Portraiture of Cultural Responsive Leadership
in Title 1 School Principals Implementing Mandates of No Child
Left Behind Act within the Context of Parent Involvement

by

Loraine Conley

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Bryan Brayboy, Chair
Kimberly Scott
Teresa McCarty

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 created a need for Title 1 principals to conceptualize and operationalize parent engagement. This study examines how three urban principals in Arizona implemented the mandates of the Act as it pertains to parent involvement. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine how principals operationalize and conceptualize parent involvement as they navigate barriers and laws particular to the state of Arizona. This study sought to understand issues surrounding parent involvement in Title 1 schools in Arizona. The beliefs and interview dialogue of the principals as it pertains to parent engagement provided an understanding of how urban principals in Arizona implement the aspects of No Child Left Behind Act that deal with parent involvement. The research study concluded that parents have community cultural wealth that contributes to the success of the students of engaged parents and that cultural responsive leadership assists principals with engaging parents in their schools. The research concludes that a gap exists between how parents and principals perceive and construct parent engagement versus what is prescribed in No Child Left Behind Act.
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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

In this study, I sought to explore how principals conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement at Title 1 schools, while supporting the school community’s cultural wealth. I am a principal of a Title 1 school, and have experienced first-hand the challenges of implementing the mandates laid out in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The purpose of this study was to explore principals’ perceptions of parent involvement in their Title 1 schools, their perceptions of programs and strategies used with parents, and their perceptions of their community’s cultural wealth. It is assumed that the findings of this study will inform current practices in schools and assist Title 1 principals with strategies to bolster parent involvement. I, as the researcher, used a qualitative portraiture methodology to paint a clear picture of the phenomenon being explored. The participants of the study included a select group of principals of urban, Title 1 schools.

Although the concept of parents and principals working together as a team in a school setting is both logical and feasible, this is not always achieved. Parent involvement can be one of the most effective ways to help parents and principals work together towards the education of students; however, parent involvement in schools can be difficult to accomplish in an effective and systematic way. The players involved in education potentially include four groups: parents, students, teachers, and principals. A problem with negotiating a team mentality between these four groups is that each may have a different idea of what parent
involvement looks like and how parent involvement should operate in schools. For example, parents who serve on school site councils have a decision-making role, whereas parents who volunteer at school functions a few times a year have a supportive role. In both scenarios, parents are involved, but the type of involvement is quite different.

Due to the variance in how parent involvement can manifest itself, it is crucial to examine what constitutes parent involvement. Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) confirm that defining parent involvement usually includes a list of what parents do for their children’s education (p. 3), but they suggest that parent involvement should also take account of parent motivation. Their definition of parent involvement combines what parents do for their children’s education with why parents become involved. When parent involvement is clearly defined by the implementers, this clarity helps to promote more parent involvement. The ultimate benefit is increased student achievement, which studies have shown is strongly impacted by parent involvement. NCLB covers the many aspects that contribute to and comprise parent involvement.

Three years after the enactment of the NCLB in 2001, and more than two years after final regulations were issued, the U.S. Department of Education continued to make significant policy decisions affecting implementation of Title 1 funding. Title 1 is important because it is the largest single program of federal aid for elementary and secondary education, and provides substantial aid for local schools. Title 1 is by far the biggest program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which focuses aid on high poverty schools. The
law mandates that schools develop written parent involvement programs and school-parent compacts to ensure parent engagement, and districts must reserve a certain percentage of their allocation for parent involvement programs. Parent engagement is noted for being difficult to achieve in high poverty schools. This is particularly true in Arizona, where one of the largest populations—Mexican immigrants and their children—is affected by Arizona Senate House Bill 1070 (SB 1070), a law that indirectly inhibits parent participation. SB 1070 allows police officers to stop suspected, undocumented citizens, and to inquire about immigration status via reasonable suspicion. The law negatively affects parent involvement because many immigrants are hesitant to bring attention to themselves for fear of legal trouble. If undocumented, Mexican parents attend parent involvement events, they risk deportation and unnecessary harassment. So, while Title 1 and NCLB mandates try to promote parent involvement, other laws counteract those measures, making the parent involvement situation troublesome for principals and school districts.

