities compounded the crisis in education (Apple, 1990). When ignoring the contemporary issues at stake, by effectively wearing blinders, schools of education were sending the message their agendas exclusively endorse a white, middle-class orientation (Ginsberg & Clift, 1990). However, according to Young and Edwards (1991) what is crucial is to “enable students to push beyond stereotypes and false assumptions about what children and families are willing and able to do” (p. 456) through critical examination of these issues in college courses.

Social-reconstructionist oriented teachers embraced rejection of the status quo in schooling and society in a conscious effort to highlight the disparities between culture, class, and race (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Maintaining a belief that teaching and teacher education can make substantive changes towards a more equitable society, the social-reconstructionist teacher habitually employed reflection, collaboration, dialogue, and critical thinking during interactions with families to situate student learning (Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Several decades ago, Wax and Wax (1966) postulated the existence of a division of school cultures which they designated the “Great Tradition and the Little Tradition” (p. 15). According to Wax and Wax, “The school [and therefore its teachers are] connected, organizationally and idealistically, with the greater society and with the great traditions of the West” which is represented by the urban, middle-class world (p. 15). Conversely, a dichotomy exists between the former and the Little Tradition that encompassed the
cultural values of the local school community, with the Great Tradition as the standard (Wax & Wax, 1966).

Through the notion of “cultural capital,” Delpit (1995) posited “some children come to school with more accoutrements of the culture of power already in place” (p. 28). Moreover, Delpit (1995) believed minority parents want to make certain the schools provide their children with the means to be successful in the larger society. Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1992) via “Funds of Knowledge” rejected “accepted perceptions of working class families as somehow disorganized socially and deficit intellectually; perceptions that are well accepted and rarely challenged in the field of education” (p. 134). In other words, “Funds of knowledge represented a positive and realistic view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction” (p. 134). Consequently, “New paths of communication foster[ed] mutual trust and accessibility between teachers and families” (Allen et al., 2002, p. 320).

Status attainment research, as characterized by the work of Bourdieu and Lareau, posited that social class is a strong determinant of the at-home activities parents engage their children in to promote student achievement. In fact, “cultural capital,” coined by Bourdieu (in Lareau, 1989) in the 1970s, elucidated the connection between social class and educational achievement. The activation of cultural resources by parents for their children linked to social class, such as attending a concert, visiting a museum, or going to a play, may be activities affordable or sought after by a certain stratum of society (Bourdieu in Lareau, 1989).
“Social capital” as defined by Coleman (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) subsisted in the relations between people, which could include partnerships between parents and teachers. Likewise, “human capital” (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) or the skills and capabilities which make a person productive, such as attainment of a high school diploma or college degree, complemented social capital in the area of home-school partnerships. An anecdote recounted by Coleman (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) is an especially powerful example:

In one public school where texts for school use were purchased by children’s families, school authorities were puzzled to discover that a number of Asian immigrant families purchased two copies of each textbook needed by the child, rather than one. Investigation showed that the second copy was purchased for the mother to study in order to maximally help her child do well in school. Here is a case in which the human capital of the parents, at least as measured traditionally by years of schooling, is low, but the social capital in the family available for the child’s education is extremely high. (p. 223)

Thus, the richness of a parent’s involvement in his or her child’s education can be attributed to the interplay between human, cultural, and social capital in the home and school settings, but not exclusively dependent on the strength of one over the others.

Issues of Diversity in Teacher Education

According to the National Education Association (1993), “Training for teachers should increase teachers’ understanding of the community’s culture, history, leadership, needs and concerns, and channels of communication” (Burns, p. 16). Coupled with a broad-based comprehension of knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to
maintain positive parental relations, undergraduate teacher preparation in the area of community diversity should be strengthened. "Culturally relevant teaching involves cultivation of the relationship beyond the boundaries of the classroom," according to Ladson-Billings (1994, p. 62).

Experiential knowledge of the bilingual community in which a teacher works can occasionally be inadequate, having gaps in the area of interacting with families of diversity, including those of lower socioeconomic background. A study by Allexsaht-Snider (1995), "Teachers' Perspectives on Their Work with Families in a Bilingual Community," found teachers cited their prior experiences working with families as providing a foundation of knowledge for their current interactions with families. Allexsaht-Snider (1995) outlined a teacher knowledge base for working with groups through internships and interactions highlighting "ethnically, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse families" (p. 92). Clearly, even more preparation at the pre-professional undergraduate level for education majors is needed to comprehend the special needs of families in the communities in which they may teach (Young & Edwards, 1991).

This task may be a daunting one for schools of education. As Goodlad (1994) stated, "There is much that teacher educators must do to prepare those who work in schools for the realities of today's communities, many of which have few characteristics described in the relevant literature just a short time ago" (p. 226). Houston and Houston (1992) contrasted the authenticity of schooling today with the panacea of yesteryear when they stated: "Teacher preparation programs need to prepare teachers more adequately for dealing with the realities of America today rather than the generalized and dated
perceptions of family life in Norman Rockwell’s placid pictures” (259). Young and Edwards (1991) decried the fact that teacher preparation programs seemingly ignore the radical social transformations that envelop schools, students, and the circumstances of their lives.

Based on the significant numbers of children living in poverty amidst dysfunctional social environments, teacher educators must prepare preservice teachers for the realities of today’s “at-risk” student populations (Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992). Whereas, in 1955, 60% of families in the United States consisted of a working father, a stay at home mother, and two or more school age children of middle-class origin, that is exceptional in today’s society (Marburger, 1990). “As communities become more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, the culture of schools and the culture of communities sometimes collide” (Lewis, 2000, p. 2). In the year 2000, in this western state, 19% of children lived in poverty, 13% were classified as minorities, and 12% were classified as disabled (Mullan, 2000, p. 130). Disparities between home and school cultures exacerbated issues in the area of family-school partnerships. These may not be particularly evidenced in middle socioeconomic class school and family settings, but become all the more evident in the lower socioeconomic class school and family settings (Grant & Secada, 1990). Especially affected are the schools of the inner city-- a “population notable for its cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and social class diversity” (Young & Edwards, 1991, p. 438).

In a study by Foster and Loven (1992) of 120 junior and senior level teacher education majors from both the Midsouth and Upper Midwest, the researchers reported that “99% percent did not anticipate difficulty in working with parents whose
socioeconomic background was different, although 27% expected that it would be more
difficult working with parents of lower socioeconomic background" (p. 16). Teachers,
being key participants in the quest for improved family and community involvement,
overwhelmingly come from the ranks of the middle-class embracing middle-class values
and aspirations (Grant & Secada, 1990). Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested requiring
teacher candidates to have a prolonged immersion in African-American culture since
"most teacher candidates do not need an immersion experience in white middle-class
culture because they are either products of it or have been acculturated and/or assimilated
enough to negotiate it successfully" (p. 134). Yet, "Knowledge of different world views
and meanings grow from personal exchanges with those who hold other perspectives”

The schools of yesteryear stipulated that the teacher live in the school
neighborhood, yet today “teachers, black or white-rarely live in the same economically
depressed neighborhoods as the children they teach,” according to Edwards and Young
(1992, p. 74). Because they live outside the neighborhoods of their students, a teacher
must “seek out knowledge about community norms of child rearing and about
expectations of schooling” (Young and Edwards, 1991, p. 443) in order to form the
alliances between teacher and parent which were once taken for granted. “One of the
most important things universities can do is to equip teachers to understand families, tap
into this resource, and use it to the fullest extent” (Kochan & Mullins, 1992, p. 270).

Related Research and Existing Prototypes

In an attempt to fill a gap in research in the area of state focused investigations,
sparse in the academic literature outside annual reporting undertaken by state education
agencies, this study examined state level survey research. On the state level, survey research on Minnesota's 27 teacher education institutions by Hintz, Clark, and Nathan (1992), presented evidence of course work limited to that state, yet did not seek to ascertain the recommendations of key stakeholders. Recent state research, Gregg's (1996) Study of Parent Involvement in Montana Public Schools: A Work in Progress, did not have, as its purpose, an exploration of college preparatory training in the area of family involvement.

Most recently, on the national level, Hiatt-Michael's (2001) Pepperdine University survey of 96 universities with teacher education programs, indicated "ninety-three percent of the respondents reported that parent involvement issues were woven into existing teacher education courses, such as special education, reading methods, instructional methods, and early childhood education in that rank order" (p. 1). However, this study failed to explore further recommendations from key informants in the area of parental engagement preparation. Through the study, Preparing Educators for School-Family-Community Partnerships-Results of a National Survey of Colleges and Universities (1999), Joyce Epstein and colleagues attempted to update their knowledge "on the preparation of educators to work with families and communities" (p. 5) based on their original study of teachers in the state of Maryland undertaken in 1982 (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Epstein, Sanders, and Clark (1999) received questionnaires from deans of education, associate deans, or administrators from 161 colleges or universities addressing present course offerings, attitudes and perspectives concerning school, family, and community partnerships, and their institutional readiness to initiate improvements in this area. However, the targeted respondents in this study were leaders in the school of
education, with faculty representing only 10.2% of the total sample. Clearly, an interstate survey can be enhanced by additional communication with those innovative groups (i.e. parents, teacher educators, preservice teachers, family counselors) endorsing change within existing elementary education programs.

Experts in the field, such as Chavkin & Williams, (1984); Epstein, (1995); and Kaplan, (1992) have developed guidelines, strategies, curricula, or frameworks that substantively contributed to the field of parental engagement. In fact, Williams and Chavkin (1984) developed a prototype based on three frameworks: personal, practical, and conceptual guidelines and strategies for both preservice and inservice teachers. However, Williams and Chavkin (1984) through their review of literature concluded, “No teacher training materials existed that were research based...and developed from the perspectives of key parent involvement stakeholder groups” (p. 5).

**The University as Change Agent**

The allegation towards schools of education throughout the country of being negligent in the area of training teachers in strategies to promote parental engagement had lately come into prominence (Becker & Epstein, 1982; deAcosta, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hintz et al., 1992; Lewis & Henderson, 1997; National PTA, 1999; Rich, 1988; Shartrand et al., 1997; Tichenor, 1997, Williams and Chavkin, 1984; Young & Edwards, 1991). In their defense, colleges of education frequently painted themselves as “hapless victims” of constant educational reforms, quickly undertaking cosmetic changes to satisfy accreditation requirements, while being staffed by professors resistant to “intellectual change and academic risk-taking” (Evans & Nelson, 1992, p. 233).

Kochan and Mullins (1992) suggested, “Colleges of education must begin by examining
themselves to discover the extent to which they understand the need to change, and the willingness to do so” (p. 270).

Swap (1993) commented upon the institutional nature of schools of education and their adherence to traditional, hierarchical principles of working relationships within the schools:

Institutions that prepare teachers have done little to change the existing regularities in schools. Teacher preparation programs rarely emphasize a curriculum that would help teachers... to learn skills of working ...[with] parents... or to explore the contributions of other human service professionals to family and community development. In short, since most schools have been hierarchically rather than collaboratively organized... and our professional preparation institutions continue to prepare teachers for this model, it is not surprising that hierarchical and authoritarian principles govern the schools’ relationships with parents as well. (p. 17)

Ladson-Billings (1999) emphasized the reactionary conservatism that surrounds many schools of education:

I want to argue that the social conditions that precipitate certain change rarely, if ever, are incorporated into the standards and practices of teacher education. Thus, the changing demographics of the nation’s school children have caught schools, colleges, and departments of teacher education by surprise. (p. 86)

Multiple barriers in instituting innovative teacher education programs tended to be steadfast and indefatigable (Boyer, 1988; Kaplan, 1992; Tom, 1997; Zeichner, 1999). Institutional obstacles which discouraged the introduction of parent engagement courses
into existing teacher education core included curricular overload of education students (Kaplan, 1992); the predominance of fragmented, overspecialized curriculum (Boyer, 1987); lack of funding in departments of education for innovative courses (Zeichner, 1999); an absence of effective leadership which might initiate curricular reform (Tom, 1997); and the generally low status schools of education have traditionally held (Zeichner, 1999). Liston and Zeichner (1991) recognized the “political impotence” (p. 199) of departments of education, with greater active involvement in higher institutional policy being the key to increased financial program resources that may lead to the opportunity for change.

**The Impact of Teacher Educators**

Another powerful barrier concerned the perspectives or worldview of those who teach educators:

Many believe that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for working with parents flow naturally from teaching experience. Yet, teachers in classrooms are frequently just as uncomfortable dealing with families as are the teacher educators who trained them. (Kaplan, 1992, p. 272)

Perceptual or effective barriers to teacher education reform, as asserted by Tom (1997), included a lack of imagination on the part of teacher education faculty coupled with a belief that change is impossible; and ultimately, recognition of a lack of reward for that change. Education faculty also tended to accept the regulations of state agencies and the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education unquestioningly, similar to the acceptance at the public school level of standards and objectives (Tom, 1997).
Current demographic characteristics of schools of education throughout the country reinforced the notion that a striking dichotomy exists between the key stakeholders in the education of children. Both Ginsberg and Clift (1990), and Grant and Secada (1990) commented on the vast gulf existing between student enrollment, the future teaching force, and faculty members in schools of education. By 2000, between thirty to forty percent of the student population were of color (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001) yet most teacher education students were women (70 percent) and European-American (Feistritzer, 1999), while most education faculty remained male, middle aged, and European-American (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Grant and Secada (1990) warned:

The multiple discontinuities—between student population and teaching force demographics and between teaching force and teacher educator demographics—should elicit a broad range of responses among... members of the teaching profession and others who are concerned about the education of our children. (p. 404)

The cultural angst, which can fester when there is a division of worldviews, was evidenced in the setting of traditional schools of education. Most education professors teach in a sheltered university environment with the majority of their students being white, with middle-class leanings (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Consequently, culturally isolated “groups of white students continue to be prepared by teacher education programs as if they will be teaching in homogeneous, white, middle-income schools” (Ladson-Billings, 1999 p. 97).
Furthermore, teacher educators had often not entered a public school classroom for years. Maintaining their isolation from the very settings they strive to prepare their students to enter, teacher educators were not familiar with contemporary school environments (Kochan & Mullins, 1992). Teacher educators were preparing students to deal with cultural dissonance between the home and school arenas without a clear idea as to the familial, cultural, or social issues involved. Evans and Nelson (1992) posited that in spite of the existence of demographic and survey data; there was a paucity of information on what actually occurred in teacher education programs.

Williams (1992) articulated the "self-development challenges...[which] teacher educators themselves will face in terms of their own dispositions and preparation for providing parental involvement training to undergraduates" (p. 250). Among these personal development challenges may include recognizing parents as equal partners in their children's education, becoming knowledgeable about philosophical, theoretical, and research bases of literature on home-school partnerships, and observing and participating in parent-teacher activities in diverse socioeconomic, cultural, racial and linguistic settings (Williams, 1992).

Contemporary research documenting the efficacy of parent engagement should drive curricula reform in the arena of teacher education. Zeichner (1999) contended that, although there is a great deal of concern being voiced about the quality of teacher education and teacher educators, including the low status of research on teacher education, a new scholarship in the area of research in teacher education is emerging. "There is much innovative and exciting research throughout the world today that policymakers and practitioners need to pay more attention to and take seriously"
Up until 1990, garnering little external funding support, research on teacher education was labeled as “random, chaotic, and directionless” and the research base as “extremely thin” (Zeichner, 1999, p. 6). Furthermore, both the activities and ensuing research surrounding teacher education have historically held a low status in the academic community (Zeichner, 1999). Nonetheless, Houston (1990) maintained that each teacher education institution determined its own best way of training potential teachers with little attention to the practices of other institutions or to the research literature. According to Zeichner:

Program developments were often a reaction to mandates of state departments and legislatures more than a thoughtful and forward-looking process based on coherent, well-thought out principles and ideas about what teachers need to know and be able to do. (1999, p. 12)

The next section will discuss authenticating teacher preparation in family engagement based upon educators’ perceptions about their foundational knowledge, skills, and understanding.

The Need for Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement

Research documented few teachers recounting any undergraduate educational preparation intended to instruct them in developing strategies to facilitate family-school partnerships (Edwards & Young, 1992; Epstein et al., 1999; Evans-Schilling, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand et al., 1994; Stallworth & Williams, 1981; Williams & Chavkin, 1984). Comparatively, Tichenor (1998) stated, “The logical place to begin educating teachers on the importance and benefits of parent involvement and to encourage them to become ‘parent advocates’ is in teacher education programs” (p.257).
Without a knowledge base that balances the lack of experience in working with parents, first year teachers can become increasingly anxious when dealing with parents who may be challenging and frustrating. Houston and Williamson’s (in Houston & Houston, 1992) study of first year teachers reported nearly every practitioner mentioning concerns about parents labeling them “uncooperative, uninterested, uninvolved, unhappy, non-compliant, untruthful, and unwilling to provide parental support” (p. 257). In fact, themes of discord between teachers and parents have been evidenced in research since the 1930s. Waller, in his classic *Sociology of Teaching* (1932), posited that parents are likely to approach their child’s teacher with the same fear and trepidation they felt when they approached their own elementary teacher. Issues of dominance and subordination affected the nature of relationships between the two groups that were unconsciously repeated by parents holding on to deeply rooted childhood perceptions (Waller, 1932).

New teachers must be prepared to enter the teaching force with a realistic appraisal of future interactions with parents (Childers & Podemski, 1982-83; Clarke & Williams, 1992; Foster & Loven, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jones & Bledinger, 1994; McBride, 1989; Young & Edwards, 1991). Childers and Podemski in their 1982-1983 study, focused on unrealistic expectations that first year teachers may hold, including the common expectation that “cooperative relations will exist routinely between students, parents, and staff” based on the presumption that “college will have been adequate preparation for all the challenges a teacher will face” (p. 4). Tichenor (1998) reiterated, “In order to effectively work with parents and families, teachers need knowledge, skills, and confidence to direct the parent involvement process” (p. 237).
Preservice education majors at the elementary level must become grounded in the knowledge, skills, and understanding to enhance parent involvement once they enter the classroom arena (Chavkins & Williams, 1984). An essential facet of the preservice preparation of elementary teachers, as demonstrated by studies, supported instruction in facilitating productive family-school relations (Shartrand et al., 1997). Teacher educators cited limited opportunities to instruct education students in the content of family involvement in education (Williams & Chavkins, 1984).

Deans of education from the California campuses attending a conference in the late 1980s foresaw the need to “add topics of school, family, and community partnerships to teacher education” (Epstein et al., 1999, p. 3). Some moved quickly to enact changes in curriculum with five of the eight campuses reporting small revisions within one year (Epstein et al., 1999). Yet, Ammon (1990, cited in Epstein et al., 1999), in an informal survey of six University of California campuses indicated few courses being offered on parental engagement. Based on a survey administered by Chavkin and Williams (1992) to teacher educators in the South and Southwest, a lack of experience in educating elementary majors in the area of family-school involvement was evident (in Williams, 1992). Only 4% of teacher educators reported having taught a complete course in family-school involvement; only 15% of teacher educators reported having taught part of a course in this area; while only 37% of teacher educators devoted at least one class period to the topic of parental involvement (Williams, 1992, p. 250, figure 18-1). Stallworth and Williams’ (1981) survey of 575 college educators in six southern states reported 55.5% of respondents indicated they included strategies to promote family-school interactions, while only 4.2% of the teacher educators reported they taught a complete course on the
topic (p. 13). Epstein et al. (1999) in their extensive national survey of colleges and universities indicated "over half of the 161 respondents (59.6%) reported that their [school of education] offered a full course on parent involvement...surprisingly, most of these are full required courses (67.5%), about half of which are targeted for graduate students" (pp. 7-8). Furthermore, they concluded "topics of family involvement are not well integrated into teacher...education programs [and]...most students preparing for school teaching must piece together information from various courses" (p. 8).

Teacher efficacy in communicating with parents can frame the development of preservice curricular components stressing skills, knowledge, and understanding in the area of family engagement (Foster & Loven, 1992). According to Fero and Bush (1994), first year teachers rated areas of deficiency in their teacher education training including understanding the dynamic nature of pupils' families and knowledge of how to work with parents. Additionally, the Fero and Bush (1994) study found that novice teachers were uninformed about what to anticipate from parents because of their limited exposure to them. Interactions with only one or two parents can alter a beginning teacher's perception of how well they are doing in the classroom and ultimately influence a teacher's positive or negative feelings about teaching. By offering future teachers opportunities to interact with parents earlier in their professional preparation, a number of fears about entering the arena of parent relations might be quelled (Foster & Loven, 1992). The role of teacher training is to develop realistic expectations about interacting with parents, so that the "reality shock" of parent-teacher confrontations might be lessened for prospective teachers (Fero & Bush, 1994, p. 10).
There was evidence that positive relationships between veteran teachers and the parents of the students they teach may diminish as the number of years of teaching increases (Clarke & Williams, 1992). In analyzing teachers' years of experience (from one to over twenty years) as related to the perceived importance of parental involvement, Clarke and Williams found teacher respondents in the six to ten year teaching cohort indicated negative responses towards the involvement of parents. Clarke and Williams discovered as "teachers accumulated more years of experience, the mean scores related to teacher perceptions of the importance of parent involvement declined steadily" (p. 5). This study highlighted the importance of instructing novice and preservice teachers in the fact that "home-school partnerships are powerful devices for improving academic achievement as well as for giving parents a greater sense of 'ownership' in their children's school" (Clarke & Williams, 1992, p. 4).

Research has verified that preservice teachers appreciated the ultimate rewards of education coursework covering the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary for productive family-school partnerships (McBride, 1989). McBride's (1989) study of 271 undergraduate early childhood education majors yielded strong positive attitudes towards Epstein's 1987 Typology of the six original forms of parental involvement. "Significant correlations were revealed between subjects' perceived preparation for parental involvement strategies and the number of ... home-school relationship courses completed and class sessions attended on parental involvement" (McBride, 1989, p. 61). When posing open-ended questions to 89% percent of the original group concerning their perceptions of why so few teachers use parental involvement strategies, 33% percent of the respondents indicated that a lack of information or perception hampered their use of
these strategies, while 28% percent of the group indicated that teachers did not have the time to plan and carry out these parent ventures. Furthermore, 76% (185 out of 271) of the preservice teachers felt a course in home-school partnerships should be a requirement during their teacher training (McBride, 1989, pp. 63-64). Additionally, Morris and Taylor (1997) indicated that selected experiences via a preservice class for elementary majors including hosting parent interviews, generating a yearly parent involvement plan, maintaining a parental involvement notebook, and conducting a workshop heightened their sense of confidence and efficacy in developing parental engagement programs when they began teaching. A recent assessment study by Katz and Bauch (1999) of teacher education graduates from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University found new teachers indicating they felt prepared in many ways to interact with parents having received parent involvement preparation in their course work. Therefore, when the infusion of parental engagement strategies appeared in the educational course work of elementary teacher candidates, they reported more ease in working with families.

Although the perceptions of preservice teachers remained paramount in their willingness to interact with parents; nonetheless, elements of state and national certification affecting the infusion of content into courses proved a major consideration in curricular revision.

**State and National Certification**

Certification requirements within individual states tended to be the impetus behind the incorporation of courses on family engagement into the curricula of schools of education. Elementary teacher certification in this western state was issued on the basis of completing a bachelor’s degree through an approved teacher education program, and a
and a passing score on the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST, 1996) that measures the candidate’s reading, math, and writing skills. However, Praxis I, the Pre-Professional Skills Test generally taken by students before the completion of an elementary teacher certification program, lacked questions addressing the issues of family engagement (PPST, 1996).

In scrutinizing the Teacher Education Program Standards (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994) under the area of Professional Education (10-58.303) that encompassed the foundations, methods, and materials of teaching with supervised laboratory experiences, the researcher found evidence of a competency (vii) requiring “the ability to communicate effectively with parents” (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994, p. 10-867). Sub-competencies required teachers “to identify and understand the role of parents and families in education…communicate the student’s level of development…[and] gather information from parents to better gain insight into their children’s needs” (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994, p. 10-867). This implied teacher as expert. The elementary certification program (10.58.508) specified that the knowledge base of elementary teachers include:

- studies and experiences in the sociological and behavior sciences…which emphasize the interaction of children with their environment and the roles of parents and families to include…knowledge of parenting styles, family structures and settings…possibilities and limitations of parents and teachers… and knowledge of family dynamics-functional/dysfunctional models. (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994, p. 10-876)
Throughout the standards delineated, the notion of a genuinely equal collaboration between parents and teachers was not made explicit.

However, two elementary teacher competencies indicated progress toward a partnership model. Prospective elementary teachers were requested to “provide knowledge of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds... and their effects on children, families, and society” (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994, p. 10-877), thereby promoting culturally relevant teaching. Teachers-in-training should “communicate to parents of developmentally appropriate language activities which could be used at home to reinforce the school program” (Montana Board of Public Instruction, 1994, p. 10-880). This latter competency minimally required a connection between the home and school with the aim of promoting family literacy activities.

Furthermore, the Professional Educators Code of Ethics from the Office of Public Instruction very broadly requires professional conduct in “respect[ing] the individual roles, rights, and responsibilities of the community including... parents” (Office of Public Instruction, n.d., p. 1).

Throughout the United States, according to Radcliffe, Malone and Nathan (1994), news in the area of teacher preparation indicated few states mandated teachers study either parent, family, or community involvement strategies for their certification as demonstrated by:

- Only 15 states (29%) required kindergarten through twelve grade teachers to study or develop abilities in parent involvement;
- Only 14 states (27%) specifically required elementary teachers to study or become competent in this area; and
- Only 6 states (12%) specifically required junior high/middle school teachers to study or achieve competence in encouraging parent involvement. (p. A-1)

Few state reports, university-based evaluations, or regional studies documented the number of elementary educational courses preparing preservice teachers in the area of parent engagement. In an overview of Minnesota's 27 teacher education colleges and universities, Hintz et al. (1992) found that over one-half failed to offer any courses at all related to family involvement in education. A landmark study, the Harvard Family Research Project, initiated by Dr. Heather Weiss in 1983, focused its research on preparing teachers in family involvement (Shartrand et al., 1997). Looking at the certification materials from fifty-one state departments of education (including Washington, DC) in the report entitled *Preparing Teachers to Involve Parents: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs* (1994), the researchers noted:

Twenty-two states alluded to family involvement in certification requirements, eight states mentioned family involvement for both early childhood and kindergarten through twelve certification, five states mentioned it for early childhood certification only, and nine states mentioned family involvement for kindergarten through twelve certification only. (Shartrand et al., 1994, p. 11)

In 1997, the Harvard Family Research Project report indicated that most states did not mention parent involvement training for newly certified teachers, or mentioned it in vague terms.