A major reason that NCLB has so many provisions regarding parent involvement is the connection between parent involvement and high student academic achievement. With the intent to foster parent involvement, NCLB allows schools to use federal funding sources (Title 1 funding) to implement school parent involvement plans. In fact, if a school receives Title 1 funding from the federal government, its principal is mandated to involve parents in the school. This is problematic, however, because schools receiving Title 1 funding typically have low rates of parent involvement and high rates of poverty. Schools which
receive money, but do not meet parent involvement criteria, risk losing the money, when realistically such schools generally need additional federal funding sources to provide educational services to students. When funding is lost due to lack of parent involvement, the loss is detrimental to schools and students.

Despite the possibility that funding may be lost, parent involvement in poor and urban schools using Title 1 funding remains limited. In an attempt to remedy the problem, principals in schools using Title 1 funding strive to get parents involved in their schools. When attempts to involve parents fail, is the problem the principal, or the strategies used to involve parents? Part of the problem may involve the changing role of the principal, and adjustments to such changes. While the position of principal formerly consisted of managerial duties, it has shifted to include the role of instructional leader. Prior to NCLB, principals were not responsible for student achievement to the extent they are now.

One of the results of the shift in the principal’s role is that the principal’s accountability for learning is now much greater. According to NCLB, by 2014 100% of students must pass the state’s academic assessment. Progress towards this goal is measured annually in incremental percentage benchmarks. Schools are measured according to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of the students; if a goal is not met, there are grave consequences for the principal. For example, in the state of Arizona, a certain percentage of elementary school students in grades 3 through 8 in each of a number of subgroups must pass state assessment, as defined each year by the Arizona Department of Education, on the Arizona Instrument of Measure (AIMS). The subgroups include: ethnicity and race,
students with special needs, limited English proficient students, and free and reduced lunch recipients. Due to these strict requirements, the principal must use every resource to ensure success. While parent involvement is one resource that contributes to a school’s success, eliciting parent involvement can be difficult for principals.

One of the challenges that principals face is the lack of a clear definition of parent involvement, or a road map of effective strategies to engage parents. Although there is a plethora of research about parent involvement, it can exist in many forms, and principals must know what kinds of involvement work for their community. In urban schools, research indicates that parents who have negative past experiences with teachers, staff, and principals tend to be unwilling to be involved, because of low expectations. Often, the types of parent involvement schools prefer interfere with the working schedules of parents. In addition, urban schools are usually located in poorer neighborhoods, with limited resources. In such situations, a parent’s first priority is to meet the physical needs of the family, such as providing food, clothing, and shelter. It is precisely these urban schools, however, that rely on Title 1 funding which mandates parent involvement. This creates a problem for principals, who need funding for student services so that their students and school have a chance to meet the criteria set forth in NCLB. The problem is multifaceted, to say the least, but also a shared problem, because parent involvement is a mandate encountered by all principals using Title 1 funding.
Statement of the Problem

Despite how complicated it is to involve parents in schools—especially with the hurdle of Arizona immigration enforcement laws—parent involvement is mandated for principals receiving Title 1 funds. More specifically, section 118 of NCLB states that every school must have a written plan for parent involvement, developed with and approved by parents. The plan must describe how the school will foster a partnership between home and school, supported by two-way communication. The act specifically mandates that meetings be held to discuss how Title 1 funds will be spent, and to make sure parents understand the needs of the school, such as the academic state standards that must be met, and the assessments that must be passed. Often, parent involvement is one-sided, and focused on what the school needs to do for compliance, rather than on what parents want to do or how they want to be involved.

Most parent involvement activities are geared towards parents coming to school and assisting with the needs of the school. This scenario is often problematic because of parents’ works schedules, and also because coming to school can be a deterrent to some undocumented parents. Another problem with parent involvement occurs when parents go beyond assisting with school needs, in which case principals and teachers are not always welcoming. Parents may also not be welcomed because the resources they bring are not perceived as valuable. NCLB is structured to provide parents with the resources policymakers perceive they need in order to support their children’s schools. However, the perceptions policymakers have about useful resources are not the same as the perceptions of
parents; this mismatch further complicates the notion of parental involvement, and makes it harder for parent and principal to develop a partnership that fosters the two-way communication defined by NCLB.

One way to assist principals in meeting the mandates of NCLB, and use parent involvement as a resource to improve student achievement, is to consider the cultural wealth of the school community. There is a body of research that considers the cultural wealth that students of color bring to schools. Parents undoubtedly have resources within their families and communities that can help support schools. If principals approach parent involvement with the mindset that parents and communities have valuable resources, this has the potential to increase parent involvement, thus helping schools meet the mandates of NCLB and secure resources needed to attain student achievement goals. Unfortunately, research indicates that a significant number of principals of Title 1 schools do not conceptualize or operationalize parent involvement in a way that supports the community cultural wealth. As a result, many principals struggle simply to get parents involved in activities at their schools. Moreover, there is little information as to how principals conceptualize, operationalize, and support the community cultural wealth at their sites. An evaluation of these aspects will provide the school system with valuable information as to how to increase parent involvement, thereby aiding them in complying with laws set forth in NCLB, and ensuring funding for their schools.
Research Questions

To better understand the problem of how principals miss opportunities to take advantage of community cultural wealth and increase parent involvement, this study sought to explore how principals are engaging participation. It was guided by the following questions:

1. How and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 schools?
2. How and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how principals conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement at their sites, while supporting the community cultural wealth. It is anticipated that, through exploration, a better understanding of the needs, problems, issues, and challenges of parent involvement will emerge. Principals have many roles in schools, and leadership styles vary. The information gathered by this study will enable principals to make well-informed decisions with respect to assets, no matter their role or leadership style. The connection between principals and parent involvement may seem obvious, yet for principals it can sometimes be unclear. For instance, principals who do not understand the positive impact that parent involvement can have on student achievement will tend to focus on other ways to try and improve the AYP, and neglect strategies to involve parents. Moreover, there are mandates for parent involvement from the local district, the state agency, and the federal government,
which all serve as a call to action for principals. The responsibilities of the instructional leader call for better support of parent involvement. To this end, principals who are instructional leaders should work with other instructional leaders to share ideas concerning how to operationalize and conceptualize parent involvement.

**Conceptual Framework**

The framework for this qualitative case study was grounded in theories of both *community cultural wealth* and *culturally-responsive teaching*. Yosso (2005) discusses community cultural wealth as a critique of *cultural capital*. The concept of cultural capital insists that there are ways of doing things, or ways in which people behave, that are more liable to result in success. Commonly, in schools, the ways the middle class behave are the most accepted, valued, and appreciated. Thus, based on an assumption of middle-class cultural capital being most valued, if middle-class culture is taught to students, they will also be successful. Yosso critiqued this notion, saying that all students bring a culture that is wealthy, and that can be used in schools towards success, if you consider viewing the culture of poor students as an asset. Yosso described “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (2005, p. 77).

Culturally-responsive teaching can serve as a model for principals’ engagement with parents, similar to the ways they engage with students by responding culturally in order to increase student achievement. Key concepts of culturally-responsive teaching are *culture, communication, caring*, and
curriculum, which principals can use to engage parents as partners in their students’ education. Geneva Gay (2000) states that matching the contextual conditions for learning to the cultural experiences of the learner increases task engagement and hence task performance (p. 15). Principals can be successful at increasing parent engagement if they match the contextual conditions with the cultural experiences of parents; this in turn positively affects student achievement. The ecology of parent engagement theory suggests that there is a “crucial importance that both space (school) and capital (interaction) play in the relative success parents, teachers, and principals have in engaging parents in the academic venue of urban schooling” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). This study examines cultural wealth and the interaction between parents and schools, specifically addressing how principals conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement in schools.

Research Approach

With the approval of the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I studied the experiences and perceptions of the principals of three, urban, Title 1 schools in Arizona. The participants were principals of schools within an urban district who met parent involvement requirements, as defined by NCLB. This investigation was a multi-case study using qualitative research methods. In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. The data collected from the interviews were supplemented by reviewing parent involvement plans, surveys, and parental program information, and by shadowing principals. The information obtained through interviews subsequently formed the basis for the overall findings of the study. Each interviewee is identified by a pseudonym.
All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although the nature of this study prevented me, as the researcher, from achieving a triangulation of teacher, parent, and principal interview data, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and principal shadowing serves to demonstrate the legitimacy of the data collection methods used. Coding categories were developed and defined on an ongoing basis, and were guided by the study’s conceptual framework. All these aspects of the research approach led to collection of data that could be useful for principals facing challenges related to community cultural wealth and parent involvement.

**Assumptions**

Based on my experiences and background as an elementary principal of a Title 1 school in an urban setting, a number of primary assumptions were made regarding the study.

The first assumption is that principals have in general not conceptualized what parent involvement should look like in their schools. This assumption is based on the fact that the role of the principal has changed over time from being managerial-focused, to also encompass instruction, and many principals have never been trained or asked to consider the significance of parent involvement.