Likewise, most teacher education programs did not offer substantive training in family involvement....[or]often limited [the] scope. Thus, a serious discrepancy
existed between preservice preparation and the types of family involvement activities that teachers were increasingly expected to perform in schools (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 1).

Clearly, as pointed out by Greenwood and Hickman (1991), state and national teacher certification examinations essentially overlooked any knowledge that potential teachers garnered concerning parental involvement strategies. As surveyed by Tichenor (1998), the National Teachers Exam Core Battery Sample Test (1994 version) contained 13 out of 105 questions dealing explicitly with some form of parent involvement. Only one question was phrased to ask for parent help or how to obtain information. Four questions concerned how teachers should deal with parent problems; two questions concerned parent attempts at censoring materials; two questions focused on parents’ rights; while three questions involved communicating information to parents (Tichenor, 1998). Additionally, Educational Testing Service (ETS), which markets Praxis III as a system for evaluating the skills of preservice teachers through a variety of methods including direct observation, listed within the Teacher Professionalism domain the performance criteria “communicating with parents and guardians about student learning” (Cruickshank et al., 1996, p. 86).

Without the driving force of a certification requirement backing the infusion of training in parental involvement, few teacher education institutions were willing to offer parental involvement course content. Until the recent revisions mandated by accreditation organizations such as NCATE, Williams (1992) felt teacher educators “relegated parent involvement to being, at best, merely an attachment to mainstream teacher preparation
experiences" (p. 253) rather than being infused throughout the teacher education program.

**Educational Organizations as Catalysts for Transformation**

Conflicts in teacher education reform policy emanating from different sources such as accreditation agencies, professional organizations, educational forums, state departments of education, state legislatures, or private foundations can further complicate the attempts of individual colleges of teacher education to develop and sustain long term family engagement training for their undergraduates. Furthermore, Tichenor (1998) questioned the degree to which the standards concerning parent partnerships issued from national teacher training evaluation organizations are enforced, or even recognized.

Although an organization traditionally powerful in influencing local and state public school policies, the National PTA (1999) developed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs based on the research premise that “parent and family involvement increases student achievement and success” (p. 1). Merely recommendations, these standards commanded attention in Congress during the adoption of the Eighth National Education Goal focusing on parental involvement. However, the National PTA (1999) stated, “Few teachers receive substantive preparation in how to partner with parents” (p. 24). Citing recent surveys of current practice in preparing preservice teachers for skills in parent involvement, they noted that:

- No state requires a separate course in parent involvement for teacher licensure.
- Only a handful of states require parent involvement preparation as a part of a course, and...

[The text continues but is not fully visible in the provided snippet.]
their competency standards or... training programs [for teachers]. (National PTA, 1999, p. 24)

As recently as 1993, statewide PTAs in California passed resolutions calling for a parent/family involvement component to be added to the credential requirements of all educators being newly certified (Chrispeels, 1996).

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is a national voluntary organization of colleges and universities functioning to advise the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) on teacher standards and accreditation. Located within its larger “Resolutions to the Membership” were recommendations concerning parental involvement, multicultural promotion, and field experiences to promote community knowledge (AACTE, 2002). Resolution Number 39 acknowledged home as the first classroom with parents and other caregivers as the first and most essential teachers. The resolution reaffirmed in 1998 for five years emphasized the necessity for parents and other caregivers to be involved in their children’s learning at school; children need parents to be involved in the school process.

*Be it resolved that:*

The AACTE join with the National PTA and other child advocacy organizations to encourage the involvement of parents and other caregivers in their children’s education.

*Be it further resolved that:*

AACTE encourage its member institutions to include strategies within their teacher preparation programs to involve parents and caregivers in their children’s education. (AACTE, 2002, p. 32)
However, encouraging colleges to develop methods to include parents in family-school partnerships differed from instituting or requiring these revisions.

The preeminent teacher training evaluation organization, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, significantly impacts the content of elementary teacher curricula throughout the United States. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 1999) endorsed new elementary teacher preparation standards as of October of 1999. Specifically addressing collaboration with families and communities based on teachers’ informed knowledge of the students’ backgrounds, the two standards included:

- **Standard 5C—Collaboration with families**—Candidates know the importance of establishing and maintaining a positive collaborative relationship with families to promote the academic, social, emotional, and physical growth of children.

  **Supporting Explanation—**

  1. Candidates understand different family beliefs, tradition, values, and practices across cultures and within society and use their knowledge effectively.

  2. They involve families as partners in supporting the school both inside and outside the classroom.

  3. Candidates respect parents’ choices and goals for their children and communicate effectively with parents about curriculum and children’s progress.

  4. They involve families in assessing and planning for individual children, including children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special abilities.
• **Standard 5D**-Collaboration with... the community; candidates foster relationships with... agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

**Supporting Explanation**-

1. Candidates understand schools as organizations within the larger community context and relevant aspects of the systems in which they work.

2. They also understand how factors in the elementary students' environments outside of school may influence the students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical well being and, consequently, their lives and learning (NCATE, 1999, pp. 33-34).

According to Tom (1997), “Using bureaucratic standards [such as those of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education] to specify program quality in a field as complex and contested as teacher education” was erroneous (p. 199). “The current structural approaches [within] a myriad of detailed requirements” (Tom, 1997, p. 174) as specified by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education may cause teacher educators to “wait for the next mandate... inhibit them from rethinking programs... not to initiate program changes (p. 174)... [and limit their] energy and imagination” (Tom, 1997, p.197).

Because the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (1999) strives to certify master level teachers, their standards of excellence are rigorous and provide a blueprint for judging the quality of novice teachers. As novice teachers gain in experience, they should be cognizant of best practices exemplified by the NBPTS. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards seeks to recognize distinguished
practicing teachers who demonstrate a high level of "knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments" in five essential propositions (NBPTS, 1999, p. 1). Their fifth proposition, "Teachers are Members of Learning Communities," specifically identified how "accomplished teachers find ways to work collaboratively and creatively with parents, engaging them productively in the work of the school" (NBPTS, 1999, p. 2). The two subsections of this proposition concerned with parents and the school community necessitate teachers "work collaboratively with parents, and...take advantage of community resources" (NBPTS, 1999, p. 3). Framed in the terms of actions teachers exhibit while connecting with parents and the school community, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards invited teachers to do the following with parents or guardians:

- share in the education of the young
- communicate regularly
- listen to concerns and respect perspectives
- enlist support in fostering learning and good habits
- share information on their child's accomplishments and successes
- educate about school programs (NBPTS, 1999, p. 2)

Interestingly, NBPTS Fifth Proposition delineated mutual partnerships between teachers and parents warning that three circumstances may "complicate this partnership" (NBPTS, 1999, p. 3). Accomplished teachers recognize:

- the interests of parents and the school sometimes diverge
- students vary in the degree and kind of support they receive at home
- the behavior and mind-set of schools and families can be adversarial (NBPTS,
Based on these complicating circumstances, teachers were required to be alert to 
"[the effects]...of culture, language, parental education, income, and aspirations" and 
"tailor their practice accordingly" (NBPTS, 1999, p. 3). "Schools sometimes 
underestimate the families’ potential to contribute to their children’s intellectual growth," 
yet the master teacher must hold "the interests of the student and the purposes of the 
school paramount" (NBPTS, 1999, p. 3). Nonetheless, an emphasis remained on the non-
supportive, occasionally adversarial relationship that might have existed between parents 
and teachers.

Furthermore, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support 
Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1999) drafted its Core Standards 
specifying Principle Number Ten delineating knowledge, dispositions, and performances. 
Teachers should be capable of “foster[ing] relationships with school colleagues, parents, 
and agencies in the larger community to support students’ learning and well being” 
(Council of Chief State School Officers, 1999, p. 12). The complementary components of 
knowledge and performance focused on community resources and factors in the students’ 
environment outside of school (e.g. family circumstances, community environments, 
health and economic conditions) (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1999).

Although well intentioned through past revisions to promote parental engagement 
in teacher training, AACTE and NCATE had “generated specific categories [which fail to 
understand or consider] the role of the family or the importance of the environment” 
(Evans & Nelson, 1992, p. 238). However, in the context of recent NCATE standards 5C 
and 5D more emphasis was being placed on teacher preparation in family engagement
Evans and Nelson (1992) posited, "Teaching must be examined in the context of the family, and the knowledge base should bring together the technical aspects of teaching within the context of the activity" (p. 239).

The forthcoming synopsis of model teacher education programs highlighted best practices in family engagement schools of education may consider.

**Model Teacher Education Programs**

The university, as the institution setting the standard for teacher preparation, should restructure teacher education to correspond with the realities of families today (Kochan & Mullins, 1992). Innovative teacher education programs modeling exemplary practices furthered preservice teachers' knowledge and familiarity with family-school relations. By offering prototypes to launch similar programs in other schools of education across the country, opportunities for transformation can be enhanced.

Initially, "need-sensing" among teacher education faculty members supplied the catalyst for curriculum development (Chavkin & Williams, 1984), while creating a specialization or faculty position with an expertise in the area of family engagement, assured continuation of the curricular commitment for this type of instruction (Shartrand et al., 1997). Kochan and Mullins (1992) urged that these constituencies must "become part of a single process of making teacher education responsive to the changing society" (p. 272). In addition, other collaborators in the development process necessarily included parents, teachers, preservice education majors, community members, representatives from local and state educational agencies, and university personnel from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, nursing, or related fields (Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Kochan & Mullins, 1992; Shartrans et al., 1997).
Areas of teacher training needing special attention included knowledge of social services available to families, understanding differing perspectives on multicultural family influences, and skills in recognizing diversity in family practices. Bucci & Reitzammer (1992) suggested we modify our view of teaching as individualist, academically-based, and isolated from the community, extending teacher knowledge of human services available by recognizing multiple agencies, the services they can provide, and developing collaboration and referral skills to promote the possibility of “schools as human service centers” (p. 293). To accomplish these goals, Bucci and Reitzammer (1992) recommended a short field placement or a shadowing experience in a social work or health service agency.

To help students construct the concepts of “culture” and “community,” Northeastern University, supported through a Kellogg Partnerships in Education grant, required education students through their Introduction to Education course (ED 110) to engage in their first field experience in a community setting (Northeastern University, 2000-2001, p. 1). “At each of the sites-including six organizations in lower Roxbury and Dorchester areas of Boston-students interacted with Boston youth as teachers, tutors, and mentors in academic enrichment programs” (p. 2). Students then returned to the college to reflect upon the “border crossings” into communities of poverty (Northeastern University, 2000-2001, p. 2).

Reformulating teachers’ understandings and assumptions about families is paramount to truly understanding how learning can be influenced by cultural considerations. Young and Edwards (1991) stressed that “teachers need to become students of their students” (p. 451) by studying their cultures, languages, linguistic
understandings, learning styles, and social conditions. What should comprise a significant portion of teacher education according to Young and Edwards? They answered, “knowledge about parents, families, and communities; their demography, culture, and roles” (p. 450). Kochan and Mullins (1992) concurred, “Teachers who are familiar with the relationships between different social worlds and ways of life will be better able to understand and relate to their students” (p. 269).

AACTE-MetLife Foundation Parental Engagement Institute highlighted national project partners infusing parental engagement education in teacher preparation (AACTE pamphlet, 2002). Northern Illinois University “embedded parental involvement throughout teacher education... through parent interviews... role played parent teacher interactions... created pamphlets and bulletin boards to support children’s literacy development” (Shumow, 2002, p. 1). Project PODEMOS based out of the University of Texas at El Paso worked collaboratively with families on the US/Mexico border. Course work included an action research project, community service-learning project, and parent power nights organized by preservice teachers (Munter, 2002). The North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement “developed, piloted, tested and revised for general use six modules for use by teacher candidates in developing attitudes, skills, and competencies needed to implement standards of the National PTA in parent engagement” (Harris, 2002, p. 1).

Jones and Blendinger (1994) described Mississippi State University’s program for reaching out to families of diversity. As an integral part of the student teaching experience, teacher candidates developed skills and implemented activities for collaborating with families, and initiated and carried out a home-based reading program.
Wiest's (1998) University of Nevada School of Education Cultural Immersion Project included this requirement:

Students choose an experience that puts them in as culturally different a situation as possible, one in which they might feel extremely uncomfortable... attend a religious service very different from their own, straight students going to a gay bar, and females going to a strip club for male patrons. (p. 359)

Programs such as these tended to remove the blinders prospective educators might have acquired, forcing them to confront their stereotypes and false assumptions (Young & Edwards, 1991).

Both Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona offered preservice programs to prepare teachers to work with Native American families who have students with special needs. The Rural Special Education Project (Northern Arizona University) required that students live for the academic year (and take courses) on a Navajo Reservation in Kayenta, Arizona (Shartrand et al., 1997). Through cultural immersion, educators observed celebratory events and community activities—attended a Navajo wedding, witnessed board meetings, and learned the Navajo language. The Funds of Knowledge Project through the University of Arizona trained teachers to be ethnographers through collaboration with the college's Anthropology Department. By exploring “the funds of knowledge” in the students’ households, teachers became cognizant of a family’s strengths, and used that information to supplement classroom activities (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 37). Participating teachers visited all types of households including low-income, bilingual, and middle-income to interview families,
share information gathered in study groups, and fashion integrated units of study based on their interview findings.

California State University at Fresno focused on general family issues, including barriers to establishing home-school partnerships (Evans-Schilling, 1996). The Parent Power Project at California State University had been in existence since 1985 under the direction of Deanna Evans-Schilling (1996). The goal of the project was to “prepare teachers to work effectively, sensitively, and confidently with families, especially families whose children have learning difficulties” (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 33). Preservice teachers outlined family literacy activities parents can engage their children in to promote academic competency (Evans-Schilling, 1996).

Multiple recommendations for the development of courses in home-school partnerships from experts in the area were as follows:

1. Rely on a research base with a thorough review of current literature to aid in curricular development (Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand et al., 1994, 1997).

2. Recognize the importance of field experiences in interacting with parents in the community (Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Radcliffe et al., 1994; Shartrand et al., 1994, 1997; Tichenor, 1997, 1998).

3. Clarify the definition of parent involvement or expand the concept to include a developmental sequence from traditional forms of parent involvement (volunteering) to non-traditional forms (parent advocacy) (Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Foster & Loven, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand et al., 1994, 1997).
4. Enable students to become aware of a wide range of useable strategies and activities they can take out into the teaching arena to promote parent-teacher relationships (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jones & Blendinger, 1994; Tichenor, 1997, 1998).

5. Pay attention to perspective educators' attitudes and beliefs with insight into broadening their vistas of experience (Bermudez & Padron, 1987; Delpit, 1995; French, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Tichenor, 1998).

6. Reflect knowledge of parental strategies on national certification exams, such as the National Teachers' Exam. Also, pre-professional licensing instruments should test candidates on effective family engagement strategies (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Tichenor, 1998).

7. Integrate or infuse training throughout teacher preparation curriculum rather than treating family engagement instruction as an isolated course (Kochin & Mullins, 1992; Shartrand et al., 1997).

8. Improve the effectiveness of instruction in teacher-parent relations through collaboration with other disciplines, such as sociology, nursing, anthropology, or health and human services, and across subspecialties, such as early childhood education, special education, or bilingual education (Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992; Evans-Schilling, 1996; Shartrand et al., 1997).

9. Vary programs to fit considerations of age and grade level of the teacher's placement, as well as the composition of the community, including linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic considerations (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Tichenor, 1998; Young & Edwards, 1991).
One commonality of the exemplary teaching methods in the model undergraduate education programs in family engagement, was the inclination to employ teaching strategies that were interactive, parent-centered, and research-based (Shartrand et al., 1997). Promising preservice teacher classroom strategies included role playing scenarios of parent-teacher interactions, analyzing case method family profiles, interacting with guest speakers, and undergoing self-reflection (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Northeastern University, 2000-2001; Shartrand et al., 1997). Field experience-based methods included participating in cultural immersion, especially critical when the teacher and student originate from different cultures; taking part in community experiences such as in human service agencies, community centers or family resource centers; undertaking action research with families and communities; developing and implementing specific family literacy activities or home-study plans; and being involved in interprofessional educationally allying Schools of Education with departments of sociology, anthropology, nursing, health or human services, or social work (Shartrand et al., 1997). These promising methods from exemplary programs give voice to parents and families, stimulate collaboration between agencies, and help teacher educators shed biases they may hold concerning families.

These model teacher education programs, coupled with the specific recommendations from the Harvard Family Research Project (1997), have the potential for replication. Initiating elementary teacher coursework promoting the knowledge, skills, and understanding of family engagement can be guided by precedents set at innovative Schools of Education.
Recommendations from the Harvard Family Research Project

A benchmark study, Harvard Family Research Project’s *New Skills for New School*, highlighted nine programs that focused on family involvement preparation at the preservice education level (Shartrand et al., 1997). Besides securing hands-on activities for student teachers, these programs “promoted a broad concept of family involvement that recognizes family strengths, the need for family support, and the importance of home-school collaboration” (p. 20). Four of the nine programs appeared to be applicable to the needs of schools of education focusing on diverse populations, rural settings, and poverty level families.

The four major challenges recognized by the nine teacher education programs based on in-depth interviews undertaken by the Harvard Family Research Project (1997) are outlined:

1. A lack of a National Technical Assistance Network—“No system existed to support research and model development for family involvement training at the preservice level” (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 17).

2. Restrictive university/and government policies—In many colleges, a limited number of education credits can be earned, which forces teacher educators to embed content about family-school partnerships within a restricted number of classes.

3. Limited scale and resources—Cooperative attempts at curriculum development among faculty, other university departments, public schools, and human service agencies can be labor intensive and time consuming.
4. Resistant attitudes—Negative attitudes held by educators towards families coupled with a high priority placed on core academic subjects inhibit change (Shartrand et al., 1997, pp. 17-18).

These major challenges of revising the curricular content of the state’s elementary education teaching programs to infuse knowledge, skills, and understanding regarding the benefits of family engagement are not insurmountable. Currently, throughout the country, program revisions to include family engagement components within teacher education programs are advancing.

Summary

The review of the literature highlighted isolated attempts by innovative Schools of Education to provide opportunities through coursework and field experiences for preservice teachers to heighten their knowledge, skills, and understanding of parental engagement. Numerous on-site studies supported the value of preparing prospective teachers to interact effectively with parents to increase their level of comfort and expertise in developing an overall plan for family engagement.

In addition, school reform experts focused on multiple dynamics within the university setting relegating coverage of family involvement topics to the second tier. Critical theory explained the broader cultural and societal constraints that inhibit teacher change. However, momentum for transformation of Schools of Education is now in place through accreditation requirements. Epstein et al. (1999) posited Schools of Education “are more likely to cover more topics of partnerships if they are accredited by organizations with guidelines on partnerships” (p. 13). Nevertheless, “Recent studies and reviews of literature and practice indicat[ed] that most colleges and universities do little
to prepare most teachers…to understand and work with families and communities,”

according to Epstein et al. (1999, p. 1).
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Methodology

The mixed methods research design of this study could be considered similar to that described by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). "Tighter designs are indicated when the researcher has good prior acquaintance with the setting [or organization], has a good bank of applicable, well-delineated concepts, and takes a more explanatory, and/or confirmatory stance" (p. 185). Research designs, invariably, are a matter of reconciliation (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill, 1991) and this study seeks to reconcile the complexities of teacher education with the myriad of considerations that go into developing effective home-school partnerships. Therefore, the "'between methods' approach—drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures" as described by Creswell (1994, p. 174) was employed. The design chosen reflected a qualitative compromise between the more structured formal interview format via email with department chairpersons and elementary education professors, a survey of student teacher preferences, and the semi-structured, informal focus group format with parents, teachers, and principals. Quantitatively, the first research question surveyed the number of courses or field experience, while the second research question elicited recommendations through qualitative data collection. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989, as cited in Creswell, 1994) expanded upon reasons for utilizing a mixed methods approach:

1. "triangulation in the classic sense of seeking convergence results"

2. "developmentally, wherein the first method is used sequentially to help inform the
second method”

3. “expansion, wherein...mixed methods add scope and breadth to a study” (p. 175)

Consequently, the reality of teacher education in its complexity was juxtaposed with the interpretation or meaning-making teachers and parents bring to their partnerships (Zeichner, 1999; Creswell, 1994).

Furthermore, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested that research interests, the circumstances of the people to be interviewed, and the constraints imposed on the researcher help determine the choice of methodology. Since three of the four department chair people and a majority of education professors were spread throughout this large western state, email was selected for convenience for both the respondents and the researcher to facilitate accessibility (see Appendix A with attachments). The four schools of education provided the sites for the student teacher surveys (see Appendix C with attachments). Considerations of research interests coupled with geographical considerations of interviewees dictated the location of the focus groups located within the college/university communities (see Appendix D).

The focus group interview has the research advantages, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), of being “inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative” (p. 55). Becker and Geer (1957, as cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) list shortcomings concerning interviews that may impact this study:

1. Focus group participants may misunderstand each other: teachers use technical terms applicable to education and student achievement, while parents may tend to deal with the affective domains of schooling; for example, “My child likes school because of the teacher” (Community X mother,
December 2, 2000).

2. Informants are often unable to verbalize the critical issues involved and only by observing parents and teachers in their daily interactions can the researcher truly understand the intricate dynamics of the parent-teacher relationship (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 92).

To correct for the first shortcoming, the researcher prefaced the interview with a statement urging the participants to ask questions of other’s statements if any misunderstanding occurred. The second weakness noted was rectified by “giving the interview questions to the participants before the interview,…focusing the questions asked in the group interview,…and addressing when interviewees strayed from the interview questions” (Creswell, 1998, p. 131).

The mixed methodology employed relied on the triangulation of sources that included the focus groups’ recommendations, the results from the teacher educator email interviews, the student teacher survey results and the scrutiny of documents including course syllabi of methodology classes, and course descriptions in college catalogues. Multiple measures were utilized to ensure any variance exhibited was not associated with the measures (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), “Triangulation is…a mode of inquiry. By self-consciously setting out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the researcher will build the triangulation process into ongoing data collection” (p. 199). Initially, college catalogs (1999-2000) from the four schools of education were utilized as documentation providing brief descriptions of elementary teacher education course requirements. Further evidence of the infusion of training for elementary undergraduates in the area of family-
school strategies was sought through course syllabi of selected elementary education classes to eliminate contradictory evidence from student teachers, focus group participants, and/or teacher educators.

Because qualitative research incorporates inductive processes, this study constructed concepts, ideas, and rationales from the details provided (Creswell, 1994). The participants, who were in fact, key informants, included education department chairpersons, teacher educators, elementary education students, elementary teachers, elementary principals, and parents. Blumer (1969, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) notes:

The importance of interviewing a select group...seeking participants who are acute observers and who are well-informed...a small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion and resource group, is more valuable, many times over, than any representative sample. (p. 54)

Additionally, “gaining trust is essential to an interviewer's success, and even once it is gained, trust can be very fragile indeed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 59-60). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) acknowledge, “focus groups are designed to use group dynamics to yield insights that might not be accessible without the kind of interaction found in a group” (p. 114). Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest focus groups serve “to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions...of the original problem that any one individual might not thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of the problem [occurs]” (as cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 114). The litmus test of this maxim was the interactions of the heterogeneous focus groups with participant teachers, parents, family advocates, and principals.
Research Questions

The goal of this research was two-fold in seeking to examine:

1. courses and/or field experiences with content in family involvement currently being offered to preservice elementary (kindergarten through fifth grade) education majors at the four NCATE accredited schools of education; and

2. suggestions for preservice elementary teacher preparation in knowledge, skills, and understanding of family-school partnerships offered by the primary stakeholders in parent involvement: novice and veteran elementary teachers, teacher educators, deans, education department chairpersons, elementary education student teachers, parents, and elementary principals.

Sources of the Data

This study was conducted through site visitations to the four schools of education throughout the state during the fall and winter of the 2000-2001 school year. Data were collected from several sources: documents (schools of education catalog course descriptions and syllabi); student teacher questionnaires; focus group questions; and teacher educator responses (written, email, personal contact, and phone responses). Data reporting is in aggregate form for the four universities. The extensive data base of 92 practicing student teachers, 20 focus group participants, and 76 teacher educators including deans of education schools, department chair persons, and education faculty ensured topical saturation. “Using the constant comparative approach, the researcher attempted to ‘saturate’ the categories…to continue interviewing until the new information obtained does not provide further insight into the category” (Creswell, 1998, pp. 150-151).
Organization and Participant Selection

The sample selection for this study is purposeful, deliberate, and criterion-based. Huberman & Miles (1998) stressed, “qualitative researchers must characteristically think purposively and conceptually about sampling” (p. 204). Furthermore, only four schools of education fit the researcher’s criteria of accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and membership in the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE). Those schools of education formed the basis for the email interview cohort of deans of schools of education, Curriculum and Instruction department chairpersons and elementary education instructors. To compensate for possible bureaucratic buffers, the researcher sent an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the email interview, which was followed by a telephone confirmation and the request for copies of syllabi from existing elementary education courses.

Profiles of Schools of Education

The four state universities involved in the study in the spring of 2001 were profiled by the researcher to formulate an impression of their SOE mission or vision statement, orientation to family/community involvement, and enrollment statistics.

The vision and foundation for University W’s Teacher Education program of “becoming a teacher in rural America” provided for “a high level of educational collaboration with...persons who are of a culturally different background than that of the student” (University W’s Elementary Education, 2000). Graduating 29 elementary teachers from University W, the composite included 10% non-traditional students, with less than 1% of graduates from minority populations (L. Forrester, personal...
University X’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction strove to promote “inclusivity, caring and respect… for the uniqueness of the individual and the diversity of cultural heritage” (University X’s Catalog, 1999/2000, p. 185). Of the graduating 41 elementary teachers in the spring of 2001, less than 2% were minority students and 14% non-traditional students (M. Bachmann, personal communication, May 3, 2001).

University Y’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction “was committed to preparing teachers who evidence the highest ideals of the teaching profession” (University Y’s General Bulletin, 1999-2001, p. 173). Furthermore, the following assumptions concerning families/communities and diversity were inherent in coursework:

1. “Effective teachers celebrate the uniqueness, dignity, and worthwhileness of all individuals and cultural groups” (p. 173).


“By schooling preservice… teachers in the dynamics of… diverse family and cultural heritage, modeling attitudes, behaviors, practices which are sensitive to… cultural differences, the above goals are accomplished” (University Y’s General Bulletin, 1999-2001, p. 173). University Y graduated 63 elementary teachers in the spring of 2001, with fewer than 8% being minority students, yet close to 55% being non-traditional students (C. Dell, personal communication, January 12, 2001).