The second assumption is that, because parent involvement is newly-mandated, principals have either followed district policy or continued to do what was in place when they came to the school. Many principals have never really designed a parent involvement plan to focus on the cultural wealth of their school community. These first two assumptions are guided by my experiences with
parent involvement programs, as a parent and principal, as well as the literature, which exposes the common practices involving parent involvement and parent involvement programs.

Third, because NCLB requires that principals increase student achievement, it is assumed that principals consider parent involvement as a resource to achieve NCLB goals and secure funding from the federal government. Therefore, I assumed that principals are willing to consider the cultural wealth of the school community. This assumption is based on principals’ knowledge of NCLB parent involvement requirements, the research regarding parent involvement, and the relationship between parent involvement, student achievement, and community cultural wealth. I assume that, because community cultural wealth is significant to me as a principal and a parent, my colleagues share the same belief.

The last assumption is that principals ultimately see community cultural wealth as a valuable tool. This assumption is based on the fact that schools usually are—and historically have been—focused on the deficit model of parent involvement, but that this approach is not working. Therefore, an asset perspective, such as community cultural wealth, may have a greater chance of success and implementation when used as a model for principals.

**Researcher**

While conducting this study, I was employed as a principal in an urban, Title 1 school, and had a child leaving elementary school to enter into high school. Thus, I brought to the study the valuable practical experience of working
in the profession of school leadership, and my everyday experience as a parent of a child attending an urban, Title 1 school. At the same time, I have knowledge and understanding of the context and the school environment. As the researcher, I acknowledge that the same experiences that provide valuable insight, might also serve as a liability. Specifically, my personal experiences might have biased my judgment regarding research design and the interpretation of findings. In an effort to mediate possible biases, my assumptions and theoretical orientation were made explicit at the outset of the study, and I remained committed to engaging in ongoing critical self-reflection by journaling and maintaining a dialogue with professional colleagues and an advisor. Moreover, to address my subjectivity and to strengthen the credibility of the research, various procedural safeguards were taken, which included triangulation of data sources and triangulation of methods.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study derives from my desire to discover ways to provide encouragement for principals with NCLB mandates for parent involvement, and to ensure that principals consider their community’s cultural wealth and are aware of the potential of culturally-responsive teaching as a resource. All of the principals who participated in this study were Title 1 school administrators trying to conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement, in order to increase student achievement. An increased understanding of NCLB, community cultural wealth, culturally-responsive teaching, and parent involvement, may increase parent involvement and secure financial resources to support Title 1 principals. By increasing parental involvement, and securing
additional funding, principals may ensure the longevity of their jobs and sustain student achievement. Teachers, parents, students, administrators, and principals have the potential to benefit from this study.

**Definitions of Key Terms Used**

*Community cultural wealth:* An array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts utilized by communities of color. Cultural capital exists in forms such as inspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

*Culturally-responsive teaching:* A strategy used to increase task engagement for students of color (Gay, 2000).


*Title I:* The Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides substantial aid to local schools. Title 1, by far the biggest ESEA program, focuses aid on high-poverty areas (Cowan & Edwards, 2005).

*Urban school or Urban school district:* A school or district that has the greatest percentage of non-white students, greatest proportion of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, and highest poverty (National Center for Urban Transformation, San Diego State University, 2012. http://ncust.org).
Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the problems associated with how principals address parent involvement mandates, the need for the study, its significance to principals, and the conceptual framework for the study. It also introduced important terms and concepts, including community cultural wealth, culturally-responsive teaching to assist with NCLB requirements, and principals’ roles. The problems principals face in schools today are centered on how to achieve student success, meet mandates, and effectively utilize the resources available to schools. Chapter 2 will discuss how parent involvement and student achievement relate to community cultural wealth and culturally-responsive teaching. The discussion begins to expose how principals can improve parent involvement, in order to help solve some of the student achievement and funding problems that are prevalent in Title 1 schools.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions held by Title 1 principals regarding parent involvement in their schools, programs and strategies used with parents, and the community’s cultural wealth. I was particularly interested in seeking to understand how the experiences of these individuals assisted with or impaired conceptualizing and operationalizing parent involvement. To proceed with the study, it was necessary to complete a review of literature. The following describes the major contributions to the literature that shape the background of the field and influenced the course of this study.