The mission statement of University Z’s College of Education, Health and Human Development was as follows: “The college will be seen by the campus and by the state as
a leader in helping natives achieve the benefits of diversity within their own state and
globally” (University Z’s Dean’s Diversity Advisory Committee, 2001, p. 1). Their
rationale was prefaced by the statement: “Our society in the 21st century will
increasingly bring people together who represent diverse cultures, religions, ethnicity,
family structures, as well as other differences” (University Z’s Dean’s Diversity Advisory
Committee, 2001, p. 1). University Z underscored their “extensive field-based
component” as a major attribute of their elementary education program (University Z’s
Catalog, 1999-2000, p. 87). In the spring of 2001, 39 elementary teachers graduated from
this program with less than 2% minority graduates, and 26% graduates of non-traditional
status (B. Clemens, personal communication, May 17, 2001).

Profiling the four SOEs, the researcher noted considerations of diversity and/or
family/community shaping teacher practice in the form of recurrent themes in the mission
or vision statements.

**Student Teacher Participants**

In the fall of 2000, elementary student teachers completing their student teaching
field placement through the four universities functioned as informants, completing a
survey on the extent of preparation they had received through their teacher education
course work to enable them to work effectively with parents. Shartrand et al., (1997)
posit that accredited teacher education programs “hold the potential for providing
student teachers with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to increase family
involvement” (p. 10). This questionnaire is represented in Appendix C with
attachments.
Focus Group Participants

Participants in the mixed focus groups of teachers, parents and principals were key informants in the area of family-school partnerships from four school districts representing urban, rural, and suburban areas. Community Y’s (pseudonym Suburban School) contingent was represented by a fairly affluent elementary school; while Community W’s (pseudonym Rural School) two room school was split between kindergarten and third and fourth and eighth grades. Community Z’s (pseudonym Urban School) elementary school had a population of over 500 students; Community X’s (pseudonym Community School) school setting was a high poverty school, housing a family resource center. The researcher strove to present a mixture of locales from urban to suburban to rural settings. Both novice (one through five years of teaching) and veteran teachers (over five years of teaching) were asked to participate (See Table 2).

The four focus groups were representative of the communities in socioeconomic and cultural factors. As suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) the researcher utilized a range of different approaches to ensure diversity of school sites by consulting with personal contacts at the university and throughout the state, approaching organizations and agencies that promote family partnerships, and dialoguing with elementary staff.

Demographic information for each school site was compiled through multiple profiles that included: Parent Profile for Focus Groups; Teacher Profile for Focus Groups (included principals, teachers-novice and experienced, school/family counselor, family liaison) and School District Profile for Focus Groups. The information attained from the profiles was augmented by interview information obtained from the principals. A composite for each school was created based on the responses and can be referred to
in Appendix D.

Table 1 represents the composition of the parent cohort for the four focus groups. School site principals at Community W, Y, and Z Schools undertook the ultimate recruitment of individual participants. Homogeneity of participants became a major concern, especially in the over-recruitment of female and Caucasian informants. However, in setting up Community X’s focus group in the researcher’s hometown, diversity was enhanced.

**Table 1: Demographics of Parent Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Participants</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>School Role</th>
<th>Job Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent #1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>In College</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Not Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Not Volunteer</td>
<td>Not Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>School Volunteer</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next table represents the constituency of the educator cohort of the four focus groups. The experiential range, grade and administrative range, and gender mix of the educators insured a broad array of opinions from a contingent of people with strong vested interest in partnering with parents.

Table 2: Demographics of Educator Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade or Position</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Teaching or Administering</th>
<th>Highest Education Level</th>
<th>Average Weekly Number of Contacts With Parents</th>
<th>Courses in Family Involvement Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educator #1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4th - 8th</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Bachelor Plus</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>K - 3rd</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor &amp; Assoc. EC</td>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelor Plus</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bachelor Plus</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Parent Liaison</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bachelor Plus</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Masters Plus</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator #11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The units of analyses included each of the four schools of education within the

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larger universities’ settings, which could be defined as a group, and the individual teachers, student teachers, parents, and principals who represented separate voices. Thus, a dichotomy was acknowledged between an established organizational culture of the universities’ schools of education and the individual reflective responses of teachers, student teachers, parents and principals.

**Procedures of the Study**

Preliminary networking with knowledgeable informants located school sites and/or recommended principals to aid in setting up focus groups. These informants included:

1. Title 1 state contacts,
2. Local school district contacts,
3. University W’s Early Childhood Professor’s suggestions and
4. Recommendations from a community organization (from Community Z)

Initial document collection included online catalogs and traditional catalogs from each higher education institution. Through scrutiny of the offerings of schools of education, the researcher isolated required or elective courses for elementary students. Later, gathering of individual syllabi was based on student teachers’, teacher educators’, and focus group participants’ identification of courses with family engagement content. This collection of syllabi proved a lengthy process due to limited knowledge of the appropriate contact personnel, and the lack of timely response to obtaining the syllabi.

During August 2000 the pilot study was completed resulting in fine-tuning the three questionnaires disseminated to respondents. In addition, the researcher queried local school district teachers, and principals as to the clarity of questions included on the questionnaires. This step provided a speedy and illuminating method for refining the
proposed queries and enhanced content validity.

Early in the fall, student teacher questionnaires sessions were set up through contact with field experience directors. At two sites, University X and University Y, the researcher traveled to the SOEs to administer the questionnaires. Field experience directors had previously crosschecked the instruments for coherence of questions.

During this time period, principals were initially contacted to formulate the composition of the focus groups representing diverse racial and ethnic parents and a mixture of novice and veteran teachers. At one site, a lead teacher functioned as school head in the absence of an administrator. Questions were forwarded to focus groups prior to meeting. Within the communities, three focus groups were held at elementary school sites except one in University W’s administration turret room. Tape recording and videotaping insured accuracy of transmission of information, although these rigorous procedures might have served to “dampen” responses.

Simultaneously with other research procedures, a complete list of teacher educators in the four schools of education was generated. Permission to survey professors was obtained from all department chairpersons in Curriculum and Instruction. Teacher educator emails were sent in mid-September of 2000 and because of a lack of response, were resent until late January of 2001. After that time, the researcher directed phone calls to the deans of the schools of education and teacher educators who had not responded. A 100% response rate was achieved based on the initial list of the deans of schools of education and school of education teacher educators. Not contacted were a small number of teacher educators (less than 5) who left the state to pursue other jobs, retired, or were on sabbatical leave.
The study’s original time frame was lengthened because of several factors outside the researcher’s control. Teacher educators’ tardiness in returning email responses required a second email request then follow-up phone calls. In addition, the researcher traveled across the state to administer a questionnaire to University Y’s student teacher cohort because of poor response on the initial questionnaire.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is “not fundamentally a mechanical or technical process... but a dynamic and creative process... throughout analysis researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and to continually refine their interpretations” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, pp. 140-141). During this process of data collection and ongoing data analysis, while remaining objective, the researcher drew upon her experiences with home-school partnerships, relied on intuition concerning the relationships between parents and teachers, and utilized document analysis to scrutinize the course listings from the four colleges of education.

The discovery phase consisted of developing ideas, recognizing similarities, or elaborating on emerging themes. To aid in discovery, the researcher read and reread interviews, employed an outside reader with a background in family involvement to verify interpretations, and tracked hunches, implications, and developed notions by use of several notebooks. Again, objectivity was foremost on the mind of the researcher.

Huberman and Miles (1994) suggested tactics to generate meaning from the data collected from the email interviews, the survey, and the focus group interviews. The researcher used the following strategies during the analysis stage ranging from concrete to more abstract tactics:
1. Noting themes
2. Making metaphors
3. Making contrasts and comparisons
4. Striving for conceptual/theoretical coherence (p. 187)

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stressed that data analysis encompasses three linked operations: data reduction, data display and the conclusion processes. These operations “occur before data collection, during study design and planning, during data collection as interim and early analysis are carried out, and after data collection as the final products are approached and completed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 180). Data coding, a method of clarifying and filtering through the meaning of the interview responses, was based on a procedure recommended by Taylor & Bogdan (1998). Initially, Taylor and Bogdan recommended the researcher “develop a story line... integrating the major themes of the study,” thereby saving time by not systematically coding unusable data (p. 151). Secondly, they urged the researcher to establish a “master list of coding categories” based on recurrent ideas, perspectives, or accounts among the interviewees (p. 152). Lastly, Taylor and Bogdan compared the final coding scheme to a “personal filing system” through the use of symbols or numbers as assigned to each category (p. 154).

In addition, the researcher utilized the software program Inspirations (1998-1999) and Microsoft Word (1995 & 2001) to visualize and sort the large amount of information gathered. Data display or the organized, condensed formatting of information obtained from the ongoing research was constructed into tables or diagrams to provide visual linkages for the reader. Inspirations software (1998-1999) was utilized to graphically represent the emergent model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement.
The researcher developed this schematic of the interrelated roles preservice teachers can assume through a grounded theory approach. The grounded theory perspective incorporated open-ended interviewing while it highlighted “in vivo codes” (Creswell, 1998, p. 241), or the interviewees’ exact words. A striving for “precision” in an elaborated model through theoretical-observation compatibility heightened the “systematic relatedness” of the emergent roles designated to preservice teachers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 329). Grounded theory research generated an “abstract analytical schema” (Creswell, 1998, p. 56), which led to a framework built inductively through listening to the voices of key stakeholders in parental engagement.

**Verification Steps**

Triangulation, or a method for verifying insights garnered from divergent sources of data, was employed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Crosschecking the transcripts of the interviews with School of Education chairpersons with the analyses of the teacher education course descriptions confirmed whether the elementary teacher’s curriculum of the particular university or college contained elements of teacher training in family-school partnerships. Congruency between elementary education course descriptions, syllabi, and course coverage as specified by elementary education professors were taken into account. Problems arising during the email and telephone interviews included an overestimation of the infusion of parental involvement into coursework by teacher educators, or, conversely, a lack of knowledge about the content of elementary education departmental courses. To compensate for these problems, telephone conversations with department chairpersons and elementary education professors occurred.

Also, as a form of “member checks” (Creswell, 1994) to guarantee accuracy of
information, phone calls by the researcher were made to those department chairs and elementary education professors participating in the email survey to cross-check information. Additionally, the student teacher survey results were examined for accuracy by each of the field placement directors.

The Pilot Study

The internal validity or accuracy of information obtained through researcher email interviews with chairpersons at the universities/colleges which offered elementary teacher preparation utilized a protocol which was field tested through a pilot study. The email interview protocol was sent to a chairperson and elementary education professors (N=20) at schools of education in Wyoming and Nebraska including the University of Wyoming (Laramie); Casper College (Casper); and Chadron State College (Nebraska) to elicit their suggestions on the clarity of questions, specificity of answers, and applicability to teacher education. Also, in September 2000, the researcher informally consulted with principals, teachers, and parents from a local district to refine the questionnaires. Appendix E contains the instrument and participant responses.

During the fall semester of 2000, a field experience coordinator from one of the four universities supervised the initial effort to receive comments from elementary education candidates on the clarity of the student teacher questionnaire as a part of the pilot study.

In addition, experts in the area of focus group interviews and family engagement scrutinized the email interview protocol and the student teacher survey to suggest revisions in the area of clarity of questions, succinctness of possible answers, and topical applicability. These experts included Helena Hoas, Research Director for Rural Bioethics
Project (Missoula), and Barbara Riley, Family BASICS Director, (Missoula).

Generalizability

Schofield (1990) noted:

The uses of qualitative research have shifted quite markedly in the past decade or two... it has become an approach used widely in basic research on educational issues in our own society... to inform program and policy decisions relating to other sites. (p. 204)

Although this research is only generalizable to the four sites included in the study, this research may ultimately strengthen teacher education program policy.

Rigorous standards assured the credibility of the focus interview protocol that followed the procedure outlined. Evaluating information between the two groups of interviewees – educators and parents occurred constantly. Furthermore, key informants from the groups, the principals, were asked to review the findings as they emerged. Therefore, authenticity of the findings and the trustworthiness of information were enhanced.

Schofield (1990) spoke of three targets of generalization, the first two apply to this study. By “studying what is” or “the goal of describing and understanding... institutions as they typically are is an appropriate aim for... understanding or reflecting on it and possibly improving it” (pp. 209-210). By choosing a site based not on convenience or easy access, but on the fact that the site shared many of the same or similar characteristics of other sites surveyed, the researcher greatly heightened the range of applicability to other similar sites. The second domain of generalization is an objective Schofield labeled “studying what may be” (p. 214). By studying the “leading edge” of
change or "best practices" in education, the researcher "increases the chances that this work will 'fit' or be generalizable to the educational issues important at the time" (p. 215). In addition, by highlighting exemplary models of preservice teacher education training in the area of family engagement in the literature review section of the study, the researcher hoped to set the stage for future curriculum development.

According to Schofield (1990), "The heart of external validity is replicability" (p. 203). The focus of the initial phase of the present study is, in fact, a replication, based, in part, on similar reports by Hintz et al. (1992) in their Survey of Parent Involvement Courses in Minnesota's Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Programs and Shartrand et al. (1994) in their working paper from the Harvard Family Research Project entitled Preparing Teachers to Involve Parents: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs. These studies surveyed schools of education, at the state or national level, to ascertain the extent of coursework for elementary education students in home-school relations. Similarly, the present research queried the four schools of education on the extent to which they incorporate curriculum on family engagement in their preservice education programs.

"Although the notion of transferability accommodates the problem of complexity, it still assumes that findings from one setting are only generalizable to another setting if both settings are very similar" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 185). The uniqueness of this state's schools of education was framed within the context of a predominantly rural, western setting that is undergoing rapid changes in demographics. With 161,000 students enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade, 19% of children live in poverty, 13% of students are of minority status, and 12% are students with disabilities (Mullan, 2000, p. 130).
Although other schools of education nationwide could “learn something” from the perceptions, opinions, and suggestions of teachers, student teachers, teacher educators, and parents concerning home-school partnerships, the distinctiveness of the findings appertains only to the particular population and setting.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study was conducted through site visitations to four schools of education throughout the state during the fall and winter of the 2000-2001 school year. Data were collected from several sources: documents (schools of education catalog course descriptions and syllabi); student teacher questionnaires; focus group questions; and teacher educator questionnaires (written, email, personal contact, and phone responses). Data reporting is in aggregate form for the four universities.

Focus group interviews were conducted at targeted elementary school sites utilizing key participants with a vested interest in family involvement—principals, teachers (novice and veteran), school counselors, parent advocates, parents, grandparents, and para-educators. In addition, practicing student teachers at the four sites were surveyed concerning their preparation to work with the parents of their future students. Furthermore, school of education catalog course descriptions and selected syllabi for the elementary teacher education programs were scrutinized for content in family involvement. Finally, teacher educators who instruct or supervise elementary education majors including deans, chairpersons, and field experience coordinators, were asked to respond to questions concerning students’ preparation to partner with parents. The interviews and questionnaires were focused on answering the following research questions:
1. To what extent do the four NCATE accredited schools of education elementary teacher curriculum offer teacher preparation in the area of knowledge, skills, and understanding to promote family involvement?

2. What recommendations from the key stakeholders in family involvement concerning knowledge, skills, and understanding should be incorporated into elementary teacher curriculum at the four NCATE accredited SOEs?

Initially, the four college catalogs from 1999-2001 were scrutinized for evidence of coursework and/or field experiences in family involvement through either required or elective classes in elementary education. Also, based on indications from all key participants, elementary education courses and/or field experiences were investigated for curricular content in family involvement.

Twenty focus group participants included both educators and parents supporting school/family involvement. These individuals provided insiders' viewpoints concerning effective teacher collaboration with parents and powerful suggestions for preparing education majors to interact with families.

Next, 92 practicing student teachers responded to a questionnaire aimed at discovering their perceptions concerning the extent of instruction or experiences they received during their course of study to aid them in working with families. Student teachers filled out the questionnaire on site at their universities. Field experience coordinators from the four universities provided the following points of reference during the spring semester of 2001 based on numbers of spring graduates and estimates of minority and non-traditional graduates.
Table 3: Demographics of Elementary Education Graduates (Spring 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools of Education</th>
<th>Student Teachers Surveyed</th>
<th>Minority Students</th>
<th>Non-traditional Students</th>
<th>Elementary Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University W</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University X</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Less than 2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Y</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Less than 8%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Z</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Less than 2%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(May 2, 2001; May 3, 2001; January 12, 2001; May 17, 2001)

Furthermore, the researcher surveyed student teacher cohorts at various stages of their field experiences: University W participants were surveyed mid-year student teaching; University X and Y participants were surveyed early in student teaching; while University Z participants were concluding their student teaching experience. Opportunities when student teachers had congregated for a meeting were utilized to present the questionnaires.

Additionally, four deans of the schools of education were interviewed personally or by phone by the researcher to address the issue of professional development for teacher candidates in preparation for collaboration with parents. Also, elementary chairpersons, field experience and practicum coordinators, along with core and adjunct faculty (N= 71) from the elementary teacher preparation programs were asked their input on teacher preparation within their coursework or field experiences; within their elementary teacher education program; and within the broader scope of future coursework and field experiences.

The “reduction” of data and subsequent “interpretation” was based on the key interpretations of stakeholders as supported by suggestions in the form of significant quotes (Creswell, 1994, p. 154). The display of themes formulated into tables functioned
as a clear representation of the essential data (Creswell, 1994). The tables offered a condensation of the perspectives held by the participants organized into overarching themes. Finally, overarching common themes between cohort groups formed the basis for an emerging model for parent-teacher partnerships.

Initially, the analyses of the two document sources for evidence of knowledge, skills, and understanding in family involvement through catalog course descriptions and selected syllabi are presented. The analyses were conducted by focusing on significant phrases indicative of family involvement in the content of courses. Next, the findings were organized into three sections in order to focus on responses and recommendations of each of the three cohort groups: student teachers, focus group respondents, and teacher educators. Within each section, both current instruction in knowledge, skills, and understanding of family involvement and future recommended practices and/or field opportunities as delineated by each of the three cohorts are addressed.

Current Elementary Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement

Document Analysis

Initial analysis of documents pertaining to either required or elective courses and/or field experiences began with the individual schools of education catalog course descriptions. Catalog course descriptions from 1999-2001 were examined in either hard copy or online. When the researcher objectively scrutinized catalog course descriptions for terminology suggestive of family engagement, general descriptors such as “parent,” “family,” or “home,” was noted. In addition, specific phrases such as “parent-teacher conferences;” “parent-teacher partnerships;” “home and school relationships;” “parents as informal teachers of young children;” “family abuse and neglect;” “IFSP- Individual
Family Service Plan;” “community based services;” “ethnic diversity;” and “teacher as a member of the community” indicated potential courses. Table 4 lists both required and elective courses within elementary teacher education programs at the four schools whose descriptions (not necessarily titles) hold the promise of content in family engagement.

The symbol (R) stands for a required course for elementary programming, while (E) stands for an elective course in elementary programming.

Table 4: Catalog Course Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalog Course Titles</th>
<th>University W</th>
<th>University X</th>
<th>University Y</th>
<th>University Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools of Education (1999-2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the Needs of the Family (E)</td>
<td>Child in the Family (E)</td>
<td>Abuse and Neglect in the Family and the Helping Process in Human Services (E)</td>
<td>Human Development-Middle Childhood &amp; Adolescence (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the Needs of the Family (Lab) (E)</td>
<td>Introduction to Exceptionalities (E)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Childhood Classroom Management (E)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Professional (E)</td>
<td>Pre-School Practicum Laboratory (E)</td>
<td>Child in the Social World (E)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Cultures in Schools and Community (R)</td>
<td>Issues in Early Intervention (E)</td>
<td>Human Development in Education (R)</td>
<td>Exceptional Needs Children (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Psychology, Management, and Assessment (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Child and the Family System (E)</td>
<td>Assessment of Special Needs Children (E)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Learner (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Psychology (R)</td>
<td>Introduction to Multicultural Education (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Planning and Management (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(University W Online Catalog, University X Catalog, University Y General Bulletin, University Z Online Catalog from 1999-2001).

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Next, based on student teacher survey indications from the four schools of education, the syllabi of selected courses were gathered by the researcher to be scrutinized for evidence of knowledge, skills, and/or understanding in family involvement. It was critical to note several teacher educators mentioned a discrepancy between the catalog course descriptions and actual class content in knowledge, skills, and understanding in family involvement. Although the majority of teacher educators agreed to the importance of preparing education majors to work with families, various statements accounting for the disparity between this belief and the actual class content were offered:

- "A word of caution as you review the syllabi for content—my syllabi includes broad topics that do not reflect everything that is discussed in class" (early childhood professor, November 27, 2000).
- "I doubt we measure their (elementary education majors) efficacy in being able to be successful in parent involvement" (educational psychology professor, November 16, 2000).
- "[Family involvement is] not explicitly in our syllabi, but often incidental discussions on parent issues come up" (educational psychology professor, February 7, 2001).
- "If one were to ‘word search’ our syllabi, the number of hits on ‘working with families’ is small" (exceptionalities professor, December 29, 2000).
• "Both students and I are interested in this area (family involvement), but formal instruction and measure of in-service teachers' abilities to effectively involve parents is not done in our school to my knowledge" (educational psychology professor, November 16, 2000).

Nonetheless, in perusing the selected syllabi that student teachers indicated as having content knowledge, skills, and/or understanding, the researcher focused on terminology that broadly signified possible topical coverage. Terminology within selected syllabi included, but was not limited to the following topics:

- **Home Influences**: family; students' home cultures; parenting styles; overview of role of the family in the life of the child; traditional family values; family lifestyle; home inventory; family and relationship skills

- **Home-School Relationships**: parent-teacher partnerships; home and school relationships; positive suggestions to parents; working knowledge of how to deal with parents; parental attitudes; meeting parents for the first time and teacher attitude: the heart of good parent communication

- **Community Resources**: home visits; community resources; community profile; school neighborhood; community partnerships; family abuse and neglect; IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan); families and communities; disabilities in families; clinical case reports with the parents or guardians; reciprocal relationship between parents; children, extended family, and community; involves parents from the community; families and early childhood programs; understanding the needs of families
• **Parent-Teacher Communication**: communicating with parents; communication of assessment results to parents; parent-teacher conferences; effective conferences with parents; parent conference plan/procedures; working with parents; interacting with parents; dealing with families; family involvement; explaining to parents; conferencing techniques; permission from parents; interviews with parents; parent involvement; and interviewing teachers on parent involvement; communicating developmental progress to a parent

• **Parents as Partners**: parents as partners; plan of action for involving parents; use of children's literature in the home; literacy instruction at home; parents’ expectations for their children; importance of the family in literacy development; and engaging parents as partners; partnerships with families and communities

• **Family Diversity**: cultural diversity/ culture & ethnicity; cultural awareness; human diversity curriculum based on ethnic and social background of learners; and cultural discontinuities between home and school culture; sociological issues of public schooling: families’ culture; plan for dealing with diversity in families (Terminology from elementary education syllabi indicating possible content in family involvement from University W, University X, University Y, & University Z, 2000-2001).
The summative table enumerates course syllabi for either required or elective courses for each of the four elementary education programs containing key phrases indicating possible content in family involvement:

Table 5: Summative Syllabi Document Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Schools of Education</th>
<th>No Evidence of Content in Family Involvement</th>
<th>Evidence of Content in Family Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University W Syllabi</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University X Syllabi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Y Syllabi</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Z Syllabi</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preceding table lists the number of courses for each School of Education containing instruction in knowledge, skills, or understanding in family involvement based on evidence from document analysis of the syllabi. This table should be coupled with Table 6: Evidence of Summative Document Analysis specifying syllabic content in family involvement for each of the four schools of education found in Appendix G. Table 6 specifies syllabi within individual schools of education evidencing family engagement terminology.

Student Teacher Perceptions on Family Engagement

Three questions were posed to elementary student teachers that included denoting courses and methods that prepared them to interact successfully with families. In addition, they were asked to comment upon how their teacher education program could have better prepared them to work with parents while in their student teaching experience.
First, student teachers from the four universities were asked to indicate from a list of elective and required courses in the elementary education program classes those imparting knowledge, skills and understandings in the area of family involvement. Table 7 indicates the number of students surveyed and the courses taught on their campuses that had content related to family engagement. The total number of courses is indicated as well as the number of classes each student cited as having family engagement as an integral part of the course curriculum. Median values are included to show how many courses at each institution were, on average, indicated as having this content. The total number of courses designated by students takes into account some students not listing any courses because they felt they did not contain family engagement components.

Table 7: Family Engagement Course Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools of Education</th>
<th>Student Teacher Respondents</th>
<th>Total Courses Indicated</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University W</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University X</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Y</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Z</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest frequency of courses in descending order is listed by each university group of student teachers in Table 8. The most frequently listed courses by student teachers at each school of education are reflected in the tables below.
Table 8: Frequency of Student Teacher Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University W</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>Course Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Educational Psychology Measurement &amp; Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Child Growth &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Foundations of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Language &amp; Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Literacy &amp; Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University X</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>Course Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Educational Psychology and Measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ethics and Policy Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Exceptionality and Classroom Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exploring Issues through Field Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Health Issues of Children &amp; Adolescents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Y</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>Course Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Historical, Philosophical, and Legal Issues in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Society, Schools, and Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Human Development in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Diagnostic Teaching of Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teaching Language Arts &amp; Children’s Literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Z</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>Course Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Exceptional Needs 0-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Educational Management and Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Educational Planning and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Paraprofessional Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Introduction to Multicultural Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within methods courses, professional block, and/or foundations courses students were asked to indicate content in family involvement. A total of 19 responses from the professional block/foundations from University W designated the following courses pertaining to curriculum in this area:

- Foundations of Education
- Educational Psychology, Management and Assessment
- Exceptional Learner

No methods classes were mentioned by student teachers at University W.

University X’s methods courses were identified a total of 12 times by the target group in the instrument with coverage in family involvement:

- Teaching Math in Elementary School
- Teaching Social Studies in Elementary School
- Teaching Science in Elementary School
- Teaching Language and Literacy

In addition, respondents from University X noted professional education coursework 32 times:

- Exploring Teaching Through Field Experiences
- Educational Psychology and Measurement
- Ethics and Policy Issues
- Exceptionality and Classroom Methods

University Y’s Professional Education core courses had 32 indicators which included the following classes:

- Curriculum Theory and Design
• Junior Field Experience

• Society, Schools, and Teachers

• Human Development in Education

• Educational Psychology

• Philosophical, Legal, and Ethical Issues in Education.

University Y’s methods courses had 15 applicable responses:

• Teaching Language Arts/Children’s Literature and Reading in the Elementary School

• Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School

• Teaching Mathematics in the Elementary School

• Teaching Science in the Elementary School

• Teaching Art in the Elementary School

• Strategies in Health Enhancement

University Z’s student participants cited 11 courses that demonstrated content in family involvement:

• Principles and Practices of Early Literacy

• Teaching Art

• Teaching Mathematics

• Child Health Enhancement Methods

• Teaching Social Studies

• Teaching Reading to Established Readers/Remedial Readers

• Paraprofessional Experience
Although no required stand-alone class covering family involvement was found in any of the four elementary teacher education programs, two students out of 92 surveyed indicated a need for a separate course on this topic. Fifteen students listed student teaching (especially through parent-teacher conferencing) as a source for interactions with parents. Under the broader category of field experiences, 16 students named junior field experiences, para-educator experiences, hands-on experiences, and tutoring sessions as viable opportunities to meet and interact with parents.

Although five students indicated special educational preparation as a source of their knowledge regarding family diversity and the importance of respecting individual family needs and concerns, not all students are required to take exceptionality classes during the elementary programs. Furthermore, two students cited early childhood preparation supporting family involvement by offering resources for parents, providing home visitation models, exemplifying letter writing to parents, and demonstrating effective parent conferencing. Low numbers of elementary majors (up to 25%) take these valuable elective classes (early education professor, January 29, 2001). A professor of elementary education, who also teaches early childhood courses, concurred, “Many colleges do not require a family dynamics/relations class as part of their elementary education programs, unlike early childhood education and special education” (November 17, 2000). A chair of special education and reading noted, “Information about relationships with families is infused in the human development courses and the SPED [special education courses], throughout early childhood courses” (November 15, 2000). Although focus group participants mentioned Native American Studies as a source for
understanding cultural diversity, no student teachers mentioned Native American Studies classes covering family involvement content.

When queried about current class instruction/experiences, elementary student teachers at the four schools of education listed critical areas in order of decreasing frequency: (a) communication with parents, (b) recognition of the significance of family involvement, (c) understanding needs and concerns of families, (d) preparation for parent-teacher conferences, family-school functions, and working with volunteers. (University W student teacher questionnaire, October 2, 2000; University X student teacher questionnaire, October 12, 2000; University Y student teacher questionnaire, January 12, 2001; University Z student teacher questionnaire, December 12, 2000).

Students noted spontaneous university discussions about their observations and concerns related to parent-teacher interactions. Student teacher responses cited class discussions led by professors that provided guidance, options, and/or suggestions on topics of parent involvement. This parallels teacher educator responses that mentioned “incidental discussions on parent issues come up that are not explicitly listed in the syllabus” (math professor, January 29, 2001), and “much of what we do is not listed in our syllabi or listed in general terms” (elementary methods professor, December 12, 2000).

Student teacher cohorts specified current classroom instructional strategies or opportunities for field experiences. These included the following two components, course instruction and field experiences across the four schools of education. Course instruction considered valuable stressed opening the lines of communication with families, developing and maintaining contact with parents, and learning effective ways to approach
parents. Respecting the concerns of families with exceptional children, while maintaining an ethical stance, was cited. Providing entrée for parents into the classroom as volunteers was a priority (University W student teacher questionnaire, October 2, 2000; University X student teacher questionnaire, October 12, 2000; University Y student teacher questionnaire, January 12, 2001; University Z student teacher questionnaire, December 12, 2000).

Students mentioned numerous field experiences as promoting knowledge of family engagement: clinical experiences, tutoring sessions, field practicum, para-educator work, substitute teaching, and student teaching. They valued “practical” and “hands-on experiences with “opportunities to interact with parents daily.” “Communicating,” “interacting,” and “guidance in dealing with parents” were activities mentioned as supportive of the development of relationships with families (University W student teacher questionnaire, October 2, 2000; University X student teacher questionnaire, October 12, 2000; University Y student teacher questionnaire, January 12, 2001; University Z student teacher questionnaire, December 12, 2000).

Gallego (2001) stressed the dynamic interaction evident when coupling community-based field experiences with classroom content and pedagogical knowledge. Gallego (2001) urged, “Creating environments that support all students’ academic success requires changes in...the courses preservice teachers enroll in as part of our teacher education programs” (p. 323). Table 9 delineates both instructional strategies and field experiences elementary education majors acknowledged as supportive of family engagement.
Table 9: Student Teacher Recommended Instructional Strategies and Field Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Instruction</th>
<th>Field Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Instruction/Discussion:</strong> Open lines of communication with parents: maintain contact newsletters, home visits; phone home with positive comments; proper and improper way to approach parents; getting permission slips for activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relating to parents:</strong> Approaching parents with sensitive issues; collecting data on children; decisions to contact; diversity of parents; different expectations and different opinion/points of view; respecting family needs/concerns; listening to parents of gifted/talented kids express needs of their children; general parental/familial situations, rights of parents; provide a basis for determining ethical behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Meetings/Conferences:</strong> Help manage/set up meetings; skits/role play parent-teacher meetings;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Involvement:</strong> Parents are vital part in the success of student learning; important to have a smooth working classroom; home life affects students' school life; understand ways to evaluate if a child is in need of &quot;special&quot; services; how to approach parents, volunteers in class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-School Partnerships:</strong> Work on sensitive issues; teachers, parents, and students working together; how to include parents in the child's education; keep a good relationship; volunteers in class; collaboration and involvement of parents in daily activities of the child with extensions at home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( Student teacher questionnaire comments: University W, October 2, 2000; University X, October 12, 2000; University Y, January 12, 2001; University Z, December 12, 2000).
Among the 92 student teacher respondents from all four schools of education, 32 comments addressed a lack of course instruction or field experiences in family involvement.

Students commented:

- "The elementary program doesn't prepare us at all."
- "I honestly didn't learn how to collaborate with parents."
- "I don't feel I was properly trained to handle any parental situation."
- "I don't recall learning about how to get parents involved."
- "[It was] not a part of any syllabus...[I have] not received any instruction as to how to get parents involved."
- "[I was] not given or taught the necessary skills to deal with families."

(Student teacher questionnaire comments: University W, October 2, 2000; University X, October 12, 2000; University Y, January 12, 2001; University Z, December 12, 2000).

Paralleling these remarks by student teachers, 23 statements addressed the issue of very little training in family involvement. Students wrote:

- "To be honest, I feel we should have been given more information and training."
- "I truly feel our professors could have touched more on this topic."
- "There is little information geared to knowledge and understanding [to work with parents] in the actual classroom."
- "I can't say there was a lot of actual training."
- "[Family involvement was] not mentioned as much as it should have been."
- "[I] haven't been fully prepared by discussing matters."

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(Student teacher questionnaire comments: University W, October 2, 2000; University X, October 12, 2000; University Y, January 12, 2001; University Z, December 12, 2000).

Approximately 60% of the 92 student teachers surveyed at the four institutions commented upon either a lack of preparation or very little training to work with parents (Student teacher questionnaires: University W, October 2, 2000; University X, October 12, 2000; University Y, January 12, 2001; University Z, December 12, 2000).

**Student Teacher Recommendations**

There appeared to be general agreement across student teacher cohorts at the four schools of education on critical knowledge, skills, and understanding that need to be developed during their education coursework and/or field experiences. The following student teacher pedagogical considerations and/or experiential learning applications emerged in response to the questionnaire:

- How to effectively communicate with parents
- How to establish positive parental relations and deal with angry parents in different situations
- How to implement and include longer more inclusive field experiences
- How to work with diverse families to meet the individual needs of families
- How to prepare for and participate in constructive parent-teacher conferences
- How to encourage and provide incentives for parent volunteers in the classroom (Student teacher questionnaires: University W, October 2, 2000; University X, October 12, 2000; University Y, January 12, 2001; University Z, December 12, 2000).
Focus Group Key Stakeholder Perceptions

Focus groups comprised of 20 key stakeholders were labeled Community W (pseudonym Rural School); Community X (pseudonym Community School); Community Y (pseudonym Suburban School); and Community Z (pseudonym Urban School) for the sake of anonymity. Within the focus groups, for the purpose of triangulation, the researcher identified:

• individual-to-individual validation of emerging themes (present and future coursework)
• group-to-group validation of recurrent themes (present and future coursework)
• parent cohort versus teacher cohort divergent themes
• parental concerns of persons of ethnicity

Individual-to-Individual Validation

Emerging major themes indicated by more than one-half of focus group contributors for each setting are highlighted in Table 10. The composition of the focus groups included Community W-Rural School, with four members; Community X-Community School, with six members; Community Y-Suburban School, with six members; and Community Z-Urban School with four members. If more than one-half of the participants initiated dialogue concerning the following themes, the researcher noted the multiple dialogues. Therefore, the table reflects themes discussed by a majority of the individuals in each focus group. The discussants voiced minor variations of the themes, yet the researcher felt their topical meaning related closely to the broader themes listed below.
Table 10: Individual's Repeated Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repeated Themes by Focus Group Participants</th>
<th>Community W</th>
<th>Community X</th>
<th>Community Y</th>
<th>Community Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills: Open Door Policy &amp; Limited Experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Importance of Family Involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Community, State, and Family Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Resource Help: Family Resource Centers or Home Visits</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Diversity of Families: Religious, Cultural, Economic &amp; Social</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual-to-individual validation of themes served to establish a pattern of responses that insured a “depth of participants’ involvement with the material they are discussing” (Merton et al., 1990, as cited in Morgan, 1997, p. 46). Across groups, deference to one individual member was not evident; members’ views concerning elementary teacher preparedness to work with families were valued, reiterated and expanded upon by the whole group. From the repeated themes voiced by key participants in the four focus groups, the research narrowed to across group themes emerging through the interview dialogues.

Group-to-Group Validation

Recurrent themes and sub themes appeared across the interview dialogues during the focus group settings. The table represents themes that emerged across two or more
groups as repeatedly mentioned by participants (not necessarily a majority) when queried about current elementary teacher preparation to work with families.

Table 11: Repeated Themes across Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repeated Themes And Sub Themes</th>
<th>Community W</th>
<th>Community X</th>
<th>Community Y</th>
<th>Community Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical importance of parent involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of families: cultural, socio-economic &amp; religious</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of resource help</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of community, state &amp; family demographics</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Imparting to preservice teachers the critical importance of parent involvement was believed to be foundational in elementary teacher education coursework. Key stakeholders viewed teacher knowledge of the availability of community and school resources as essential. Two of the four schools had active family resource centers; Community X often logged in over 200 hundred visitors monthly, while Community Z employed a family liaison who acted as a resource agent for the families in her school (December 6, 2000; November 14, 2000). Community Z family liaison suggested the need for a class on “Resource Development in your Community” where teachers seek out and find community resources, from Big Brothers and Sisters to Prevent Child Abuse to a community food bank (November 14, 2000). Fried (2001) noted to promote student
academic excellence, "The emphasis must extend beyond the school to include the community—its cultural agencies, places of worship, local leaders, and, most of all, parents" (p. 153). Community X family outreach specialist, who coordinated her school’s family resource center, suggested strategies that new teachers might utilize:

I would think that placing yourself in a position, as a student teacher, especially if you are working with a child that you have concerns about, if you happen to know that one of the families of your students is there at the [family resource] center…that you check with the right people, or see to it that the family would be getting some kinds of services, if services are available. (December 6, 2000)

Community Z Family Liaison suggested a teacher education class entitled “Cold Calling Parents 201”:

Because there is nothing harder,…it is the hardest part of my job, calling parents and having to deal with a negative issue. All those cold calls that teachers make…making that first cold call for a hygiene issue…and then you just feel sick to your stomach. (November 14, 2000)

Community W School participants endorsed home visits as school outreach for their families and a prerequisite for preservice elementary teachers to develop their comfort level when visiting their students’ homes.

Community Y Native American mother emphasized knowledge of community, state, and family demographics that might be embedded in a course for preservice teachers:
First, a broad overview of the history of the area...the attitudes and perceptions people have...a cultural overview of the specific area...the SES factors [that] make up the area...coming right down to the school, the family, the child, and the dynamics of what is happening in the family today. (October 16, 2000)

Being an effective communicator with parents of students was rated as an absolutely essential skill for preservice educators across all four focus groups. Education participants invited teachers to essentially listen to people first, then talk later. As a subtheme within the communication theme, Community X principal cited “a pretty narrow band of experiences” or perspectives on the part of preservice teachers directly affecting their ability to communicate with and have empathy for diverse families (December 6, 2000). Community Y veteran male teacher, who has a degree in special education, echoes this sentiment:

I think teachers still come out of teacher education into a public school system expecting straight rows of well-behaved kids from a tidy place and that’s a misconception that comes back to you really, really quick... in my regular education training, I simply do not recall that we discussed what to do with families. (October 16, 2000)

Community Z veteran female teacher underscored the need for reflection of one’s own personal knowledge of strengths and weaknesses, as tied to empathy and understanding for families and a willingness to communicate:

If they come from a strong family themselves, and have not had a lot of experience outside that realm, they need to know I need to pursue information about situations I may not have personally experienced. Say the child has a parent

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who just got out of prison, and we assume that the parent doesn’t care about that child because he is in prison, well, that’s just not true. And that’s a tough process for a lot of pre-service teachers. (November 14, 2000)

From the Community W perspective, a parent who is completing an early childhood degree stressed:

They [preservice teachers] just don’t have the life experiences.... You know there are different people with different backgrounds, and baggage...the younger students don’t really know that...maybe there should be something other than life experiences that teaches you those things. (October 7, 2000)

Developing a willingness to listen to parents was also felt to be a priority in teacher preparation, a trait of collaborative communication with parents. Further, Rich (1998) stated, “Teachers must be academic sharers--explaining the curriculum, teaching methods, and how parents can reinforce learning at home” (p. 38).

Educator Cohort Versus Parent Cohort Divergent Themes

Educators and parents prioritized two distinct areas in elementary teacher preparation. The deviation between group emphases represented the varying viewpoints held by each group, the former group concentrating on educative opportunities for teachers, while the latter group was concerned with authentic collaboration with families of diversity. It was informative to note the variations in themes two divergent groups of stakeholders felt were crucial to support family engagement. Their perspectives, although dissimilar, authenticated their meaning of family involvement. Themes are displayed in Table 12 and further explicated in the two sections that follow.

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Table 12: Divergent Themes: Educators and Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divergent Themes</th>
<th>Educator Cohort</th>
<th>Parent Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring of new teachers on parent collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical importance of family involvement: extensive research base supporting family involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatives and positives of “dealing” with families</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools’ open door policies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to family involvement based on family diversity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences/observations with real families: home visits/lab interactions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Educator Themes**

Teacher as participants within the focus groups appeared to unite on school related teacher issues in interacting with parents. Educators were apprehensive that schools of education were not fully preparing future teachers to effectively involve parents in their classrooms. Therefore, several educators including principals, as well as novice and veteran teachers, suggested mentoring new teachers to the differing aspects of family involvement as an option (November 14, 2000, October 7, 2000, December 6, 2000). Fried (2001) believed “the importance of building a network of advice and support for new teachers cannot be overemphasized...in creating a capacity for initiative and partnership among teachers and parents” (pp. 96, 97). Comments were similar to those of Community W novice teacher who had started teaching that fall:
I also think after the teachers get out of school, they should work under someone for a year. I think that way they get into a routine they know, because some of these kids [new teachers] get out and they are lost; they’re not ready to teach. (October 7, 2000)

Community Y veteran teacher agreed:

I think we do have teachers that are better at it [parent involvement] than others…they may have better skills…they are more comfortable with addressing conflict, they are more comfortable with sharing things with parents. Like the child coming to school not smelling good, those kinds of things [sic]. So, how to mentor your new fellow teachers…because I think that is a professional obligation that whatever your strength is, and if it is parent interaction, that you need to learn to be a good mentor [sic]. (October 16, 2000)

Community X principal talked about what really helped him the most as a young teacher:

[I] was making a lot of mistakes and learning from those. And what I really wish I had more of, in making those mistakes, was a good mentor. Someone to fall back on when I was in my most miserable places after I had made a mistake, someone that would’ve said, “Oh, I did that a whole bunch of times, you know, and here’s what I learned from it.” Schools can provide some support systems to young teachers as they enter the workforce by taking care of some of that. (December 6, 2000)

Educators were extremely cognizant of the critical importance of family engagement, and knowledgeable about recent research supporting the role of parent as crucial to student academic achievement. Community X school counselor succinctly
stressed, “All of the research shows that kids’ connections to families, and families’ connections to schools increases their ability to succeed in school” (December 6, 2000).

Also, Community X intermediate teacher of 28 years felt, “My view is that the teacher with the school, and the parents, are all part of a team, and you can’t have the team without all of the members” (December 6, 2000). Fried (2001) viewed parents as members in the “Triangle of Partners” along with teachers and students (p. 54).

Community X principal stated that knowledge at the preservice level should focus on research on family/parental engagement. Furthermore, he recommended:

You can learn in a [college] classroom a conceptual framework for parent involvement. If you had a conceptual framework, if you really understand the whole dynamics of schools and families, and societies, and cultures... then you can put the “practical” into that and make it make sense and work for you.

(December 6, 2000)

Issues of “dealing” with the parents of their students remained a topic of dialogue in the four focus groups. A recent report from Public Agenda (Farkas et al., 1999) found many teachers seem to harbor doubts about parents’ capabilities to judge them fairly without being guided by personal innuendo and a lack of objectivity. Although having a negative connotation, “dealing” with parents appeared to refer to communications between child educators and childcare givers that may have negative overtones.

Community Z veteran teacher believed:

I guess I feel as a teacher when I receive a child in the classroom, that I am receiving the whole family. The siblings, the mom and dad may not be living together... so opportunities for involvement are not just academic, but emotional
opportunities, and sharing with the parents the highs and lows. I enjoy calling up
the parents and saying, “Guess what your child did today?” but I believe in
sharing too “not-so-highs” which would mean I need your support. (November
14, 2000)

Community X principal concurred:

My experience is that emerging new teachers that are just coming out, the one
thing that causes the most grief is their ability to work with families and parents.
If they can do that, chances are, they will have a relatively good experience. And
if they can’t do that, chances are they are going to quit in a few years. And we
lose some good teachers that way, because they haven’t been trained in that skill.
There is nothing more miserable as an educator to have a parent angry at you, that
really makes you miserable, because most educators… are nurturing, caring
people. I think those skills have to be taught, because we rely too much on
personal experience. (December 6, 2000)

Community W novice teacher stated, “Especially with older students that are
afraid of dealing with parents… they come across thinking, I’ve graduated… I’m the
expert” (October 7, 2000). Community Y veteran teacher agreed:

I think for new teachers coming out, I was intimidated or scared of parents that
wanted to be in there [classroom]. They wanted to watch me, make sure I was
doing the right thing. But, as a first year teacher, I remember I taught in
California… on a military base [and] I just wanted the parents to stay out and let
me do my thing, but that wasn’t good because I needed help, and once you let
those people come in, and open the door to the parents, they feel more
comfortable, too. If you close the door, they think you’re trying to hide something and don’t want them in there…the opposite is true. (October 16, 2000)

Educators, including principals, school counselors, and teachers verbalized the significance of mentoring novice teachers in partnering with parents, referring to a research base to support the notion of family collaboration, and preparing teachers for the positives and negatives of working with families.

**Parent Themes**

Parent participants in all four focus groups held the perspective of a true partnership with parents. The welcoming atmosphere of a school’s *open door* policy was a top priority for parents. Pipher (1998, in Scherer, 1998) suggested, “Parents… need a personal relationship with school” (p. 10). Community X mother, who coordinates the school’s family resource center, suggested:

It’s really important for beginning teachers to know how to make a good impression…a friendly impression in their classrooms right off the bat, and they have to lay it out, “Here’s how you communicate with me… here’s my email address, here’s my phone number, this is a great time to call me, because I have recess”… so the parent feels welcome so that they don’t have to wait for a problem, so they are nervous to approach the teacher, I guess. Be very approachable, that’s what I am trying to say. (December 6, 2000)

Community X mother continued along this theme:

One thing that struck me as we’ve talked, is maybe a course in relationships. Relationships take time, sometimes you click with someone right away, and sometimes…it might take two years to have a good relationship with a family.
Usually it is worth the effort, …because I think the theme that runs through it is that parents and teachers want the kids to do well, and everyone is on the same page there, and so sometimes the struggle is worth it. (December 6, 2000)

Moreover, recognizing and understanding that variety in families exists and that barriers limiting involvement in school activities also exist. Community X mother stressed:

I think they (teachers) should understand that there are different types of families. There’s single family homes, kids that live with grandparents…and they need to understand there’s a lot of parents, especially single parents, they usually work because they have to support their family on their own, so they don’t have a lot of time for their kids… or to find a way after work…to get them involved.

(December 6, 2000)

Community Y mother, a former teacher noted:

As we were talking about all the types of families, I think that fits in there and that we have to understand that parents are working and their schedules are full. They may even have shift work, or the parents don’t see each other. Teachers need to look at each family’s situation, so they can work through each family’s differences. (October 16, 2000)

Closely paralleling the theme of family diversity was a need for preservice teachers to work with “real families” through extended field experiences, lab interactions, or visiting homes according to Community X focus group (December 6, 2000). All focus groups agreed education majors need authentic opportunities to interact with “real families” as exemplified by teen mothers from non-reservation settings, parents from Native American reservations, grandparents raising students, parents exiting prisons,
and/or a mother with multiple sclerosis (October 7, 2000; December 6, 2000; October 16, 2000; November 14, 2000). Community W focus group participants trained in the premises of early childhood education, were especially vocal concerning these crucial experiential activities. Community W mother believed:

I think that starting out with home visits and getting to know the family and where the child comes from, and what is happening in their life can really help...have labs outside the [college] classroom, hands-on things where you are not relying on books [sic]. Those things are more helpful for me. (October 7, 2000)

In addition, Community Y Native American mother referred to organizations that endorse and promote family involvement:

I know some educational groups, such as Head Start and Title 1 in the school district really encourage family participation and expect their teachers to get families involved, and have done a lot of development on ways to involve families. It would be good if those resources could be tapped with undergraduates and utilized because these are groups who have worked. (October 16, 2000)

Also, she cited a powerful opportunity for teachers in training:

If students could actually sit and observe parent-teacher conferences...if those parents gave permission...because that’s such a tremendous learning experience for them. But, the more they could see how parents and teachers work with one another to work through the issues, the good, the bad, or whatever [sic]. (October 16, 2000)

Community X mother suggested frequent participation in family observations.

She believed, from her work experience as a patient advocate in a hospital dealing with
patients that were “irate, sad, or confused,” skits might be helpful in education courses to role play interactions with families and exploring various family situations (December 6, 2000).

Parents clearly favored the adoption of an open door policy for all schools, an agenda supporting the removal of existing barriers to multiethnic parent involvement. In addition, they recommended increased observations of “real families” as a component of teacher education preparation. These expanded experiences with families could occur through home visitations or in a lab setting.

**Parental Concerns of Persons of Ethnicity**

Generally, shared parental concerns about family involvement crossed racial and ethnic boundaries as typified by dialogue during the four focus group interviews. Although persons of diversity in the focus groups included two Native Americans, and one Laotian mother, parents expressed similar concerns across the focus group settings. Parents of lower socio-economic status, and those having exposure to varied cultures, such as the mother who had resided in Alaska, had a heightened awareness of the issues surrounding multicultural families and poverty. The following four themes reflecting socio-cultural issues tended to cross cultural boundaries during the interviews:

- Cultural awareness and respect
- Promoting a school’s open door policy
- Differing compositions of families
- Socio-economic levels of families
Respect for and an awareness of diverse cultural traditions and norms by educators was a frequently reiterated plea by parent participants. Community W mother commented “I would want them [teachers] to be aware of other cultures, not just in their community, and also that everyone’s home life is a different culture” (October 7, 2000).

Focusing on state and community demographics, a Native American mother from Community Y noted:

[Community Y] has a real diverse population, and one part of [Community Y] is so different than another part, and a teacher coming to [Community Y] would have a completely different set of working circumstances than one going to [a rural setting] or a little area maybe on the border of a reservation, and I think, maybe, if they had an understanding of the community, they would have an understanding of the parent’s expectations of the school, and what they hope their child would gain from their education...and a teacher needs to be sensitive to what the parents in that community want as an outcome for their child. (October 16, 2000)

Community X Laotian mother pointed out discontinuity exists in language transferal from other countries that are culturally bound.

We talk backwards, when I’m going to introduce myself, I say my name is PH, instead of HP, so every time when I try to say something to one of the friends, I say ‘OK, am I saying it right, or backwards? (December 6, 2000)

Delpit (1995) confirmed this view:

Negatively stereotyping the language patterns of their students, it is important that...teacher education programs include diverse parents...among those who
prepare future teachers, and take seriously the need to develop in those teachers
the humility required for learning from the surrounding context when entering a
culturally different setting. (p. 56)

Parents were especially cognizant of schools that endorsed an open door policy
welcoming parents, especially the hard to reach parents, into the school building. Decker,
[of parents]... to embody an ethic of caring” (p. 44). Community X mother credited her
school’s open door policy for her daughter’s continued excitement about school:

I think having me in the school helps her stay excited about it... and I don’t want
her to lose that. I think every kid would be as excited and want to come to school
more if they got to see their parents around more. (December 6, 2000)

Community Z mother related her extensive school volunteer experiences through
a middle class perspective of comfort in entering her children’s school:

As a parent, I have been here for seven years with three kids, and I take an active
role in not just waiting for the teacher to ask, but asking the teacher what they
would need, you know, go the extra mile, instead of waiting to see who is signed
up. Some parents don’t know what they can do. Different teachers have different
requests. (November 14, 2000)

Community Y Native American grandfather noted the ease of parental
involvement in his school supporting an open door policy:

If a parent, grandparent, or any [one] else related to children in this school does
not get involved it’s their own fault… because it’s a very open school system, it’s
easy to walk in… you feel good about coming here. You look at this school
compared to other schools right in town and if you would just count the number of non-available parking spaces when they have a school function here... you can’t find a place to park. (October 16, 2000)

Community X family outreach specialist, also a very involved school parent, contacts and welcomes the hard-to-reach parents to get them into the school:

Now I’m working in the school in the family resource center... where I’m outreaching to other parents to say, “come and be involved in the school” [I am] finding a lot of barriers that keep parents from being involved at school... a lot of them have not learned the skills that it takes to be... a good school parent, and just offering that confidence, and not going in there full bore with “we don’t think you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing”... probably 98% of the time we’ve got some parent involvement (December 6, 2000).

In addition, understanding differing compositions of families was a theme voiced as critically important in teacher preparation. Both cohorts, educators and parents, emphasized understanding the changing dynamics of families as a crucial element in teacher education. Community Y Native American grandfather commented on the sub theme of the family as community:

We’re not just talking about families in the traditional sense... we’re talking about that extended family from the extent of the minority. My wife is Cheyenne, my grown children are Cheyenne, and the grandchild living with me is obviously Cheyenne... but in the terms of the extended family, everyone has said “awareness... awareness... awareness.” Not only the extended family from the
bloodline, but the extended family as you look at the family of [the community].