This review focuses on the experiences of principals and the strategy of parent involvement. To this end, two major areas of literature are reviewed. The first area concerns parent involvement as it relates to schools, while the second concerns how principals manage parent involvement. A review of literature on parent involvement provides an understanding of the context, history, structure, rules and regulations that inform and affect how principals must obtain parent involvement. A review of literature on principals and parent involvement provides the context for understanding what knowledge, skills, and attitudes the study participants perceive, and how their perceptions are influenced.

To conduct this literature review, I used multiple sources of information, including books, dissertations, Internet resources, professional journals, and periodicals. These resources were accessed through ERIC, ProQuest, JSTOR, and EBSCO. Throughout the review, as the researcher I point out important gaps and
omissions in particular segments of the literature as they become apparent. In addition, relevant issues and ideas are discussed. Each section of the review closes with a synthesis that focuses on the implications for this study. The chapter summary then shows how the literature informed the researcher’s understanding of the material, and how the material contributed to the ongoing development of the study’s conceptual framework.

**Parent Involvement in Schools**

Many educational professionals and administrators support the idea that schools need more parent involvement, and that parents are not involved enough in their children’s education. Teachers and principals commonly hold this belief, but the issue raises certain questions. Is parent involvement actually needed? Does parent involvement truly contribute to student success? To attempt to answer such questions, further background on the situation is needed.

It is first necessary to define and discuss the concept of parent involvement. Parent involvement is defined in many different ways. For example, one definition of parent involvement pertains to what the parent and child do at home to support learning. But parent involvement can also consist of the parent going to the school and providing support there. Further still, parent involvement can include making decisions that affect the function of the school. For example, if parents serve on school site councils, this involves decision-making. Barton et al. (2004) confirm that defining parent involvement usually includes a list of what parents do for their children’s education (p. 3). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Barton et al. suggest that parent involvement is more than just what parents do, but
combines what parents do for their children’s education with the motivations behind their involvement. *Ecologies of Parent Engagement* (EPE) is a framework used to describe what parents do and why. This framework suggests that schools must consider what parents do, along with their motivations for being involved. Barton et al. (2004) describe the EPE framework as a mediation between capital and space: “In this context, capital is defined as the academic venue of the school, and space is defined as the opportunity to engage at school with actors within the school” (p. 3). While definitions in other studies may differ from that provided by Barton et al., the main components of parent involvement remain the same in all relevant literature. The first component of the definition is that parent involvement occurs when parents are involved in their children’s education. The second component is that what parents do, and why they become involved, can vary between schools, depending on the parent and the school. Because the major aspects of parent involvement are so broad, there is a range of opportunities and means for parents to become involved.

Schools face many problems, but some are unique to parent involvement. One problem unique to parent involvement involves teachers’ attitudes towards parents at school. Often, teachers believe that parents do not care, because they do not come to school activities. In some circumstances, teachers feel that parents are not willing to be involved because students do not attend school regularly, or are habitually tardy. In other circumstances, certain students are unprepared for school when they do arrive, and teachers infer that this is caused by the parents’ lack of interest. Epstein (1991) conducted a study of 171 teachers in eight inner
city schools to examine the connections between school programs pertaining to parent involvement, and teachers’ attitudes and practices regarding parent involvement (p. 289). Epstein used questionnaires as one measure to examine teachers’ attitudes. The findings of the study were as follows: teachers in elementary or self-contained settings had more positive attitudes; teachers with more positive attitudes placed a higher importance on parent involvement; and teachers with more positive attitudes had greater success at reaching hard-to-reach parents (Epstein, 1991, p. 293). Conversely, when teachers harbored negative attitudes towards parents, because of student behavior, this negatively affected parent involvement.

While teacher attitude is certainly one of the obstacles in the way of parent involvement, it is not the only one. Poverty is another major problem associated with parent involvement. Many children attending urban schools are poor, and are the children of poor parents. Many parents are not able to be involved in schools in the traditional sense, because they work more than one job. These jobs are often not flexible, and the working hours are not compatible with parent activities scheduled by schools. Poor parents are concerned with meeting family needs and providing food, clothing, and shelter. For families in these circumstances, there is simply not enough time to attend school functions. Furthermore, when parents work multiple jobs, they are not involved at home with their children, and can’t assist with homework. While many teachers assume this is because parents do not care, that is rarely the case. In fact, poor children often have poor health, and their
parents are more concerned with providing the medical resources that they need in order to attend school.