(October 16, 2000)

Community X mother spoke of teacher skills in understanding and respecting differing family viewpoints:

I think teachers need to understand that they have to work with the parents and find a time to get them in. Also, they need to understand that there's different backgrounds, families come from different places... [practice] different religions. They need to understand what their backgrounds are about, so they can respect anything that the family believes in or doesn't believe in. I think that's important.

(December 6, 2000)

Furthermore, exposure to and recognition of the effects of differing socio-economic levels of families emerged as an issue teachers needed acknowledge.

Community Y Native American grandfather emphasized:

It is so darned easy to get caught up in your daily planning, and your discipline, and your responsibilities that you don't take time just to take a moment to take another look every day at this kid... which of these kids has a computer, the economics [of the family], scientific [knowledge]... the bumps, the blemishes, the gifts, you know... and I don't think you can teach that, but you can teach an awareness of it. (October 16, 2000)

Community X mother believed in developing dispositions toward teacher awareness of socio-economic level, including a non-judgmental attitude toward children:

I think we have talked about understanding the differences of where children come from as far as [their] background and whether they're from low economic
or high economic situations. Understanding that that does not make the child…their education levels [sic]…their intelligence is not dependent on that. Every child needs to have the same chance. (December 6, 2000)

Promoting a school’s open door policy implies recognition and acceptance of differing compositions of families from the perspective of socio-economic level, ethnicity, or race of families. “Without opportunities to deliberately expand and challenge personal and professional habitudes (unexamined attitudes), prospective teachers may routinely…misunderstand diversity” (Gallego, 2001, p. 313). Focus group participants of diversity encouraged mainstream teachers to develop an awareness of the dynamics of multicultural families and to nurture a respect for the preferences of families.

Focus Group Recommendations

Focus group participants across the board articulated a myriad of skills and/or strategies that schools of education should be teaching their elementary education majors in preparation to work with the families of their future students. They were minimally aware of course content in the four schools of education included in the study; nonetheless, they raised generalized concerns about the extent of elementary teacher grounding in working with families. Family involvement skills and strategies to be infused throughout education coursework were mentioned by a majority of focus groups as represented by Table 13.
Both cohorts of key stakeholders, parents and educators, had recommendations for schools of education to incorporate into their elementary teacher preparatory program. All groups prioritized skills and/or strategies in the area of communication with parents. Community Z principal underscored the importance of readying teachers to interact with parents through positive approaches to communication skills that include writing, eye contact, and body language. “If you expect it [from your teachers], you have to teach it, and that’s what the professors need to do” (November 14, 2000). Novice teacher from Community W School suggested, “Open the channels of communication [with rural parents] and go from there” (October 7, 2000). Community W parent was reminded of a course she took in Alaska entitled, “‘Parents as Partners in Elementary Education’—I liked the name of the class, you know” (October 7, 2000). Community Z veteran teacher indicated the status of her local school of education:

There are no classes on communication with parents, or how to effectively use parents, although I think there may be subtopics in classes. Communication skills
are number one. Writing, and how to effectively write comments to make the
parent feel like they are valued and you value their child [sic]. (October 7, 2000)

The principal from Community X reflected:

Formal training would have to, in terms of skills, and strategies, include
communication skills. Listen more, talk less, team building, problem solving,
conflict resolution, finding common ground, however you want to say it [sic].
Start listening to parents, try to solve it [problem], be part of the solution, and not
part of the problem [sic]. I think if teachers have that kind of training and skills,
we’re going to be better [off]. Unfortunately, we lose some good teachers who run
afoul of parents. (December 6, 2000)

Selected focus group participants mentioned increasing and/or lengthening field
experiences, observations, or structured interactions to offer more experiential time with
families. Community X school counselor recalling his college education suggested:

Ideally, I think we could restructure the college format. I think that ideally
college would be about... half the classroom time, and the other half of that
classroom time would be experiential. When I worked in foster care I was in the
homes and the treatment center, I was with kids when they were melting
down... and saying things that were incredibly difficult to deal with. Being
verbally abusive, and what do you do then? [sic]. And there’s nothing that teaches
you to deal with that. Give people way, way, way more experiential time...
working with families, and seeing what families are doing to get the kids to
school, and what the kids are going home to. (December 6, 2000)
Community Laotian mother proposed an informal observation project providing preservice teachers with substantive experience studying families:

You know a lot of people graduate from college, they probably about the age of twenty, something, some of them not married yet, so they don’t know much about family life [sic]. So maybe, they should have another course to do in real life that they as an observation in a family [sic]. Because a lot of students, when they doing our [their] research, they say, “I’m a student from the university, I’m doing research [on the] family, so I would like to observe your family, for just one week to do this [sic].” They need to have a course like that, because I haven’t seen anything like [that which] deals more with families [sic]. (December 6, 2000)

Pertaining to the examination of social inequality through cross-cultural courses in the instruction of preservice teachers, Community Y veteran teacher clarified:

I have had some exposure to different socioeconomic levels, and there is no question about it, if you are impacted by poverty, it does not look the same as it does if you are not. One of the more helpful things to me was the Native American Studies [Program]… from the standpoint that it explores a lot of culture, and maybe gives you a chance to try and understand the community again, and the culture and families. (October 16, 2000)

Community X veteran teacher cited two “excellent” graduate cross-cultural courses, potential models for undergraduate preparation. He had recently attended the courses at University X on “how to deal with different cultures…[which] is extremely important” (December 6, 2000). However, Gay (2002) warned that teachers should not be held responsible for culturally relevant teaching if they have not been fully prepared.
"Therefore, teacher preparation programs must be culturally responsive to ethnic diversity as K-12 classroom instruction" (Gay, 2002, p. 114).

According to the focus group participants, prerequisite communication skills include developing positive connections between parents and teachers; nurturing culturally competent teachers; and offering authentic substantive community field experiences.

**Teacher Educator Themes**

Two overarching themes emerged from the interviews with teacher educators at the four universities. Primarily, teacher educators, to varying degrees, acknowledged the necessity for schools of education to adequately prepare teacher candidates to effectively interact with families. Selected cohort members endorsed a philosophy of teacher-parent collaboration through expanded awareness by students and faculty alike. Moreover, teacher educators cautioned curricular and/or time constraints impeded the future development of coursework in the area of family involvement.

An overwhelming majority of teacher educators reiterated the importance of preparing education majors to collaborate with parents/families. "Working with parents is a critical component," according to an adjunct professor teaching art methods (February 15, 2001). A math methods professor declared, "I believe students should be aware of how to deal with families—communication is very important, how, how often, and when" (December 8, 2000). "Dealing with parents is a big part of your job (as a teacher); in actuality you deal with 50 people, including students and their parents" according to a language arts professor (February 2, 2001). Furthermore, a successful classroom environment constitutes building solid relationships with parents. A Native American
Studies professor advised students that an effective program is contingent upon parent involvement (February 5, 2001). A methods professor from University W warned:

In the current climate of wide scale misunderstanding of what public school teachers do in the larger public, I think it is essential for new teachers (and all teachers for that matter) to have the tools to communicate what they are up to with all community members, and the parents of their students in particular. We encourage our pre-service teachers to see the necessity of including the family in how they understand good teaching. (December 24, 2001)

Noting the limited worldview some students hold toward parents who are unable to be involved in schools as traditional “middle class” volunteers, a literacy education professor described:

In my classes, we talk about working with parents often, as many (not all) students believe that parents are supposed to participate in school in a particular middle class way. We talk about the feasibility of this given material and cultural differences. I talk about Victoria Purcell Gates’ research, as well as Lisa Delpit’s argument. (December 11, 2000)

Positive attitudes and dispositions to replace the deficit views of poor parents can be initiated through a philosophical stance embraced by a school of education (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). “The professional perspective is very narrow; we need to broaden the viewpoint. Tolerance is needed for different family situations,” according to an educational psychology professor (February 2, 2001). A dean of a school of education proposed moving towards a new focus in teacher education programmatic direction.
Overlying all of this should be a philosophy that should be a part of teacher education that includes compassion for parents with an understanding of how difficult their role is. School should become a resource for parents. Parents might not have had good experiences with school, yet the teacher should let them know that they are there to partner. (February 2, 2001)

“Fostering the dispositions in students that make family involvement a natural extension of their vision of teaching” (January 24, 2001) for preservice teachers stands as a curricular objective according to a methods professor.

Curricular Concerns

A credit cap of 128 credits was expressed as a deterrent to the establishment of a stand-alone course in family partnerships. The dean of a school of education admitted:

The issue of teacher preparation in family involvement is one we are struggling with across the nation... with limited number of hours, we wonder if the plan of study is developmentally appropriate. (February 2, 2001)

Also, a practicum coordinator addressed the feasibility of adding courses. “No stand-alone course in family involvement exists... with 128 credits, students top out of coursework” (February 7, 2001). “Another course can be a problem—we are five feet deep in courses,” maintained a foundations professor (February 10, 2001). A field experience coordinator concurred, “We may never see a stand-alone course with the credit caps in force” (January 29, 2001) while another field experience director regretted, “the sad part is the School of Education did a better job before the program was cut to 128 credits” (January 24, 2001).
Teacher educators had differing opinions about the value of adding a stand-alone course in family involvement to their elementary teacher education programs. An educational foundations professor doubted:

A separate course to address family issues or teachers working with families is appropriate. Too much curriculum proliferation already exists in teacher education. Beyond that, I feel that issues of family and family involvement should be embedded in courses relating to human development and the social aspects of education. (April 2, 2001)

On the other hand, an elementary program coordinator supported the concept of a stand-alone course. “Currently, the topic of family involvement is infused into courses, but it would be nice to have a stand-alone course” (January 29, 2001).

However, in response to the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2000) standards 5B and 5C that support collaboration with families and the community, some schools of education had outlined goals for course infusion in family involvement. This effort appeared to be completed to varying degrees at the four universities, one having developed a master chart aligning NCATE family and community standards to coursework, and another being in the process of development, “but not anywhere near completion” (chairperson of reading and special education, November 15, 2000). However, this respondent in the developmental stage, failed to mention the “Reflective Practice Education Model” from the catalog. Theme 4.4 “Collaboration and Professional Relationship Building: Understands the process of negotiation, cooperation, and collaboration with… parents,” was listed under the area of professional and specialty studies (University Y college catalog, 1999-2000, p. 161).
Moreover, two universities had not begun work on a comprehensive grid while one university emerged farthest along in this development. "Our program has 15 program outcome goals displayed on a grid based on NCATE standards with program outcome assessment measured. The 15th one deals with family involvement in education. [Nine] courses contain this topic" (foundations & educational psychology professor, January 24, 2001).

The infusion of knowledge, skills, and understanding about working with parents into elementary teacher education coursework and field experiences was limited, at best. "We’re (teacher educators) aware of it (family involvement), but I’m not sure how well we’re covering it," was a sentiment expressed by an educational psychology professor (January 24, 2001). A field experience director added, "At this university, I haven’t found much" (January 29, 2001). A dean of a school of education who had a special education background and had served as a school board president stated:

Preparation is infused throughout methods and developmental courses, yet it needs to be strengthened. This is a terribly important and critical issue. We need to ask, "How can a parent be at ease when I’m not at ease?" For many beginning teachers, it is awkward working with parents. (February 2, 2001)

Existing course content reflected an effort on the part of teacher educators to infuse knowledge, skills STRATEGIES, and understanding of family involvement into both required and elective coursework. Descriptions were forthcoming concerning classroom inclusion of family involvement knowledge, skills STRATEGIES, and understanding into existing coursework that was often not reflected in the syllabi. However, not all content was elaborated upon in the syllabi, but often came up incidentally through classroom
discussions focused on concerns about working with parents. An early childhood educator warned, "A word of caution as you review my syllabi for content—my syllabi includes broad topics that do not reflect everything discussed in class" (November 27, 2000).

Citing a "lack of time for content in family involvement because of priorities to cover the basics" in a two credit science methods class, a professor decided to cut an action research community project (science methods professor, March 29, 2001). An exceptionalities professor framed the dilemma, "But this begs the question: what would we abandon from the curriculum given that we cannot increase our credit load in the major?" (December 29, 2000). The following required or elective courses were designated by teacher educators at the four universities as having coverage of the topic of family involvement. Table 14: Required or Elective Courses Covering the Topic of Family Engagement is located in Appendix F. Note field experience opportunities are excluded from this table.

Teacher educators agreed that a stand-alone course exclusively focused on family involvement did not exist at their university; moreover, many professors were not aware of the content of courses besides their own as exemplified by comments:

- “If we do offer elective or required coursework on family involvement, I am not aware of it” (adjunct social studies professor, February 2, 2001).
- “There is not a course on sitting down and talking to parents” (education department chairperson, January 12, 2001).
- “No stand-alone course on family involvement exists” (Curriculum & Instruction practicum coordinator, February 7, 2001).
• “No, I am not aware of any courses dealing with family involvement” (field experience coordinator, November 17, 2000).

• “I can’t think of any courses” (science methods professor, March 29, 2001).

• “I’m not sure how we specifically prepare our elementary preservice folks to work effectively with parents and families. However, I am not familiar with the content of all our courses” (educational psychology professor, November 16, 2000).

• “[This college] has no one course devoted exclusively to family involvement” (literacy education professor, February 2, 2001).

Table 15 outlines specific knowledge, skills/strategies, and/or understanding teacher educators reported covering in their classes or through various field experiences. Frequently, teacher educators acknowledged a mismatch between course coverage delineated in their syllabi and actual topics covered through class discussions or activities. Thus, the researcher became aware of the necessity to interview teacher educators through phone or personal conversations, email, or written responses to get a clear picture of class content. The field experience coordinators, practicum coordinators or education professors provided additional information about field experience opportunities to interact with families.

In addition, Table 15 can be cross-referenced with the emergent Model for Preservice Teacher Education in Family Involvement that follows.
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<td>• Necessity of family involvement</td>
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<td>• Teaching about other cultures-language and power</td>
<td>• Minority parenting styles</td>
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<td>• Perceptions of cultural differences</td>
<td>• Sensitive issues on health topics</td>
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<td>• Defense of multicultural book selections</td>
<td>• Concerns about parents: Dealing with angry parents</td>
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<td>• Issues of multiculturalism: Inclusive and affirming to families</td>
<td>• How to form and maintain parent partnerships</td>
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<td>• Participation of literacy as middle class</td>
<td>• Changing demographics—family, culture, gender</td>
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<td>• Native American holiday issues</td>
<td>• Way to overcome barriers</td>
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<td>• Tribal culture</td>
<td>• Affirming home culture</td>
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<td>• Dysfunctional families</td>
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<td>• Way families can be involved in learning process</td>
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<td>• Low SES issues</td>
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<td>• Family involvement skills students now hold</td>
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<td>• Classroom management involving parents</td>
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<td>• How to involve parents in future classroom</td>
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<td>• Homework issues</td>
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<td>• How students feel working with families</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Parental Rights and Responsibilities:**
- Legal Issues
- Community Issues
- School Board Policy
- Special Education
- Conflict Resolution
- Abuse and Neglect
- Mandatory Reporting
- METNET: Missing Children
- Goals setting
- IDEA PTA

**Parent-Teacher Conference Skills:**
- Role play with parents
- Video clips
- Procedure and listening
- How to prepare for parent-teacher conferences
- History/purpose
- How to accommodate for split families
- Three steps to deal with parent complaints
- Attend workshop at Families First

**Family Volunteers/Programs:**
- Background checks
- Field trips, chaperones
- Family Math/Science
- Family Literacy-FRESH Program

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Teacher Educator Recommendations

The researcher found evidence of a strong desire on the part of many elementary teacher educators to "embed [parent involvement] content into their courses ... infuse [information] across the curriculum, and... [develop] attitudes woven throughout the program" (February 7, 2001, February 12, 2001, April 7, 2001). "I believe that teachers must collaborate with family members in order to understand, know, care about and educate children," asserted an early childhood professor (November 27, 2000). "Overlying all is a philosophy... [about partnering with parents]," according to a dean (February 2, 2001). A global perspective should be striven for, one that broadens both professors' and students' worldviews, yet teacher educators should be allowed to approach the topic of family involvement in their own way according to an undergraduate program coordinator (January 29, 2001).

Teacher educator recommendations for curricular components in a stand-alone course or components merged into existing courses mirrored their belief on the importance of preparing teachers to work with families. These considerations led to the development of the Emerging Model for Preservice Teacher Education in Family Engagement.

Emerging Model for Preservice Teacher Education in Family Engagement

In order to unearth the themes that contributed to an emerging Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement, the researcher reviewed the recommendations of key participants repeatedly. Data included student teacher questionnaires, focus group interviews, and teacher educator responses. Multiple...
preliminary tables were constructed that reflected the number of times a theme was mentioned among individuals in each cohort group. Next, these preliminary tables were then compiled into a comprehensive grid that cross-referenced overarching themes between cohort groups. Lastly, suggestions for knowledge, skills, and understandings was embedded into coursework at each of the four universities in the form of specific content which served to enrich and enhance the emerging model. I focused on the four roles that surfaced from compilation of the data:

- Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner
- Teacher as Parent Facilitator
- Teacher as Cultural Liaison
- Teacher as Resource Intermediary

**Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner**

Teacher-to-be as a learner holds a comprehensive knowledge base on the efficacy of parent involvement. The “expert syndrome” should be circumvented; otherwise the teacher assumes power over the parent. This role supersedes the others and would be inclusive of the following:

- Know an extensive research base including theories supporting family involvement: participate in a variety of field experience practices working with families; evaluate the significance of parent partnerships; understand basic types of involvement on a continuum
- Subsume the role of teacher as parent educator: promote family connection with learning practices; encourage family literacy
• Validate parents as caring; maintain respect and compassion for parents; flexible in understanding the difficult role of parent; aware of family concerns; consider the total student; understand the process of parenting

**Teacher as Parent Facilitator**

Teacher-to-be acts as willing facilitator of parent communication and collaboration. An *open door policy* is an assumption for a successful and welcoming classroom and school environment. This role is inclusive of the following:

• Nurture general communication skills; interact with parents; overcome awkwardness with parents: report academic positives and negatives; explore parental expectations of teachers; develop interpersonal skills; translate clarity about school culture into language families can understand

• Communicate student progress; explain curriculum and assessment; explain school philosophy/standards/vision; gain positive information about students; explain developmental stages; discuss rules/discipline procedures; include parents in class planning; articulate professional goals; dialogue with resource personnel (counselors, principals, school psychologists); form a basis of teamwork developing IEPs/IFSPs

• Become a facilitative and active communicator; employ conflict resolution strategies including "I" messages, reflective listening; avoid defensiveness; train in anger management for parents; know steps to deal with family complaints; develop the willingness to ask how you can help them become better parents
Teacher as Cultural Liaison

Teacher-to-be develops a cultural consciousness of diversity in parents, students, families, and communities. This role is inclusive of the following:

- Exhibit tolerance of diverse family situations; celebrate ethnic and racial family diversity and multicultural issues inclusive and affirming to families; recognize religious considerations, language issues, impact of differing SES levels and small community/urban environment; understand literacy/poverty from a middle class perspective

- Understand community influences on how children learn; be cognizant of cultural discontinuity between school and home; identify with the school community; recognize importance of sharing family stories; include Native American celebrations and tribal issues

- Recognize changing community, state, and family demographics including blended families, broken homes, single parents, families of divorce, non-custodial parents, and latchkey children

Teacher as Resource Intermediary

Teacher-to-be acts as a resource intermediary both inside and outside of the school setting for families in need. This role is inclusive of the following:

- Recognize family stresses, needs, and concerns; acknowledge school should become a resource for parents through family resource centers, identify community resources/social services including medical needs and disabilities; deal with abuse and neglect appropriately through mandatory reporting; build youth assets and protective factors
• Be familiar with legal issues of parents' rights; and policies regarding parent or community complaints or issues; deal with sensitive issues: bullying, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy

• Support early contacts with parents including incentives for parents to volunteer; involve parents as classroom volunteers to contribute to daily success of classroom; recognize overzealous parents; encourage PTA involvement to coordinate field trips and seek chaperones; endorse school's open door policy

Skills/Strategies

The following instructional skills and/or strategies were suggested by the various cohort groups for implementation throughout elementary teacher education coursework.

• Role playing or skits

• Field experiences: lab-based family interactions, ethnographic data collection on community/families, collaboration with families, tutoring experiences, home visits

• Action research

• Service learning

• Grant writing for parenting classes

• Family presenters as guest speakers

• Video clips of family interactions

• Case studies: Teacher ethics in working with families

• Scenarios: Problem/solution, critical thinking, mock parent/teacher conference

• Job shadowing at family, child care, community, and health organizations

• Plan and set up whole family activities and workshops
• Observations of parent/teacher conferences
• Panel discussions on family issues
• Interviews
• Hands-on activities to prepare teacher and classroom for parent interactions
• Lesson plans and units: interactive homework, family extensions-funds of
  knowledge, cultural inclusion activities, collaborative writing projects, utilizing
  parent volunteers
• Informal discussions: guidance and suggestions from professors
• Journal entries
• Research papers on topics of family involvement
• Teacher educator lectures
• Textbooks on family involvement

The emerging Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement
was “grounded in views from participants in the field” (Creswell, 1998, p. 241). Their
assertions generated a schema that may contribute to programmatic plans for infusing
family involvement knowledge, skills, and understandings into existing coursework.
Furthermore, an extension of the model delineated specified strategies that melded
classroom-based or field-based activities with appropriate content knowledge in family
engagement. The next section presents this schema and the extended model as generated
through the research.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The statewide study presented was conducted to gauge the extent of elementary undergraduate teacher preparation in family involvement at four NCATE accredited schools of education. Moreover, the study sought the advice and suggestions of key personnel who shared an interest in the development of preservice educators seeking partnerships with parents. Curricular content in teacher training must “emphasize the influence of families on students and their implications for instruction” (Houston & Houston, 1992, p. 256). By focusing on the summative knowledge, skills, and understanding preservice elementary teachers are acquiring through their programs of study, the future direction of teacher education programs may be enhanced and strengthened in the area of family collaborations.

Research simultaneously discovered the degree of preparation elementary preservice teachers were receiving along with specific suggestions garnered from individuals interested in the area of family involvement by posing the following questions:

1. To what extent do the four NCATE accredited schools of education elementary teacher programs offer preparation in the areas of knowledge, skills, and/or understanding to promote best practices in family involvement?

2. What recommendations from the key stakeholders in family involvement concerning knowledge, skills, and understanding should be incorporated into
elementary teacher education at the four NCATE accredited schools of education?

Summary

The study of four NCATE accredited schools of education was undertaken to survey the extent to which either required or elective course work or field experiences was currently offered to elementary teaching candidates. By querying practicing student teachers and cross-referencing their responses with the course descriptions in the four college catalogues and individual syllabi, a clear picture emerged concerning the breadth and depth of their preparation. Additionally, teacher educators from the four schools of education were requested to indicate current course work or field experiences preparing teachers-to-be to work with parents. Finally, school resource personnel and parents provided their views on the amount of current preparation education majors are receiving in family involvement. Convergence of participant responses from these three cohorts was instrumental in concluding that content (knowledge, skills, and/or understanding) in existing courses in the area of family involvement was infused throughout the four programs, but limited in scope and haphazard in presentation. Based on this conclusion, recommendations from the three cohort groups were utilized to synthesize a Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement (Figure 1) that includes Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner, Teacher as Parent Facilitator, Teacher as Cultural Liaison, and Teacher as Resource Intermediary.

Study data was collected through a variety of qualitative survey and interview methods. These methods included document analysis, focus group interviews, personal, email and written interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. College catalog course
descriptions supplied a pool of required and elective courses subsequently narrowed to those indicated by participants confirming content in family involvement. Student teacher and teacher educator open-ended questionnaires provided information on curricular content of courses, along with suggestions for strengthening teacher preparation in the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to connect with families. Deans of the schools of education and field experience coordinators stressed the critical nature of ensuring future teachers are equipped with the expertise to effectively collaborate with the families of their students.

The focus group interviews served as the means of articulating individual perceptions and observations about teachers’ potential knowledge and skills attainment through teacher education programming or life experiences in general. The institutional settings of the schools of education served as a contrast to the naturalistic focus group sites. The natural setting of the focus groups mirrored the flavor of the community from the two room rural school to the large suburban school with over 500 students. Again, these family experts, including principals, parents, teachers, grandparents, school counselors, family outreach specialists, and para-educators endorsed a partnership model with parents.

Creswell (1998) noted, “The study must have ‘value’ both in informing and improving practice... and in protecting... the truth telling of participants” (p. 195). By utilizing multiple means of data collection with highly diverse groups of participants, the researcher allowed for personal interpretation on and reflection from the four schools of education elementary teacher education programs. “Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective”
(Creswell, 1998, p. 202). Therefore, a large number of respondents (N=183) lent validity, with state coverage of this topic saturated through multiple data points.

Cohorts expressed their perceptions of the extent of elementary teacher curricular preparation in family involvement, or an admitted lack of knowledge of specific curricular preparation. However, as disseminators of content the teacher educator cohort provided the most accurate assessment of the true extent of coursework offered through their education programs. Nonetheless, each cohort's array of responses substantively contributed to the study's development and progression into a Model of Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement.

**Extent of Elementary Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement**

The majority of respondents agreed to the importance of preparing education majors to work with families/parents. Nevertheless, no required stand-alone course on family involvement was offered at any of the four elementary education programs, excluding those in early childhood and exceptionalities. The lone offering was a capstone course—one-half day exclusively reviewing family involvement at the conclusion of student teaching.

However, the infusion of knowledge, skills, and understanding into existing courses, often not reflected explicitly through individual syllabi, nonetheless appeared across a continuum of education courses as indicated by teacher educators. Approximately 82% of teacher educators confirmed family course content, either implicitly or explicitly in the form of knowledge, skills, or understanding. Teacher educators repeatedly mentioned incidental class discussions on pertinent parent issues. Methods classes as designated by students for University X, University Y, and University...
Z ranged from five to six courses. Students at University W did not indicate any pertinent content in their methods courses. Students designated 3 to 4 foundations courses from individual schools of education as content relevant. However, only two students out of 92 surveyed indicated a need for a stand-alone course covering family engagement. Field experiences were indicated at Universities X, Y, and Z as opportunities to interact with parents; however, they were not cited at University W. Classroom assessments of the knowledge, skills, and understanding in working with families were lacking; some educators questioned whether the skill of partnering effectively with parents was measurable as a disposition to be nurtured.

The credit cap limit was repeatedly offered as rationale for the lack of a stand-alone course in the area of family engagement with several individuals mentioning the changing NCATE standards for teacher preparation as a vehicle for curricular change in teacher education. With forethought, one school of education had developed a grid of program outcome goals that included family involvement based on NCATE standards with program outcomes broadly evaluated. The other three schools of education were either in the process of developing a rubric, or were lacking such an instrument.

A Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement

Based on the suggestions and recommendations of the three cohorts, a model that holds promise in the area of teacher preparation for family engagement emerged. The Venn diagram in Figure 1 delineates the overlapping archetypes that evolved through the research.
Teacher knowledge, skills, and understanding are consistently intertwined through the archetypes with attributes overlapping.

*Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner* superimposes other archetypes appreciating the nurturance of a caring perspective as pivotal in family collaboration. This is contingent upon a broad-based knowledge of the benefits of including parents. "Teachers should also be familiar with the research base and focus on communication and interpersonal skills, particularly those that help parents feel comfortable and respected" (National PTA, 1999-2000, p. 24).
This essential research base would provide the core foundation reviewing every level of family involvement on a continuum, exploring research on the importance of family/school/community partnerships, studying the leaders in the field of family involvement, recognizing the family connection in the learning process, and acknowledging barriers that exist in formation of family-school partnerships.

*The Teacher as Parent Facilitator* stresses the critical importance of opening lines of communication with parents and/or guardians. Being a facilitative communicator includes having solid interpersonal skills such as the ability to initiate conversations with parents. Having the tools to communicate student progress and demonstrating willingness to resolve conflicts with families is vital. Laying out a “blueprint for a family... [can provide the teacher with] power tools to help a family regain order” (Community X school counselor, December 6, 2000). Conferencing skills incorporate reflective listening with the ability to report both positives and negatives about child developmental progress into parent-friendly language. Adopting a willingness to dialogue with parents by asking, “How can I help you with parenting concerns?” is the first step. Then, operating as a team to address those parental concerns is the next step.

*The Teacher as Cultural Liaison* within the larger model acknowledges acceptance of differing family situations within differentiated socioeconomic and ethnic classes. Recognition of diversity issues encompasses both the home and school arenas, including minority parenting styles, as well as cultural barriers to family engagement. Affirming and celebrating the home culture is a part of the classroom agenda.

These realities are the result of changing demographics of the American family including language differences, ethnic diversity, gender considerations, poverty concerns.
cultural issues, and socioeconomic dynamics. The resultant worldview that develops based on these drastic changes from small communities to large disparate urban societies cannot be looked at through middle class lenses anymore.

_The Teacher as Resource Intermediary_ for families requires that educators acquire a sensitive awareness of community agencies and school resources assisting families. Educators need to validate the role of parents, be more aware of family concerns and family stresses, recognize differing configurations of families that include single parents families, divorced or split families, blended families, non-custodial guardians or grandparents as custodians. A professor related a broad definition of “family” provided to her by a principal: “A family is a group of people who live together, love each other, and the adults are in control” (University Y curriculum and instruction foundations professor, February 10, 2001). When teachers are able to understand with compassion the difficulty of being a parent in the 21st century it forces them to empathize deeply with parents.

Also, teachers need to acknowledge risk and resiliency factors that impact families by being proactive in the area of family and youth asset building. The whole child, not just the school persona, is “key to unlocking the success of the child” (Community X family outreach specialist, December 6, 2000).

**Extension of the Model of Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement**

The extension of the Model of Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement follows in _Table 16: Delineation of Roles within the Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement_. The knowledge, strategies, and understanding as reported by key stakeholders could be a viable starting point for instructors interested in infusing family engagement strategies into their classes.
Table 16: Delineation of Roles within the Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation in Family Engagement (as reported by Teacher Educators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher as Knowledge Practitioner Strategies</th>
<th>Teacher as Parent Facilitator Strategies</th>
<th>Teacher as Cultural Liaison Strategies</th>
<th>Teacher as Resource Intermediary Strategies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Critical Thinking: Importance of family/school/community partnerships</td>
<td>• Lectures on family connection in learning process</td>
<td>• Funds of Knowledge Project: Cultural discontinuity</td>
<td>• Data collection on community and school resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Timeline of family engagement: Levels of family involvement on continuum</td>
<td>• Email Reflections on participation of literacy as middle class</td>
<td>• Cultural Inclusion Activities: Language and power</td>
<td>• Interviews on school issues: Legal issues, school board, IDEA PTA</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research Paper on experts: Purcell-Gates, Delpit, Cummins</td>
<td>• Practicing conflict resolution</td>
<td>• Service Learning Project on perceptions of cultural differences</td>
<td>• Special Education: CST, family plan, IEPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Panel Discussions: Useful role of parents in overall function of schools</td>
<td>• Goal Setting</td>
<td>• Collaborative Writing Project: Defense of multi-cultural book selections</td>
<td>• Action research on community issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Problem/Solution Scenario: Barriers that inhibit family involvement</td>
<td>• Tutoring experiences</td>
<td>• Plan a Multi-culture event: Inclusive and affirming to families</td>
<td>• Textbook readings on parental rights and responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Informal Discussions on how to form and maintain parent partnerships</td>
<td>• Family presenters as guest speakers</td>
<td>• Field experiences with Native American</td>
<td>• Case Studies: Issues of abuse, neglect, risk, and resiliency factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Classroom bulletin board</td>
<td>• Video clips of family interactions</td>
<td>• Observations of Parent-Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>• Job Shadowing at Family, childcare, community and health, organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Role playing attitudes towards working with families</td>
<td>• Mock Parent-Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>• Plan and set up workshops</td>
<td>• Interview low SES families</td>
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<td>• Hands-on activities to prepare teachers and classrooms for family interactions</td>
<td>• Observations of Parent-Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>• Home visits on family dynamics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Review lesson plans and units including interactive homework</td>
<td>• Reflections on partnership of literacy as middle class</td>
<td>• Journal Entries: Differing family configurations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop family extension activities</td>
<td>• Practicing conflict resolution</td>
<td>• Grant writing for parenting classes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Overlap between activities may account for the expansion of curricular content within the ensuing archetypes. This extended model, coupled with the four roles that surfaced through the data, might provide a bridge for teacher educators interested in progressively introducing topics and discussions about family engagement into their education courses.

Discussion

From the onset of this study, surveying the four NCATE accredited schools of education in this western state, I sought advice from key personnel interested in preparing elementary teachers to work more effectively with families. The methodologies chosen—focus groups, personal interviews, written or email interviews, and questionnaires contributed significantly to the presentation of a clear portrait of the current status of existing teacher education coursework containing family involvement components, and the desire for change in the existing teacher education programmatic structure. Opinions emerged from the two complementary groups; teacher educators, field experience coordinators, and deans of schools of education converged with those opinions of elementary teachers, parents, principals, and elementary education majors in formulating recommendations for intensifying preparation of elementary teachers.

Accreditation Limitations

Teacher educators, deans of the schools of educations, and field experience coordinators repeatedly mentioned a credit limit of 128 credits as a major constraining factor in implementation of a course solely designed to prepare teachers to work with families. Most respondents, including preservice teachers, did not envision the necessity of a separate stand-alone course as a requirement in elementary education. However,
several participants from the teacher educator cohort mentioned the revised NCATE standards as a catalyst for curricular changes in teacher education by infusing content throughout programs. Yet, curricular revisions advance gradually, often taking years to fully implement. A dean of a school of education related, “This is the fifth state I have been employed in, at all NCATE accredited schools, and I believe NCATE will change things significantly” (University Z, February 2, 2001). These findings reflect those recommendations of the Harvard Family Research Project’s *New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement* (Shartrand, et al., 1997) relying on NCATE standards as a mechanism for revision.

Institutional Constraints

Teacher educators perceived institutional barriers to effective curricular change as obstacles to surmount. This was evidenced by a lack of planning of goals based on NCATE standards in three of the four colleges studied. Only one university was unique in proactively formulating a master grid displaying program outcome goals in family involvement. Aligning with NCATE program requirements for a “systematic design with an explicitly stated philosophy and objectives” each accredited university is required to adopt a model “that explicates the purposes, processes, outcomes, and evaluation of the program” (NCATE, 1990, p. 45).

Curricular overload coupled with a fragmented course load which elementary education students are required to complete, was cited as a reason for a lack of a stand-alone course in family involvement. This curricular overload in conjunction with teacher education agendas that prioritized the core curriculum may be responsible for the lack of specialized courses, such as one on family partnerships.
Self-Development Challenges for Teacher Educators

The majority of teacher educators expressed a willingness to guide education majors in developing self-confidence in interacting with parents. However, apprehension about the lack of self-preparedness of some teacher educators in the area of family involvement was expressed. One instructor emphasized her instructional priorities not being in the area of teacher/parent partnerships, but “narrowly focused on reading” (University Y literacy professor, February 8, 2001). A disposition to present course content in the area of family involvement appeared strongest for those teacher educators with expertise in early childhood, exceptionalities, and/or educational psychology. Nonetheless, the majority of teacher educators, because of their ideological beliefs in the efficacy of family involvement, were willing to act as guides for students through trial and error.

Opportunities for Increased Field Experiences

Elementary student teachers, practicing teachers, parents, school counselors, and principals cited the value of an experiential component specifically interacting with families/parents in community, home, or school settings. Authentic opportunities for preservice elementary education majors to genuinely dialogue with hard-to-reach parents to engender positive relationships needs to be the foundation of student teaching. This finding is supported by Zeichner and his colleagues who observed that “there is some evidence that certain kinds of community experiences facilitate the development of positive attitudes toward poor parents that are contrary to the deficit attitudes that still are dominant in many public schools” (Zeichner et al., 1996, p. 179). This emergent finding also reflects the recommendations of these diverse groups to promote “intercultural
competence or... skills in relating to culturally different parents” by “developing culturally relevant pedagogy” (Zeichner et al., 1996, pp. 178, 180).

Conclusions

The following conclusions are warranted from the study:

• Curricular knowledge, skills, and understanding aimed at establishing and maintaining positive collaborative connections to families is not sufficiently evident in course syllabi, nor sufficiently demonstrated by field experiences.

• An imperative need exists for strengthening the preparation of educators through enhanced training in family bridge building.

• Candid discussions between key members of groups invested in family engagement should address innovative long-term broad-based changes in teacher education programs, as well as specific curricular-based knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to prepare teachers to partner with families.

Recommendations

The following recommendations concerning elementary teacher curricular preparation in the area of family involvement are warranted based upon the suggestions of the key participants as synthesized by the researcher.

Recommendation 1: Capitalize on NCATE Standard 5c: Collaboration with families to support the infusion of curricular content into teacher education coursework.

As schools of education cycle around into their NCATE review year, infusion of family collaboration curricular content in the areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions should be demonstrated throughout elementary teacher preparation. Although teacher educators included discussions on family involvement as ancillary in their syllabi, a need
existed for explicit and measurable instruction covering family involvement content to align with NCATE’s Standard 5c. The disposition towards partnering with parents as “candidates know the importance of establishing and maintaining a positive collaborative relationship with families to promote the academic...growth of children” (NCATE, 1999, p. 33) entails a thorough grounding in the premises of family involvement.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen preservice teachers’ awareness of criticality of parent/teacher partnerships.**

Underlying all coursework in elementary teacher education should be a philosophy that parents and teachers are team members with the goal of strengthening student learning. Preservice teachers’ openness in the formation of their “parent” pedagogy should be activated through coursework and field experiences. The professorate should address the topic of parent partnerships through their own methods nurturing a proactive stance in working with parents well before students enter student teaching.

**Recommendation 3: Teach and model a “family-focused approach” exploring support systems for families.**

The “comprehensive, collaborative and integrated ‘family-focused approach’ in schools and community services acknowledges the central function families play in their children’s well-being” (Carter, 1993, p. 7). Schools should become a refuge for families in times of stress; therefore, knowledge of community resources is invaluable for teachers in considering the “whole student,” not just their classroom persona. A realization of how family relationships can support or undermine schooling is an awareness that needs to be developed in preservice students.
Recommendation 4: Provide authentic community-based field experiences.

Over twenty-five years ago, Cuban (1969) "argued that teacher education programs must shift their center of gravity from the university to the classroom and community" (in Zeichner, 1996, p.177). Authentic community-based experiences can provide rich, meaningful interactions between families and preservice teachers. Practice, not just knowledge, in relating to families may circumvent incompatibility between home and school. Currently, student teaching provides an opportunity for very limited interactions with families, particularly through parent-teacher conferences and open house events. Enriching the student teaching experience to orchestrate student teacher/parent contacts offer additional opportunities for home visits and interactive experiences with "real" families. Shartrand and her colleagues (1997) encourage teacher education programs "move beyond classroom-based teaching methods by offering teachers direct field experiences working with families" (p. 60).

Recommendation 5: Assess and evaluate elementary preservice teachers’ knowledge, skills, and understanding in preparation for work with families.

Although teacher education institutions included in this study demonstrated limited infusion of family involvement content throughout coursework, measurement of preservice teacher efficacy in ultimately being able to work with families was not clearly evident. Teacher education syllabi should reflect authentic assessments and evaluations of the preparation of preservice teachers to partner with families. Both informal and formal assessment vehicles for ascertaining the degree of knowledge, skills, and understanding include:
- Portfolios containing parent-teacher-student compacts, weekly newsletters to families, interactive homework assignments
- Reflective dialogue journals based on community interactions
- Community ethnography projects
- Role play scenarios of family interactions
- Individualized family study plans utilizing community resources

(Grant & Robinson, 2001)

Curricular-based assessments in family involvement might be based on solid experiential practice “which research shows persists beyond student teaching” (Zeichner et al., 1996, p. 189). However, teacher dispositions in this area can be difficult to measure quantitatively, yet NCATE is now mandating assessment of teacher dispositions (skills and understanding) toward collaboration with their community (NCATE, 1999).

Recommendation 6: Promote dialogue and problem-solving among groups with vested interests in shaping a programmatic vision incorporating family involvement.

Teachers, principals, parents, family school counselors, family outreach specialists, as well as elementary education faculty and preservice teachers need to launch a platform to jointly dialogue about revisions to teacher education programs. Embedded within this dialogue should be the recognition of the barriers that may inhibit the infusion of family involvement content, as well as means to overcome these barriers.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (National PTA, 2000) called for creation of an “action team” of parents, educators and administrators “involved in reaching a common understanding and in setting mutual goals to which all are committed” (p. 25).
In addition, Hintz, Clarke and Nathan (1992) recommended departments of education experimentally offer courses on parent-educator cooperation arranging a "team-teaching situation involving a college professor and an outstanding educator currently working in an elementary school" (p. 8).

Contributions to the Field

In an attempt to augment the current body of research supporting undergraduate teacher preparation to work effectively with parents and families this study may:

- Serve as a guideline and encourage teacher-training institutions to consider the infusion of family engagement strategies into existing elementary curricula to provide a knowledge and experiential base for beginning teachers.
- Provide insight into the perceptions and ideas held by key stakeholders—teacher educators, parents, teachers, and principals—concerning the most effective ways to prepare educators to work with families.
- Cause both novice and veteran teachers to reflect upon the benefits and barriers to family engagement.
- Improve teacher training in a broader sense by raising the overall quality of teaching by incorporating instruction and experiences aimed to enhance elementary teacher preparation.

Future Directions for Research

Although this study provided strong evidence that the four major schools of education are aware of and consciously attempting to infuse curricular components of family involvement into their elementary teacher education programs, the researcher noted areas warranted for further investigation:
• Account for a discrepancy existing between elementary education students’ reported implicit or explicit content coverage and teacher educators’ reported coverage of family involvement content.

• Determine innovative ways schools of education can circumvent credit limits to develop and implement specialty courses in elementary teacher programs.

• Identify motives for reluctance on the part of the professorate to directly delineate family involvement knowledge, skills, and understanding within their syllabi.

• Explore partnerships between those with vested interests in setting policy and “others” such as minority parents, hard-to-reach parents, and community advocates that may serve as a cornerstone for a forum to explore parental viewpoints outside the mainstream of education.

The issue of infusing curricular components of family involvement into existing courses in schools of education throughout the country is indeed a complex one requiring careful consideration. Substantial barriers may need to be surmounted. However, the development of the teacher as reflective practitioner willing to collaborate with parents for the betterment of student academics should not be impeded by personal and/or institutional barriers. This study of collective recommendations by key stakeholders in family involvement contributes to a developing knowledge base recognizing the benefits of preparing teacher education students to partner with families.
REFERENCES


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Inspiration, Version 6 (1998-1999). *Inspiratio...


Appendix A
School of Education Email Questionnaire

Hello, Teacher Educators:

My name is Kathy Grant. I am a University X Doctoral Candidate in Literacy Studies. My dissertation research explores the state’s schools of education for evidence of instructional strategies and/or experiences that promote knowledge, skills, or understanding of family involvement in K-5 education. I am also seeking teacher educator recommendations on how schools of education can better prepare preservice teachers to integrate family involvement into their future classrooms.

Please consider these following questions based on the current status of your school’s required or elective family/parent involvement course work and/or experiences for elementary education students. Working definitions of the terms knowledge, skills, and understanding as they relate to family involvement training are included.

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your input on teacher training in the area of parent/family involvement by December 12, 2000. If any questions are unclear, or you have additional comments, please contact me through sources listed below. Also, I would be glad to forward a summary of the results of this questionnaire if you so desire.

Thank you,
Kathy B. Grant

1. What knowledge, skills, or understanding* about families should elementary education majors acquire through elementary teacher preparation to enable them to work productively with families or parents? For example:
   - preparation for and involvement in parent-teacher conferences
   - writing notes to guardians and dealing with upset parents
   - interpreting standardized test scores and relating standards to guardians
   - relating school philosophy/goals to parents
   - supplying parents with information on community-based resources
   - preparing for and recruiting school volunteers

2. Does your elementary teacher education program offer preservice elementary education majors either required or elective course work or experiences that promote and measure instruction in the area of family or parent involvement in education? If so, please list course titles that contain content in the form of knowledge, skills, or understanding* in the area of family or parent involvement in education.

3. In what specific ways does your elementary teacher education program prepare preservice elementary education majors in the goal of working with families or parents in the school setting?

* Knowledge- Information, beliefs, or explanations concerning family involvement in education that teachers need to be familiar with.
* Skills- The abilities, techniques, or expertise that teachers need to develop in preparation to involve parents in the education of their children.
* Understanding- Personal interpretations based upon the awareness of relations within families.
Schools of Education
Elementary Education Faculty

University W

• Walter Oldendorf- Dean of the School of Education
• Clara Beier- Literacy Education
• Lalovy Hilton- Math Methods
• Deena Alley- Director of Field Experiences
• Tim Mahoney- Social Studies Methods
• Linda Reiten- Language Arts Methods
• Ronnie Monroe- Coordinator of Elementary Education Block & Science Methodology
• Sandra Oldendorf- Foundations of Education
• Margi Sheehy- Literacy Education
• Pat Adams- Adjunct Early Childhood
• Pete LeRoy- Health & Physical Education
• Julie Bullard- Early Childhood Education

University X

• Donald Robson- Dean of the School of Education
• Marlene Bachmann- Field Experience Coordinator
• Rhea Ashmore- Department Chair Curriculum & Instruction
• Lisa Blank- Science Methodology
• Stephanie Wasta- Social Studies Methodology
• Georgia Cobbs- Math Methodology
• Doug Beed- Educational Psychology
• Audrey Petersen- Foundations of Education
• Jean Luckowski- Education Ethics
• Jan LaBonty- Literacy Education
• Ranelle Lees- Adjunct Literacy Education
• Phillip Wittikiend- Educational Psychology
• Rick van den Pol- Exceptionalities
• Rebecca Truelove- Adjunct Foundations of Education
• Susan Harper-Whalen- Early Childhood Education
• Paul Silverman- Psychology
• Annie Sondag- Health Education
• Mike Jakupcak- Exceptionalities
• Karen Kelly- Exceptionalities
• Laura Dybdal- Health Education

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University Y

- George White- Dean of the School of Education
- Karen McKechnie- Health & Physical Education Methods
- Al Heidenreich- Native American Studies
- Judy Henry- Adjunct Science Methods
- Kay Streeter- Early Childhood and Literacy Education
- Rebecca Davis- Adjunct Art Education
- Hap Gilliland – Native American Studies
- James Nowlin- Counseling and Human Services
- Lynn Schwalbe- Adjunct Language Arts Methods
- Jeffrey Sanders- Native American Studies
- Dixie Metheny- Math Methods
- Mary Jane Trehella- Adjunct Social Studies Methods
- Carl Hanson- Health Education
- Sandi Rietz- Literacy Education
- Rosemary Battleson- Literacy Education
- Judith McEnany- Curriculum & Instruction Foundations
- Ken Miller- Practicum Coordinator
- Jack Ballard- Educational Foundations
- Tony Hecimovic- Educational Foundations
- Russell Lord- Department Chair Educational Foundations
- Cindy Dell- Field Experience Coordinator
- Mary Fishbaugh- Chair, Special Education and Reading

University Z

- Greg Weisenstein- Dean of the School of Education
- Gloria Gregg- Chair Department of Curriculum & Instruction
- Bernard Arenz- Educational Foundations
- Michael Brody- Science Methods
- Scott Davis- Educational Foundations
- David Magleby- Social Studies Methods
- Elizabeth Swanson- Science Methods
- Priscilla Lund- Art Methods
- Joyce Herbeck- Literacy Education
- William Hall-Math Methodology
- Ann deOnis- Literacy Education
- Janis Bullock- Early Childhood Education
- Robert Carson-Educational Psychology
- Terry Baldus- Adjunct Social Studies Methods
- Sandra Broeder-Hall- Early Childhood Education
- Bob Clemens- Field Experience Coordinator
- Kathleen Byrne- Multicultural Education
- Laura Massey- Exceptionalities
Appendix B
Focus Group Protocol for Interview Sessions

Researcher: Kathy B. Grant
Doctoral Candidate in Literacy Education
The School of Education
University X

Welcome, Participants:

I am interested in gathering information on how schools of education in this state are preparing their preservice teachers in the area of family involvement in education. I am especially interested in your opinion of the knowledge, skills, and understanding elementary teachers should be taught to be able to work collaboratively with the families of their students.

I will be asking people from various communities in the state to address these same issues about elementary teacher preparation. I am going to ask you some questions and would appreciate honest responses. If any questions I ask are ambiguous or unclear, please request I rephrase the question. There are no correct answers to these questions. I want to learn from your suggestions in the area of teacher preparation in family involvement in education. This group may not necessarily agree on all these issues; differing opinions and viewpoints are expected. Please feel free to question other participants about the clarity of their responses if their statements are unclear to you.

If there are no objections I would like to video record and audiotape this session so that I will have an accurate and complete record of the focus group interview. The recording will be transcribed to paper, but these transcripts will be seen only by members of my dissertation committee. Furthermore, your name will never be identified with reports or publications from this study.

Is this OK?

Subject's Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this dissertation research project. I have been informed of the purpose of this research and that anonymity is assured. I voluntarily agree to participate in the focus group interview. I also understand I will receive a copy of this document.

Name of Participant
Signature of Participant
Focus group Location
Date
Focus Group Questions

1. What have been your opportunities in the area of family involvement in education?

2. What basic knowledge* do people who are learning to be teachers need to know about families?

3. What understandings* about the differences in families should elementary education majors develop through teacher course work?

4. What do teachers need to learn (i.e. skills or strategies*) prior to student teaching to help them work effectively with families?

5. Do you know of college courses in the state, either in education or another discipline, that focus on preparing elementary education majors to work with families?

If so, what skills and strategies are currently being taught in those courses?

If not, what might the “ideal” course look like to prepare elementary teachers to work with the parents of their students?

*Terminology

Knowledge- Information, beliefs, or explanations concerning family involvement in education that teachers need to be familiar with.

Skills- The abilities, techniques, or expertise that teachers need to develop in preparation to involve parents in the education of their children.

Understanding- Personal interpretations based on the awareness of relations within families.
School/District Profile for Focus Groups
Fall 2000

School Name: ___________________________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________________________________

Current total number of students: _______ Grades in school: _______________

Number/percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch: _______________

Overall socioeconomic status of the families whose children attend this school: _______________

Number of teachers/staff in school: ___________________________________________

Number of veteran teachers (over 5 years of teaching): _________________________

Number of novice teachers (one-five years): _________________________________

Principal: ______________________________________________________________

Number of years as administrator: Number of years at school location: _______________

Does there exist a district or school parent involvement policy either developed by the school board or the individual school advisory council?

______________________________________________________________________

When was this policy implemented? _________________________________________

Does the district/school refer to and adhere to the provisions?

______________________________________________________________________

If so, in what specific ways? ______________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

General amount of parent volunteerism at the school site:

_______ High (over 20 volunteers weekly)

_______ Medium (between 10-19 volunteers weekly)

_______ Low (10 or fewer volunteers weekly)

Comments on family-school partnerships in your elementary school: _____________

______________________________________________________________________
Parent Profile for Focus Groups
Fall 2000

Name: ______________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________

Phone Number: __________________________________________________________________

May I contact you if I need to check focus group information after the interview? 

Y  N

Current Marital Status: _____ Single  _____ Married  _____ Divorced  _____ Widowed

Who is filling out this profile?  _____ Mother  _____ Father  _____ Stepmother  
      _____ Stepfather  _____ Aunt  _____ Uncle  _____ Grandmother  _____ Grandfather
      _____ Guardian  _____ Other relative

What is your highest education?

_____ Did not complete high school  _____ High school  _____ Some college training  
      _____ College degree  _____ Advanced degree

Are you employed now?  _____ Employed full-time  _____ Employed part-time  
      _____ Not employed now  Job Position ______________________________

School Volunteer:  _____ Frequently (more than once a week)  
      _____ Sometimes (more than once a month)  _____ Never

If your school has a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTA), are you a member?  Y  N

Number of Children: _______________Ages of Children: _______________________

Schools Attending: ________________________________________________________

Number of years a child of yours has attended this school: _______________________

Number of years in this school district: ______________________________________

How do you describe yourself?

_____ African American  
_____ Asian or Pacific Islander  
_____ American Indian or Other Native American  
_____ Hispanic American  
_____ European American (Caucasian)  
_____ Other (Please specify) ____________________________________________

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Teacher Profile for Focus Groups
Fall 2000

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Address: ___________________________________________________________________

Contact phone number: ______________________________________________

May I contact you if I need to check on focus group information after the interview?  
Y  N

What is your gender?  ____ Male  ____ Female

How do you describe yourself?  
_____ African American  _____ Asian American  _____ Hispanic American  
_____ Native American  _____ European American (Caucasian)  _____ Other

What grade(s) do you teach this year?  K 1 2 3 4 5  ____ Other ______________

Number of students in your classroom? ______________________

What is your teaching experience?  
Years in teaching _______________
Years in this school _______________
Year obtaining teaching certificate __________

Have you had college preparatory courses to work with parents to promote family partnerships?  
_____ No  ____ Yes (Please specify) ____________________________________________

About how many hours a week, on average, do you spend in contact with parents?  
_____ None  ____ Less than one-hour  ____ One hour  
_____ Two hours  ____ Three or more hours

Average number of parent volunteers who assist you during the week: ________________

Are you aware of, or do you refer to a district-wide, or school-wide parent involvement policy developed by the school board or school advisory council?  
______________________________

If so, in what ways do you utilize this document?  
______________________________

What is your highest level of education?  
_____ Bachelor’s  _____ Bachelor’s + credit  _____ Masters  _____ Masters + credit  
_____ Specialist  _____ Doctorate  _____ Other ______________
Certificates/Endorsements Held ________________________________
Appendix C
Student Teacher Questionnaire on Family Engagement
Elementary Student Teachers

Prompt: Please answer the following questions based on your elementary education teacher program coursework. Answering the three questions is strictly voluntary, but all information will remain anonymous if you decide to participate. This survey will in no way affect your graded field experience.

The comments about this survey may be used in my dissertation entitled Preservice Teacher Education in Family Engagement: An Emerging Model. Thank you for taking the time to reflect upon and answer these questions.

1. List your elementary education coursework that has included knowledge, skills, or understanding in the area of family-school partnerships or parental involvement.

2. To what extent do you feel your elementary teacher education program prepares you with knowledge, skills, or understanding to effectively collaborate with parents?

3. What knowledge, skills, or understanding should your program teach elementary education majors to enable them to work more effectively with parents during their field service placement?
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education - Required or Elective Courses:

- Introduction to Cultural Anthropology
- General Psychology
- First Aid & Safety
- Adult Wellness
- Health Education
- Introduction to Creative & Performing Arts
- Introduction to Early Childhood/Lab
- Creating an Environment for Learning/Lab
- Career Planning
- Positive Child Discipline
- Meeting the Needs of the Family/Lab
- Early Childhood Professional/Lab
- Child Growth & Development
- Exploring the Culture of Schools/Communities
- Foundations of Education
- Early Childhood Curriculum/Lab
- Management of Early Childhood Program/Lab
- Educational Psychology Management & Assessment
- Exceptional Learner
- Social Aspects of Behavior
- Children’s Literature
- Literacy & Language
- Elementary School Social Studies Program
- Elementary School Language Arts Program
- Elementary School Science Methods
- Elementary School Health & P. E.
- Arts Methods for Elementary Teachers
- Technology Education for Elementary Teachers
- Elementary School Mathematics Program
- Music for Elementary Teachers
- Classroom Instruments
- Literacy & Assessment
- Group Dynamics & Leadership
- Exceptional Child
- Management of Exceptional Learners
- Curriculum for Diverse Learners
- Assessment of Learners with Special Needs
- Rural Education
- Rural Education II
- Content Area Reading & Writing
• Diagnosis & Instruction of Literacy Variabilities
• Storytelling
• Reading & Writing Lab
• Organization & Administration of the School Literacy Program
• Rural Education
• Senior Seminar
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education-Required or Elective Courses.

- Exploring Teaching through Field Experiences
- Educational Psychology & Measurement
- Teaching Math in Elementary School
- Teaching Social Studies in Elementary School
- Teaching Science in Elementary School
- Children’s Literature and Critical Reading
- Teaching Language & Literacy
- Early Childhood Education
- Ethics & Consumer Education
- Child in the Family
- Introduction to Exceptionality
- Pre-School Laboratory
- Ethics & Policy Issues
- Exceptionality & Classroom Methods
- Issues in Early Intervention
- Literacy Strategies in Content Areas
- Basic Diagnosis and Correction of Reading & Writing
- Organizing Classroom Reading & Writing Programs
- Application of Literacy Models
- Intergenerational Experiences in Schools
- Health Issues of Children & Adolescents
- Sociology of the Family
- Family Deviance
- Services to Changing Families
- Psychology of Parent/Child Relations
- Child & Adolescent Psychology
- Social Psychology
- Infant & Toddler Development
- Family Development
- Community Service Delivery
- Seminar in Human Development
- Family Communication
- Personal & Family Economics
- Ethics & Consumer Economics
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education - Required or Elective Courses:

- Society, Schools & Teachers
- Human Development in Schools
- Educational Psychology
- Philosophical, Legal, and Ethical Issues in Education
- The Child in the Social World
- Social/Emotional Development of Young Children
- The Child in the Family System
- Fundamentals of Communication
- Introduction to Public Speaking
- Survey of the Human Services
- Assessment and Treatment of Problem Behavior
- Abuse, Neglect in the Family and the Helping Process in Human Services
- Strategies in Health Enhancement
- Healthy Lifestyle Management
- Introduction to Native American Studies
- Social Issues of the Native Americans
- Indians of the United States
- Reading & Writing Across the Curriculum
- Emergent Literacy
- Theories in Reading
- Diagnostic Teaching of Reading
- Teaching Language Arts/Children's Literature and Reading in the Elementary School
- Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School
- Teaching Mathematics in the Elementary School
- Teaching Science in the Elementary School
- Teaching Art in the Elementary School
- Teaching Music in the Elementary School
- Sociology of the Family
- Community & World Population
- Minority Groups in America
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education - Required or Elective Courses.

- Introduction to Anthropology
- Children's Literature
- Paraprofessional Experience
- Principles and Practices of Emergent Literacy
- Teaching the Multicultural Child
- Health Enhancement Instructional Techniques
- Children's Health Enhancement Methods
- Teaching Social Studies
- Teaching Elementary Science
- Teaching Art and the Elementary Curriculum
- Teaching Mathematics
- Teaching Physical Education
- Teaching Music
- Elementary Music Methods
- Educational Planning and Management
- Educational Management and Discipline
- Teaching Literacy to Established Readers
- Teaching the Primary Grades
- In-School Experience
- Educational Psychology & Human Development of School Age Children
- Introduction to Multicultural Education
- Health Enhancement
- Foundations of Assessment
- Young Adult Literature
- Corrective & Remedial Reading: Clinical Experience
- Content Area Reading
- Public Schooling in American Society
- Life Span of Human Development
- Human Development - Mid-Childhood through Adolescence
- Early Childhood Classroom Management
- Curriculum for Early Childhood Education
- Exceptional Needs 0-21
- Assessment and Intervention
- Drug Health Issues for Education
- Introduction to Native American Studies
- American Indians in ______
- American Indians in Contemporary Society
- Individual Problems
**Terminology**

**Knowledge**-Information, beliefs, or explanations concerning family involvement in education that teachers need to be familiar with.

**Skills**-The abilities, techniques, or expertise that teachers need to develop in preparation to involve parents in the education of their children.

**Understanding**- Personal interpretations based upon the awareness of relations within families.
Appendix D
Community W School Profile
Rural School Focus Group (pseudonym)
Focus Group-October 7, 2000

Participants:
SW: Female lead teacher
BJ: Female novice teacher
CH: Married mother
AW: Widowed mother

School/Community History:
Situated in a remote country setting, Rural School was established in 1901 as a rural site to serve students of the town supported by a small ranch-based economy. The school burned down in 1988 and was rebuilt to the current structure. Facing east, the compact but isolated school sat on a bluff overlooking a valley floor. The tiny town where the school was located between a highway and a service road had a population that hovered around fifty people. The main buildings included a post office and local tavern which a school board member owned. This tightly knit community, where everyone knows everyone else, provided strong community support for their small school.

School Description:
The current modern structure of red aluminum siding contained two classrooms and one all-purpose room. Large windows framed the generously sized, airy classrooms. A well-equipped playground with a basketball court was located to the north side of the school. Playground rules foreshadowed the discipline motto this school maintained, “Inappropriate behavior will result in a loss of playground privileges.” The well-maintained structure with an outbuilding demonstrated a pride in the school where the traditional ethic of teaching remained strong.

School Population:
According to supervising teacher SW, over one-half of the twenty-four students were driven to the school district’s closest bus stop by their parents from the local university town. All students were of European-American descent. The socioeconomic status ranged from lower class to upper class families.

Students were grouped in two classes: kindergarten through third with fifteen students, and fourth through eighth grades with nine students. SW reported that she worked with students for up to five years as they progressed through the grades. This extent of individualization did create problems. Even though science and social studies were held in a whole class setting, as was writing, other subjects had to be taught individually. Furthermore, skill levels extended up through high school.
School Rituals/Parent Involvement:

Students were transported by bus from the county line to the school or driven by their parents. Lunch was a daily brown bag affair with a designated parent transporting a hot lunch to the school once a week. For seven weeks on Fridays, students were bused the twenty-five miles to University W to be instructed by block students from the elementary education department.

Many parents worked and found it difficult to visit Rural during the day, but the teachers nonetheless maintained close contact with parents by either seeing them in the local university town or calling them by phone. The lead teacher estimated that between two to five parents volunteered weekly at the school. Also, parents coordinated a Booster Club in lieu of a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTA) that was involved in fund raising events, slide shows in classes, field trips, and sports events. Open House was a yearly ritual with virtually all parents attending. The teachers related that parents were not at all intimidated or afraid to come to Rural School, and noted that the small setting provided for better communication between the two groups. “Good school support by parents” was noted. The lead teacher was unaware of any district or school parent involvement policy in place at that time.

Teaching Staff:

First year teacher salaries for this district started at $15,000 which discouraged teacher applicants. SW, veteran teacher, was certified in music education in 1969 from University W and worked as lead teacher of fourth through eighth grades for four years. She began at Rural nine years ago as a volunteer music teacher when her son attended the school. SW, who is European-American, related that she had no college preparatory courses in the area of parent engagement. Although she did not have parent volunteers in her class that year, she related that she spent two hours in contact with the parents of her students weekly. She resided north of the school.

BJ, novice teacher, who taught kindergarten through third grades, taught at Rural for one year after receiving her Bachelor in Elementary Education along with an Associate in Early Childhood from University W. BJ listed course work she has taken in preparation to work with parents entitled “Meeting the Needs of the Family.” BJ credited her early childhood associates degree for bettering her skills as a parent and providing strategies for working with parents. Having two parent volunteers to assist her during the week, she contacted parents three hours or more weekly. As single mother raising three children, she resided about 25 miles from the school.

A para-educator and a Title 1 teacher who visited the school one day a week rounded out the staff. Additionally, there was a community member who taught French twice a week.

Parent Participants:

The two European-American parents who interviewed during the focus group were both mothers of children currently attending Rural, but lived nearby. Each child (age 7 and age 7 1/2) had attended Rural for two years, with one mother who volunteered
frequently (more than once a week), and the other occasionally (more than once a month). One mother was a widow who had recently completed an Associate degree in Early Childhood Education but was not currently employed. The other was working on completing a Secondary Education degree in Business Education, and was married. She often helped with computer technology at the school. They had both taken courses at University W. Both mothers maintained close contact with the teachers at Rural.

**Group Dynamics:**

The litmus test for focus group cohesiveness was measured by “how active and easily the participants [will] discuss the topic of interest” (Morgan, 1997, p. 17). The dynamics of this focus group were ideal for the participants were fairly close acquaintances who interacted either on a daily or weekly basis. They felt completely comfortable discussing this topic in each other’s presence. This may be accounted for by the fact that no wide gaps in social class backgrounds existed. The “mix and match” (Morgan, 1997) design of parents and teachers was successful in this focus group session for parents were not constrained in their dialogue. Neither polarized in their opinions, nor striving towards conformity, the participants felt free to express their opinions and concerns about the lack of training in the area of family-school partnerships. “The reliance on the researcher’s focus and the group’s interaction” (Morgan, 1997, p. 13), worked particularly well during this interview session.

**Interview Session:**

In the funnel-based interview (Morgan, 1997), the group began with the less structured question inquiring about their general experiences in the area of family involvement in education. As the interview continued, the researcher had no difficulty in sustaining the discussion of the topic through the use of structured questions. Participants appeared highly involved with the topic, so much so that the moderator maintained a low to moderate involvement during the questioning. The goal of topic saturation occurred when participants reiterated previously expressed answers, or indicated that they had no more to add to the topic. Since “focus groups... involve inviting participants to the discussion,” (Morgan, 1997, p. 6) the discussion naturally concluded when the interviewees had exhausted their opinions on the theme of teacher training in family engagement.

**Focus Group Demographics:**

Focus Group Participants: Four: two teachers and two parents  
Date: Friday, October 7th  
Location: Main Building, Room 311-Turret Room  
Small, compact, octagonal-shaped room with four windows, octagonal table with five chairs. Set up with video recorder, tape recorder, notebook, laptop computer, with food provided  
Length of Session: 3:30 through 4:30  
Total Time: Thirty-eight minutes of dialogue after introduction and explanation, filling out profiles, permission forms signed

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Questions: 6 total—1 through 5C
Question 5B was answered through the discussion of question 4
Participant Responses for Questions: Veteran Teacher-10 responses; Novice Teacher-9
responses; Married Mother-7 responses; Widowed Mother-6 responses
Participants:
MP: Male family social worker/counselor
MM: Male principal
SB: Female family resource center outreach specialist
RR: Male intermediate teacher
TS: Mother of primary student
HP: Laotian mother and university student

School/Community History:
Community Elementary School had a rich history, having opened in 1916. In 1996, the school commemorated eighty years as an educational institution by offering pieces of the original foundation to staff and families. “Your Solid Foundation Project” symbolized the strong community respect this school had attained. The hallways of the school lined with photographs and plaques memorialized former students, principals, and teachers.

One of ten elementary schools in the district, Community had one of the highest poverty rates in the district. Situated in a section of town traditionally an area of working people, the poverty rate, based on free or reduced lunch count, hovered around 71%. Known as a very friendly, community-oriented school, Community had the reputation as a good place to teach and to send your children to school. In the opinion of the researcher and as commented upon by others, Community was one of the strongest schools in the area of parent involvement in this district. School projects and family events were often initiated by a small, but determined group of parents through the PTA based in the family resource center. The day the researcher visited, rotating groups of parents were decorating Christmas ornaments to distribute to every child in the school.

School Description:
The historic brick and wood structure housed grades kindergarten through fifth. Although this school was one of the oldest in the district, pride remained strong concerning Community School. Recent school improvements fixed a leaking roof and updated the playground equipment. Large classrooms covered two floors; a tiny Title 1 computer lab, two Title 1 classes, one resource room, a gym, and a family resource center rounded out the school. Community School remained a center of activity for after school programs and night gym use.

School Population:
According to principal MM, of the 302 students who attended the school, 71% receive free or reduced lunch. Overall, the socioeconomic status of the school population was classified as low in this working class neighborhood. Student population included Native American, Russian, and Asian children. Standardized test scores had increased
which the principal attributed to strong parental involvement. Teachers, naturally, remained in close contact with the parents of their students to help remediate academic difficulties. A Flagship Project promoted before and after school activities.

**School Rituals/Parent Involvement:**

Parent involvement was a key ingredient in the success of Community School. The family resource center, which opened in 1995, logged in over 200 visits a month by parents, teachers, and volunteers. A collaborative effort funded through Title 1, WORD (Women's Opportunity Resource Development), and the Community School District, the Community FRC was one of eight elementary parent centers in the district. Manned by the Family Outreach Specialist SB, who began her education in teacher training, the FRC had grown from part-time existence sharing a space in a music room to full-time classroom space. The principal cited, “The family resource center, in my experience, had the greatest impact on parent involvement.” Staff in the FRC included a family advocate who was a trained social worker, a Flagship Coordinator, and another family outreach specialist. Fathers felt comfortable frequenting the family resource center.

An extensive library of parent resources, including parenting books, videos, pamphlets, tapes, records, and children’s books could be accessed by any parent. An adult book club encouraged literacy endeavors. Two modern computers with Internet access were available for parent use. Literacy lunchtime events coupled parents and their children, while Tot Time was offered for parents of preschoolers. Family Literacy Packets, Welcome Wagon Kits, and Kindergarten Round-Up packets were distributed to families through home visits or during school events.

**Teaching Staff:**

Staff included 20 veteran teachers, and one novice teacher. The seasoned staff was comprised of many teachers who began their teaching careers at Community, and will retire from this school. The collegiality and friendliness between staff members contributed to the overall atmosphere of Community.

MM, the principal of 7 years, was well liked by staff, and conveyed a sense of humor and caring for students and families. Having worked as an administrator for 26 years, and trained as a school counselor, MM was especially knowledgeable about family conflict and resolution, and special education laws. He warned, “Don’t rush to judgment... understand if you do, you’re going to alienate somebody. Once you’ve put up a roadblock, it’s almost impossible to remove it effectively with that family.” He was acknowledged as a principal advocate for family engagement, and often joined parents informally in the school’s family resource center. The researcher considered this principal one of the strongest, if not the strongest “parent involvement” principals who worked in the Community District.

MP, the school’s part-time social worker/family counselor held a Masters in Social Work. For the past three years, he was shared between two elementary schools in this district. MP believed as a counselor to enhance kids’ opportunities to succeed in school, involve the parents... as often as is possible. All of the research shows that kids connection to
families, and families connection to schools increases their ability to succeed in school.

RR, a male fifth grade veteran teacher of 28 years at Community School, recently completed a Masters in Technology Education. He cited spending approximately two hours per week in contact with parents. Also, he utilized 2 to 3 parents per week as volunteers. With 26 students in his classroom, and with 28 years of experience he felt fortunate enough to have the second generation of former parents’ children “coming around now.” RR visited the home of students to dialogue with parents about concerns.

Parent Participants:
HP was a single mother of Laotian nationality who volunteered in several of the district’s family resource centers. She also took adult basic education classes through the district to improve her English, and was a business student at University X. Because of initial language barriers, she advocated:

- going and get[ting] to know more people, and you can learn what is available in school, while you can learn a lot of stuff to educate yourself, besides your kid learning from school.

HP had three children, ages 9, 10, and 15, was not employed, but frequently helped teachers out in their classrooms.

TS was the married mother of three children, ages 2, 5, and 7. She and her husband ran a business from their home, and the family just recently relocated to the Community District. She was a member of the PTA and appeared excited about the opportunities to be involved through the Community Family Resource Center. She related, “in the first 2 schools [her children attended], I didn’t have much opportunity [to be involved] at all; they just didn’t seem to be overly welcoming to parents.”

SB, besides serving a welcoming role as family outreach specialist, was a long time, actively involved parent at Community School. She worked towards completing her teaching certification before marrying and starting a family. Her four children were ages 10, 12, 14, and 16, with one son diagnosed with diabetes. The researcher, in her role as Parent Involvement Coordinator for the Community District, worked closely with SB to help develop the district’s family involvement program.

Group Dynamics:
The Community focus group participants were less well acquainted than either the Urban, or Rural focus groups. Nonetheless, the dialogue flowed well between participants with individuals piggybacking on the answers of others. Parents appeared comfortable in answering the researcher’s questions, and interfacing with the school’s administrator, counselor, and teachers.

Morgan (1997) posited:
Class differences reflect a general segregation of interaction in society so that even when the participants have few overt class differences in their experiences, they may still be uncomfortable discussing personal experiences in each other’s presence. (p. 36)

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This was clearly not the case during the Community focus group. Participants freely discussed personal experiences as they related to general suggestions about teacher preparation in family involvement.

Deference to one individual was not evident; all group members contributed with five responses each. The whole group valued each member’s suggestions, although areas of expertise differed to include counseling, administration, education, family outreach, and diversity.

**Interview Session:**

The funnel approach to initiate group interactions was essential for some participants were not prior acquaintances. Morgan (1997) stressed, “A final decision in determining group composition involves seeking out strangers versus allowing acquaintances to participate together” (p. 37). TS was the only participant who was probably a stranger to two other participants, RR and MP.

Nonetheless, low moderator involvement was maintained for the participants were well prepared with answers having reflected upon the questions to be asked. Their well-thought out answers were evident of a willingness to provide input on this topic of family involvement in education.

**Focus Group Demographics:**

Focus Group Participants: Six: one principal, one teacher, one school counselor, two parents, and one family outreach specialist/parent

Date: Wednesday, December 6, 2000

Location: Community School Family Resource Center

Large square table with seven chairs set up with tape recorder with microphone, video recorder, and a notebook. Lunch provided.

Length of session: 11:30-1:00

Total Time: Approximately 54 minutes of dialogue after introduction and explanation, filling out profiles, permission forms signed

Questions: 5 total—1 through SC

Participant Responses for Questions: Principal-5 responses; School Counselor-5 responses; Teacher-5 responses; Family Outreach Specialist/Parent-5 responses; Primary Parent-5 responses; Laotian Parent-5 responses
Appendix D
Community Y School Profile
Suburban School Focus Group (pseudonym)
October 16, 2000

Participants:
BF: Female principal
TF: Female veteran kindergarten teacher
CD: Male veteran kindergarten teacher
RM: Grandfather-surrogate parent of American Indian students
GH: Female American Indian parent
BK: Female parent/parent liaison in school’s family resource center

School/Community History:
This middle-class to upper middle-class elementary school was constructed eighteen years ago in a fairly affluent area. Located near an airport and a state university, the school was built to educate the children of suburbanites moving into the burgeoning area of Suburban district. Homes in this canyon sold for well over $100,000. Similar to an isolated Shangri-la, this canyon’s families included city professionals, professors at the local state university, and retired couples. Community involvement was strong; in fact, a state legislator who resided in the area had taken over as the school grant writer, and often visited the school several times during the day. An effective Parent-Teacher Organization (PTA) maintained a strong relationship with the school. The day the researcher visited, the principal was slated to present to the PTA on brain-based research.

School Description:
The modern blue-sided structure highlighted by pink trim contained grades kindergarten through six. A large, equipment filled playground was located on the side of the school. An open classroom structure surrounded the library that functioned as the focal point of the school. Parents who entered the school were greeted by a living room set up with a couch, chair, and coffee table. Glass display cases throughout the school housed student work, as well as popular trade books. Student artwork was displayed on the walls; visiting artists frequented the classrooms to provide art classes. Generally, classrooms had only one computer station each.

A family resource center, staffed by a parent volunteer, had an extensive library of parenting materials, which was accessed by parents at any time. Although under funded, the FRC was manned by an enthusiastic former teacher who reported that material circulation was high. The FRC also hosted lunch craft events that rotate through every class in the school.

School Population:
According to the principal who had administered the building for six years out of a twenty-two year career, the overall socioeconomic status of the school was middle class. Out of a school population of 370, 15 students were American Indian, 15 students
were Hispanic American, and 20 students were Asian American in grades kindergarten through sixth. This school also housed the district's ESL program.

This parent/guardian population consistently attended PTA meetings, borrowed parenting books from the family resource center, and ran fund-raisers for computer equipment. In addition, parents remained involved in the current school goal emphasis; for example, brain-based research, enhanced writing, etc.

School Rituals/Parent Involvement:
BF (the principal) attributed very high parent involvement not to the affluent SES, with only 8% of students receiving either free or reduced lunch, but to the fact that "parents are similar everywhere" in their quest for school involvement. She maintained a strong relationship with her staff and also provided a welcoming atmosphere for parent volunteers and visitors. BF firmly believed that parents could be effective problem solvers for the school. However, she was not aware of a district or school-wide parent involvement policy currently in effect.

The family resource center hosted monthly parent events, including parent lunches with students, and crafts activities.

Teaching Staff:
At Suburban, 35 staff members included 22 veteran teachers and 2 novice teachers. A voluntary transfer policy existed in this district that provided teachers with options for movement to other schools.

The focus group teacher participants included a male European American first grade teacher, who having taught for 8 years, was spending his first year at Suburban. He was known as a child-centered teacher, who ate lunch with his 16 students, and spent, on the average, one hour a week contacting parents. CD was trained as a teacher at University Y and held a degree in Elementary Education and a Masters in Special Education. He cited a lack of preparation in his college course work in the area of family engagement.

TF, a female European American kindergarten teacher, had 27 students in her classroom, and said she contacted parents on the average of 2 hours a week. She obtained her Bachelors in Elementary Education in 1989 and stated that she had taken courses on the topic of parent involvement in education. That was also her first year at Suburban.

BF, a female principal, who has worked for 22 years as an administrator, has acted as principal of Suburban for six years. The researcher considered her a progressive principal who believed in and supported the best practices in education at the school. She was a sought after lecturer across the state on brain-based research, as well as writing profiles and other topics. Before coming to Suburban, BF was principal at G School, a school in town with a 97% free or reduced lunch count. She worked hard to promote family involvement with parents she cited as "prostitutes, drug dealers, and poverty-level families." During that time period, she came to the belief that parent involvement was not based on socioeconomic status, but communicating and reaching out to parents. She quoted, "When parents [or families] are similar its easy for teachers to be judgmental of children who are different." She felt sometimes teachers needed to bend to the wishes of parents, whether; at the time, it appeared to be the wrong thing.
She was such a popular principal that when she was transferred from G School to Suburban, the parents of the school, including those prostitutes and drug dealers mentioned above, marched on the school district administration office downtown to protest her transfer. Nonetheless, she was transferred to the current school that both her daughter and son had attended.

**Parent Participants:**
Three parent participants, including both a grandfather and a grandmother raising students joined in the focus group. GH, an American Indian of Cheyenne blood, who was divorced, was both the mother of a student at Suburban, as well as a grandmother of a student attending that school. One student was age 10, the other 6, who had attended Suburban for 4 years, previously attending a reservation school that GH found lacking. She was a college graduate, was employed full-time, and was not a member of the school’s PTA.

RM, who was both a father of students who attended Suburban, and a grandfather of a ten-year-old Native American Cheyenne child currently attending this school, held an advanced degree in a Masters in Education. He was retired as a principal of a school serving American Indian populations. He had indicated that he never volunteered in the school, but his answers indicated he was involved in school activities, nonetheless. He spoke of his extended family including a son aged 44, and twelve grandchildren.

The third parent, BK, European American, was married and also worked as the parent liaison for the school’s family resource center on a volunteer basis. She moved to this area 5 years ago from a rural setting where she taught high school. She had one child, age nine, and stated she was a frequent volunteer in the school.

**Group Dynamics:**
This focus group was certainly an example of Morgan’s (1997) test for whether a focus group was an appropriate method of research of “how actively and easily the participants would discuss the topic of interest” (p. 17). These participants had volumes to say about the topic of parent involvement based on their experiences and perspectives. The acquaintances within this focus group were more distant than the Rural group. The principal, based on the sampling requests of the researcher, chose the participants. GH and RM were well acquainted through the Native American community, and the teachers worked closely on a daily basis with BK, who functioned as the parent liaison in their family resource center. All participants felt comfortable discussing these issues in each other’s presence, with a funnel-based questioning approach leading the discussants into the main questions. RM and CD provided comedic relief for the group, and RM also acted as the senior group member, but did not challenge the position of the principal. “The process of sharing and company among participants” (Morgan, 1997, p. 21) created an air of collegiality, already established in this strong school climate of parent involvement.
Interview Sessions:

This group appeared well prepared and thoughtful about the focus group questions, which were sent to them beforehand. Based on the volume of dialogue generated by this group, the moderator maintained a low level of involvement. Participants appeared highly involved with the topic with each one giving more than one sentence as an answer. Morgan (1997) noted, “The actual observation of consensus and diversity is something that can happen quite powerfully through group interaction” (p. 21) and Suburban focus group was a potent example of this. The group became cohesive through the dialogue, yet individuals maintained their own opinions or piggybacked upon the statements of others.

Focus Group Demographics:
Focus Group Participants: Six: one principal, two teachers, three parents
Date: Monday, October 16, 2000
Location: Suburban School Conference Room
Conference room large round table to seat six, set up with video recorder, tape recorder with microphone, and a notebook
Length of session: 8:30-10:30
Total Time: Approximately 73 minutes of dialogue after introduction and explanation, filling out profiles, and permission forms signed
Questions: 6 total—1 through 5C
Participant Responses for Questions: Principal-8 responses; Male Teacher-7 responses; Female Teacher-8 responses; Male Parent-7 responses; Female Parent-7 responses; Female Parent/Parent Liaison-6 responses
Appendix D
Community Z School Profile
Urban School Focus Group (pseudonym)
November 14, 2000

Participants:
DA: Female parent liaison
CD: Female parent/registered nurse
DM: Male principal
PH: Female intermediate teacher

School/Community History:
Urban school was a large, modern brick facility built in 1992 that housed grades kindergarten through fifth. The school’s mission statement promised, “Urban School will join together to provide our children with the academic and behavioral skills needed to reason and communicate responsibly in society.”

A computer lab demonstrated the modernity of this school with 17 newer Macs with CD-Roms and 14 IMacs. Located off a highway exit, the area was burgeoning with new housing including apartments, trailer homes, and very expensive modern homes in sub developments. The school was built to satisfy the increase in student population in the immediate area and in the Urban District in general. Approximately 500 students attended this school with a high mobility rate based on what the principal cited as increased inflationary prices in the area for housing.

School Description:
The very large, modern, well maintained school was decorated with an alphabet border. Carpeting covered the school, and artwork was displayed throughout. Classrooms were large and well stocked with materials for student learning. In the Urban School District, parents selected from six schools for their children to attend. Elementary buses dropped off students who lived in the parameters of the school site and other students were driven to school by their parents.

The school did not have a family resource center, but did employ a parent liaison who held a Masters in Social Work. The principal considered the Parent Liaison Program as “outstanding... bringing in parents into school in a positive way.” This school maintained several innovative programs to help students. The CAP program (Child Advancement Program) had 40 volunteers coupled with high need students. The STARS Reading Program included an assortment of volunteers including a retired legislator, businessmen, college students, and parents who mentored students two times a week for 30 minutes.

School Population:
Urban School received Title 1 with approximately 21% free or reduced lunch count. Generally, the school population emanated from a middle-class socioeconomic status, but a fairly high mobility rate was indicative of families looking for substantive employment elsewhere. As of December 13, 2000, Urban School housed 499 students.
One intermediate teacher mentioned she felt she “received the whole family and their academic, emotional, and social needs” when she had a student in class. This same teacher believed in holding parents and children accountable for learning. The principal noted that less than 10% of the student population could be considered minorities; another school housed the ESL student population.

School Rituals/Parent Involvement:

DM, the Principal, was proud of the very high level of parent involvement that existed in his school. He wrote, “Parents volunteer daily at Urban.” He also added, “We have parents and community members help with our STARS Reading Program. They meet two times a week for 30 minutes.” To help students with academics, social, and emotional growth, parents and community members met with individual students at least one hour a week. This program was entitled CAP (Child Advancement Program).

Besides the CAP program, he credited DA, the school’s Family Liaison of seven years, for “getting everyone [teachers] on board. Because of her efforts, all parents feel comfortable [and] teachers [are] much improved [in their responses to parents].” At the start of the school year, DA called every family in the school. She also welcomed new families and went on home visits and served as a resource for community referrals.

Parents met monthly as a parent advisory council, and the district superintendent met monthly with PAC presidents from each school site.

Teaching Staff:

Staff included 38 teachers, 31 being classified as veterans, and 7 being classified as novices. The cooperative effort among staff members to help children and families was clearly evident.

The veteran female teacher participating in the focus group interview worked at Urban for six years. She cited a lack of family involvement course work in her teacher preparation, and had taught for a total of ten years. With 28 students in her class, she averaged one parent volunteer weekly, and spent an average of one hour a week contacting parents. She believed, “I feel as a teacher when I receive a child in the classroom, that I’m receiving the whole family.” PH loved her job, spent long hours at school, and was willing to hold parents accountable for their part in their child’s education.

The other educator was the parent liaison, DA, who obtained a teaching certificate in 1985, and taught for four years before pursuing a Masters in Social Work. She worked in Urban School since the inception of the Parent Liaison Program seven years ago. Her job was “just to get the family more involved in the school and make them feel more comfortable, and I do that in many different areas.” Through her training as a social worker, she took courses that contained skills in working with parents. She strongly lamented the fact:

I don’t know if professors get it... these professors [who] have been there [at the local teacher preparatory university] for 15 or 20 years, and are still teaching the same lessons from the same book need to get it.

The principal, DM, appeared to be extremely well liked, congenial, a progressive principal who will retire next year after 31 years in this district. He served as principal of
Urban for 9 years. DM also appeared in a video highlighting family involvement efforts throughout the state developed by MPIRC (XXX Parent Information Resource Center), to explain the Parent Liaison Program in his district. Under his leadership, parent volunteerism and resource and referral services for families increased incrementally. DM stated:

Now I do not know of a single parent that is not feeling comfortable coming into this building and knowing if they've got a question I've got an answer. We have an open door policy, many times I'll tell new parents, 'We're only a phone call away, should you have any questions, whether positive or concerns...' so I think we have tremendous parent involvement and relationship with parents.

Parent Participants:

CD, a married mother, and a registered pediatric nurse who worked part-time at a clinic, had three children attend Urban School in the seven years she resided in the district. She was extremely active at the school, president of PAC, served in an advisory capacity on school health issues, and on the school's advisory board. She appeared extremely comfortable interacting with school personnel; they worked as a team. CD felt "as a health professional, a home visit for a teacher would open up the eyes of so many." She also expressed concern for teacher awareness of community resources for families, the integrity of teachers, and health issues affecting families.

Group Dynamics:

Morgan (1997) posited, "Participants must feel able to talk to each other, and wide gaps in social background or lifestyle can defeat this requirement" (p. 36). Of the four focus interviews undertaken, the Urban focus group, because of the small number of participants, and similar socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, demonstrated homogeneity.

Furthermore, the focus group participants were united in respect, pride, and admiration for the Family Liaison Program, which was extremely successful at Urban School. This group of four highly involved participants was in agreement concerning mutuality of purpose—to explain and highlight their family involvement programs. Merton et al. (in Morgan, 1990) drew attention to "the personal context from which individual remarks arise—what is it about a particular participant that leads him or her to express things in a particular way?" (p. 46). Morgan (1997) found, "Perspectives and personal context may be based on the social roles and categories that the participants occupy, they may also be rooted in more individual experiences" (p. 46). Obviously, the social roles of principal, veteran teacher, family advocate-social worker, and pediatric nurse, which distinguished the identities of these participants, affected their perceptions, and therefore, their responses.

The veteran teacher's expertise was deferred to; she responded almost twice as frequently as some other participants. The ethos of a team working together for the betterment of families in this school was the overriding impression the researcher attained.
Interview Session:

The funnel approach to initiate the focus group interview was hardly necessary; the participants were highly versed in the precepts of family involvement in education. As previously mentioned, they had been chosen as a school site to be highlighted in a video on family involvement. Therefore, low moderator involvement was maintained, with the researcher posing a few questions about the district-wide Parent Liaison Program, the Para-Educator Experience, and elective courses at the local teacher preparatory university. Participants were willing to elaborate, at length, about specific family scenarios, and were willing to generalize about the conditions of families impacting student learning.

Focus Group Demographics:
Focus Group Participants: Four: one principal, two teachers, and one parent
Date: Wednesday, November 14, 2000
Location: Urban School Conference Room
Large, oval table with five chairs, tape recorder with microphone, video recorder, and a notebook
Length of Session: 3:30-5:15
Total Time: Approximately sixty-six minutes of dialogue after introduction and explanation, filling out profiles, and permission forms signed
Questions: 6 total: 1 through 5 B
Question 5C was answered through the discussion of question 4
Participant Responses for Questions: Veteran Teacher-13 responses; Parent Liaison-7 responses; Married Mother-8 responses; Principal-8 responses
Appendix E
Pilot Study
August 2000
Schools of Education Review
of Email Protocol

Researcher: Kathy B. Grant, Doctoral Candidate in Literacy Studies
The School of Education, University X

Directions: The purpose of this dissertation research is to explore a western state's schools of education elementary teacher preparation curricula (K-5) for evidence of instructional strategies that promote knowledge, skills, or understanding in the area of family engagement. I will be emailing both department chairpersons and methodology professors at four western universities to pose the following three questions to them. Before I disseminate the surveys I would appreciate your comments on each of the three questions as to:

- their clarity or how understandable they are
- the opportunity for succinctness or brevity of the answer by the respondent
- the topical applicability or how well they apply to the purpose of the research as stated above.

Please place your comments on the next page. If you have any questions or additional comments, please email me at ____. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your input on my dissertation research.

1. Does your elementary teacher education program offer preservice elementary teachers either required or elective coursework to promote family-school partnerships?

2. To what extent does your elementary teacher education program prepare preservice elementary education majors in the goal of working with parents in the school setting?

3. What knowledge, skills, or understanding should preservice teachers acquire through elementary teacher preparation to enable them to work effectively with parents?
Comments on the Questions:

1. 

2. 

3. 

Thank you for your time in evaluating these questions,

Kathy B. Grant

August 21, 2000
Pilot Study of Survey Instruments
June-September 2000

Questionnaire on Email Survey Instrument Sent To:

The University of Wyoming at Laramie

♦ Dr. Margaret Cooney, Chair-Department Head- Elementary and EC Education
♦ Dr. Mina Bayne, Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Michelle Buchanan, Asst. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Alan Buss- Asst. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Barbara Chatton- Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Judy Ellsworth- Asst. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Duane Keown- Assoc. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Pat McClurg- Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Linda Rhone- Asst. Professor-Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Amy Roberts- Asst. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Tim Rush- Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education
♦ Dr. Margi Sheehy- Asst. Professor- Department of El.Ed/EC Education

Casper College
♦ Dr. Wendy M. Smith- UW/CC
♦ Dr. Susan Thompson- Associate Professor- UW/CC

Chadron State
♦ Dr. Clark Gardener- Dean of Education
♦ Dr. Jack Hytrek- Field Experience Director
♦ Dr. Patti Blundell- Intro. to Teacher Education
♦ Dr. Bill Agnew- Intro. to Teacher Education
♦ Mr. Steve Fisher- Intro. to Teacher Education
♦ Dr. Patricial Cruziero- Reading Education
Appendix E
Pilot Study
Email Survey Results
From Chadron State, Nebraska; The University of Wyoming, Laramie; and Casper College, Casper
Comments solicited July 2, 2000-September 8, 2000
Condensed Fall 2000

Comments on Questions 1-3

1. Does your elementary teacher education program offer preservice elementary teachers either required or elective course work to promote family-school partnerships?
   - Family school partnerships may be addressed as part of a course rather than as stand-alone course. Do you want to limit answers to only stand alone courses?
   - I would ask question #3 first, as it speaks to the "ideal." The second and first deal with "what is." We all do less than the "ideal" because of the limited time in programs and courses.
   - Will you describe what you mean when you say "family school partnerships?" I'm not sure what this includes.
   - Question #1 can be answered with a "yes" or "no." If you need additional information you need to change the question.
   - Ask if topic is covered in a specific course. Ask if specific teacher ed. goals, objectives and outcomes address this. Ask if portfolio documentation is required.
   - Either required or elective course[s] to promote family-school partnerships? Please list the specific course[s].
   - OK
   - After "course work," I would put in parentheses or "experiences." In that way you may get descriptions of other instruction (i.e. Family Math Night) outside of the class, but a valuable instructional experience attached to that class.
   - Clear; opportunity for brevity too high-maybe add: Please list courses by name and indicate whether they are required or elective.
   - I would also attach a clear description of what you mean by "family-school partnerships," so you focus the respondent somewhat as they answer your questions.
   - I like questions 1 and 3.
   - Will probably get you yes/no answers-or possibly a list of causes at most.
   - I reviewed your questions and have some comments and suggestions. Based on the information you provided in your study, I'm not sure you will get the data you will need. First, question #1 is Yes/No. If you want
a simple yes/no then it is fine, but then you might add another question to pull out some details.

- Rephrase question #1 to ask, “What aspects of your program address family/school partnerships?” The program may have threads throughout a number of courses. We have threads here at _____ for technology, special education, and multiculturalism. Even then, the proclaimed existence of such threads doesn’t guarantee that each class addresses that content. We are currently reviewing our courses to make sure they do, but some instructors have strayed, relying on others to present necessary content. Anyway, the department chairs should be aware of such over-arching goals (outcomes, standards, or objectives) of the programs. The instructors might not be aware of the programmatic threads, hence #2.

- Yes
- You might define “family-school partnerships” in the course of this question. You risk getting a huge range of interpretations here.
- I feel this question is clear and understandable.
- Only in individual competencies inside courses, especially at residency level.

2. **To what extent does your elementary teacher education program prepare preservice elementary majors in the goal of working with parents in the school setting?**

- Are elementary program courses the only place parent involvement might be taught? Child development courses, parent involvement, etc. Some of our students, particularly Early Childhood minors are taking courses in Family and Consumer Science that include working with parents. Introduction to teaching courses may include material dealing with families.
- Does this ask if teachers are able to work with parents when they come to the school (in the school setting) or are you intending this question to include other interactions?
- OK
- Reverse questions # 2 and #3. Question #2 is too vague. I would prefer a list for questions #2 and #3 of specific tasks in family-school partnerships.
- Clear, again maybe allows too brief of a response, instead of “to what extent,” you could say “in what ways.”
- I would change “to what extent,” to “in what ways.” I think you will get more specific information from that change.
- “To what extent,” seems vague to me.
- I’m not sure “to what extent” means. Applicability varies with department head–familiarity with course offerings.
- In the courses you teach, how do you address family/school partnerships? Or by the end of the course, what will your students
know about family/school partnerships? How will they learn this? How will you assess their understanding of family/school partnerships?

- The second question asks for an extent, or range. When I first read it, my first reaction was that it could be answered with a simple "a lot" or "a little." It doesn't ask for specifics.
- Linked to semester before student teaching: teacher prep courses.
- Again, clarify "extent," one class session, a thread through programs, a philosophy, a course, etc.
- This is somewhat vague- "extent" is very subjective. Do you want specific classes? I'm not sure how to reword it for clarity, for me at least.
- Only in individual competencies inside courses, especially at residency level.

3. What knowledge, skills or understanding should preservice elementary teachers acquire through elementary teacher preparation to enable them to work effectively with parents?

- If you are looking for specifics, a checklist could be used or a rating scale (if appropriate) to your work.
- List as many possibilities as plausible with room for "other."
- Preparing for parent-teacher conferences
- Involvement in parent-teacher conferences
- Planning student-led conferences
- Writing notes to guardians
- Interpreting standardized test scores to guardians
- Relating standards to guardians
- Relating school philosophy/goals to guardians
- Preparing for parent volunteers
- Working with guardians of special needs students
- Requesting guardian assistance (field trips, costumes, food/snacks) could be categorized
- Dealing with upset guardians
- Other ________________
- Perhaps ask when in the program these are documented.
- How do you define "to work effectively" with parents? In general, working with parents can involve many things; your question seems rather broad. If you provide additional information you can probably narrow the focus.
- Question #3 seems clear.
- Clear; asks for specific details, certainly topical.
- Fine.
- Will require an effort on interviewee's part; probably best question to get what you are looking for. Perhaps you should consider requesting
that the head survey faculty or ask faculty members who incorporate(s) these elements in their course work to respond. My concern is that the head may not be as familiar with course content and you will not get an accurate picture of the program. As a department head I try to keep abreast of all the offerings, but know that I do not know specific content changes as the program evolves. Encouraging the head to seek input from other faculty members might result in a more accurate picture.

- The third question is phrased as an opinion question; in other words, it could be answered even though my program does not have instructional strategies that promote parental involvement.
- Examples: Knowledge-Demonstrate ability to listen to parent concerns and recommend whom to contact regarding further information or concerns. Skills-Demonstrate excellent communication skills with parents or demonstrate knowledge of early childhood growth and development.
- This one works for me.
- Clear. Will you have room for open-ended comments, explanations, and clarification?
- Understanding of student, understanding of the importance of family and community, skills of communication with parents.
Appendix E
Pilot Study
University X-The School of Education
August-September 2000
Elementary Education Students' Suggestions &
Field Experience Coordinators' Comments
for Revision of Questions on Student Teacher Survey

Answers and Comments:

1. List your elementary education course work that has included knowledge, skills, or understanding in the area of family-school partnerships or parental involvement.
   - Social Foundations, Educating the Exceptional Child, Teaching Math K-6, Educational Psychology.
   - Ethics and Policy, Educational Psychology, attending PTA meetings, participating in Parent/Teacher Conferences.
   - Introduction to Education, Strategies for Teachers.
   - I don't remember spending a significant amount of time in any class. Every class talks about the parents and their importance, but not in detail.
   - Exceptionality and Classroom Management, Ethics & Policy Issues. They touched briefly on issues about parents' rights, involvement, etc., but not on how to get parents involved.
   - None, I do not feel that we had good information in this area, and if we did, it was very little and skipped over for the most part.
   - None of my elementary course work focused much on understanding family-school partnerships. However, my block social studies course did seem to talk and teach more about getting the parents involved. Many lesson ideas were mentioned on how to get the children/parents working together.

2. To what extent do you feel the University X's School of Education prepares preservice teachers with knowledge, skills, and understanding to effectively collaborate with parents?
   - Somewhat confident, although I do think that classroom management would be helpful. I guess the proof will be in the pudding.
   - I feel I did not receive a strong background in this area through my teacher education program. It was touched on in methods with case studies and class discussions.
   - Much like students, nothing is like actually doing it. We cannot effectively synthesize or role-play in the classroom (college). I do think a focus needs to be made to avoid gossip-passing information between teachers may be essential, but can damage parent/teacher relationships if colored or
elaborated on, as is often the case with groups of teachers exchanging information.

• I feel like professors prepare us with knowledge, but the system doesn’t provide any opportunities to develop skills for dealing with parents. That’s a source of anxiety, but I think it’s one of those areas that just takes experience.

• On the legal level... I feel prepared, but personally I am depending on my own experience and people skills, not necessarily learned/shared advice!

• Average—we should spend more time on this.

• Really, not at all other than practicing good communication skills through writing papers.

• None, I am already noticing how unprepared University X made me in my student teaching and how much more I wish I could have been taught not only in this area, but all areas.

• Not enough— if any at all. I have no idea how to collaborate with parents, teachers, etc. The skills I have learned are not the ones I needed. I need to learn practical information.

• I believe we talked about the importance of parental involvement now and then, but the emphasis was on methods of teaching that would be most effective for teaching the children. There was very little mentioned on parental collaboration as I remember.

3. What knowledge, skills, and understanding should your program teach elementary education majors to enable them to work more effectively with parents during their field service placement?

• I think it would be beneficial to have information about the demographics of the school district you will be teaching in (i.e. income, jobs in the area, SES, environment, etc.).

• Having discussions on the rights of parents, laws, etc. that we need to know about as both parents and teachers. We did this a bit in methods but could use more.

• I think I answered this above. Do not fear, nor assume anything about whom you will be working with in terms of parents.

• It would be nice to know more about managing conflict and what’s expected of me as a teacher. It would be nice also to see what community resources teachers use the most in Community X and see them incorporating.

• I think helpful tips before the student teaching assignments, etc.

• This is a skill you learn in the process to respect every parent, as they are different. I learned it a lot during student teaching and parent-teacher conferences.

• Describe what good relations look like, policies for having parents in the classroom and helping with special events, how you can involve parents in the school, how to hold a parent-teacher conference, how to be respectful of different family types, practices, and habits, etc. It would be a good
idea to require elementary “block” students to design and hold an event that involves parents during their block experience. It could be a short play, potluck, bake sale, reading day, etc. It would be nice to create an event and get some feedback on how to do it better.

- They should provide guidelines, questions, prompts for us to answer or put in a “practice situation” or “role play” based on a particular situation that as a teacher you will have to talk about with parents.
- What to tell parents… how to work with them… how to involve the parents in your classroom.
- Possibly teach us a variety of ways to get the parents in the classroom—working with their children at home. Maybe teach us about ways to get parents more excited about their children’s education and ways to make them want to be more involved. I believe it is important that they feel like we want them in the room, etc. COMFORTABLE.

4. **Please comment on the clarity of these questions. How could they be easier to answer? List terminology that is unclear or ambiguous.**

- I have had so many classes that it’s hard to remember them all by name. All the questions were clear to me; I had no problem with what was being asked.
- [For question #1] Do you just want a list of courses? [Does course work] mean class assignment?
- The first question is confusing as to what exactly you would like a list of…courses, assignments, etc. What course work do you mean?
- Students may need transcripts or help completing #1 from memory.
- Only the first one gave me any trouble.
- “Family-School Partnerships”- I guess I’m unclear on what this is exactly.
- The “knowledge, skills, and understanding” part gets wordy. Maybe you can ask how our programs have “helped” us. Then we can describe what knowledge, skills, and understanding we have gained from our classes.
- I think they were very easy to read and understand and made them clear and concise to respond to.
- I think the questions are fine. University X does a poor job in many areas—especially this area. It needs to be addressed and it is not. I feel I have been cheated by going to University X and in their education program.
- The questions sound very clear—I believe parent involvement is an absolute necessity to greater student success in academics as a whole. More should be taught upon this area of education our future professional educators.
Appendix E

(Continued)

Pilot Study—Focus Group Instrument
September 2000
Comments from Principals, Teachers, and Parents

Note: The researcher requested that the following current school district elementary or former elementary principals provide input on refining the original focus group questions: Joe Staudahaur, Jerry McVay, Mike Maxwell, Roberta Stengel, Patrice Harkins, Steve McHugh, Karen Allen, Mark Thane, and Carol Becker

1. What knowledge about family-school partnerships should beginning elementary teachers have?
   - Change to parent involvement.
   - Change to parent involvement.
   - Preface with “What do you think parent involvement is?”

2. What understandings should preservice elementary teachers develop about the families they may work with?
   - Change “develop” to “know.”
   - Move “about family involvement” to the end of the sentence.
   - Another word for “understandings.”

3. What skills or strategies might be taught to elementary preservice teachers to help them work effectively with families?
   - Change to “What do teachers need to learn” to help them work effectively with families?
   - Change to “undergraduates in elementary education.”

4. What knowledge or strategies promoting family-school partnerships are currently being taught to preservice teachers prior to student teaching?
   - Change to parent involvement.
   - None of the participants may be aware of the existence of courses preparing teachers to work with parents at the university level.

5. Are you aware of college courses or elements of courses offered in the state preparing elementary preservice teachers to work with families?
   - For work with families.
   - Change to “what courses are you aware of through community organizations that offer strategies to work with families.”

If so, what skills and strategies are currently being taught?
   - No comments.
If not, what might the ideal course (or components of a course) be comprised of to prepare elementary teachers to work with the parents of their students?

- So if there isn’t a course, what would you want to be sure is in the course?
- Change the term “components.”

6. Please comment on the clarity of these questions. How could they be easier to answer? List terminology that is unclear or ambiguous.

- Use parent friendly wording.
- Don’t know of courses being offered in the area of parent involvement.

Teacher Comments:

- Define knowledge, skills, and understanding to help respondents answer the questions.
- Label “instructional” skills or strategies.
- Use “opportunities” instead of experience for #1.
- #2 and #3 ask for the same information.
- Is # 6 a repetition of #5?
- Change wording on #5 “offered in the state [that] exclusively [focused]...”
- In #4 change to “be taught to elementary education majors [would benefit them] prior to student teaching.”
- In #3 change to “What understandings [of family diversity] or [social structures] should elementary education majors?”
- Change #3 to “What [background knowledge or understandings through classroom experiences] should.”

Parent Comments:

- Add # 1 funnel question at the beginning, “What has been your experience in the area of family involvement in education?”
- Change terminology to more parent friendly, less education-based terminology.
- Define “family-school partnerships.”
- Shorten the number of questions from the six existing ones.
- Define knowledge, skills, and understanding.
- Split terms knowledge, skills, understanding into 3 separate questions.
### Appendix F: Required or Elective Courses Covering the Topic of Family Engagement (excluding field experiences) as Indicated by Teacher Educators

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<td>(E) Principles and Practices of Early</td>
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<td>(R) Diagnostic Teach. Rd.</td>
<td>(R) Professional Issues</td>
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<td>(E) Child in the Family System</td>
<td>(R) The Public School in American</td>
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<th>Family, students' home culture</th>
<th>Parenting styles</th>
<th>Family and relationship skills, traditional family values, role of family in the life of the child</th>
<th>Family lifestyle, home inventory</th>
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<td>Parent-teacher partnerships, positive suggestions to parents</td>
<td>Parent-teacher partnerships, involve parents from the community</td>
<td>Teacher attitude is the heart of good parent communication, knowledge of how to deal with parents, meeting parents for the first time, parental attitudes, home/school relationships</td>
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<td>Community Resources</td>
<td>Home visits, family abuse and neglect, IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan)</td>
<td>Disabilities in families, families and community, community resources, community partnerships, school neighborhood</td>
<td>Reciprocal relationship between parents, children, extended family and community; volunteer experience in community setting that provides services to children and families; attitudes, values, and opinions about family abuse and neglect; community-based resources for children and youth, community resources, community partnerships</td>
<td>Understanding the needs of families, community profiles, families and Early childhood programs</td>
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<td>Parent-Teacher conferences, Communication of assessment results to parents, working with parents, parent involvement, dealing with families</td>
<td>Communication of assessment results to parents</td>
<td>Communicating developmental progress to a parent, clinical case reports with the parent or guardian, permission from parents</td>
<td>Communicating with parents, family involvement, parent involvement effective conferences with parents, parent conference plan/procedures, interviews with parents, working with parents, conferencing techniques, interviews with teachers on parent involvement</td>
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<td>Plan for dealing with diversity in families, cultural discontinuity between home and school cultures, cultural awareness, human diversity issues, social background of learners</td>
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