To complicate the issue even further, many poor parents had poor school experiences themselves, which contributed to their perceptions. Poor parents often perceive that they are not welcome at school, because they are confronted by negative teacher attitudes. Many do indeed encounter negative attitudes, because teachers perceive lack of parent involvement as indifference, when actually parents are actually struggling with a delicate work/life balance. When these parents do make time to become involved, and then encounter negative attitudes, the issue is further complicated. Additionally, poor parents often associate their child’s school with negative experiences: more often than not, their first interaction with teachers and the principal is in response to a disciplinary issue. Because of such situations, poor parents rarely experience openness to their ideas, or an invitation to collaborate in decision-making matters concerning the school. Berliner (2006), Kozol (1995), Rothstein (2004), and Anyon (1995) confirmed the experiences of poor parents and children in schools in the United States. In Our Impoverished View of Educational Research, Berliner (2006) states:

In this set of rich nations, the United States is among the leaders in childhood poverty over the decade of the 1990’s [sic]. The only nation with a record worse than ours is Mexico, and, contrary to UNICEF, I would not consider Mexico a rich nation. Using 2003 data to compute Gross National Income per capita (using Purchasing Power Parity [PPP] as the method of comparison) the United States ranked fourth at $37,750 per capita, while Mexico ranked 80th with $8,900 per capita (World Bank, 2005). We should not be in the same league as Mexico, but alas, we are closer to them in poverty rate than others whom we might, more commonly, think of as our peers. (p. 956)
Beyond poverty, language barriers pose another problem for parent involvement, because many immigrant children come from non-English speaking nations. Arzubiaga, Nogueron, and Sullivan (2009) state that:

One out of every four children younger than the age of 8 live in a family where at least one parent is an immigrant.... Approximately 93% of children of immigrants were born in the United States and are therefore citizens. (p. 246)

When non-English speaking immigrant parents visit schools and attempt to negotiate the language, it often proves very difficult. Parents are invited to meetings, but often there is no-one to translate, except their own child. Although the child is willing to translate, the level of sophistication of the language used by teachers is often unfamiliar to the child, which makes communication with parents limited. In some schools the language needs are even greater, and interpreters are needed for multiple languages other than English.

In one qualitative study, Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) sought to understand and describe the experiences of three sets of immigrant parents (out of a group of 17 parents) at school. These three sets of parents described that, while visiting their children’s schools, they experienced disrespect, and their presence was unappreciated. They felt that school activities were solely for the purpose of fostering the agenda of the school, and not the experience that parents want for their children. These participants indicated that their only positive experience in the school space was being able to talk with teachers frequently if they spoke their language.
The Status of Parent Involvement

Schools must constantly assess the status of parent involvement, and what affects this status. Issues of poverty, negative teacher attitudes, and dealing with a language barrier, mean that parents can fail to be involved in schools for many justifiable reasons. Schools only have a limited window in which to engage parents with first impressions and to offer opportunities for involvement. In the future, schools will have to make parents feel welcomed and respected. Teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of parents must be more positive. All parents must be given the space and opportunity to participate in meaningful ways. Often, parents are given opportunities to participate in schools, but the opportunities are not meaningful to them.

Schools have tried to involve parents for many years. Epstein and Dauber (1987) and Epstein (1991) describe six ways that parent involvement can manifest itself, some school-centric, and others parent-centric:

1. Basic obligations of families include providing for children’s health and safety;
2. Basic obligations of schools include communication with families about school programs and children’s progress;
3. Involvement at school includes parents and other volunteers who assist teachers and administrators and children in the classroom;
4. Involvement in learning activities at home includes requests and guidance from teachers for parents to assist their own children at home;
5. Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy includes parents and others in the community participatory roles in the parent-teacher association, advisory councils, and Chapter 1 programs or other committees; and
6. schools’ comprehensive programs for involving families and communities in their children’s education. (p. 291)

These six parent involvement strategies suggest that there are many ways to get parents involved at school, but what do these programs look like when they are
actually implemented in schools? Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) examined 41 studies of parent involvement, focusing on the evaluations of parent involvement programs. Many of the programs only vaguely describe the participants, and empirical research was rarely noted as a part of the evaluation process, thereby making a great deal of the study qualitative in nature. Although the researchers did not find statistical evidence that supported positive effects, or a strong correlation between parent involvement and student learning, they did confirm the lasting effects of parents being involved, including improved student attendance and increased attendance at school-sponsored events. It was noted that most programs were implemented in an effort to satisfy requirements for federal funding. The researchers’ final statement concluded that: “there is not substantial evidence from studies demonstrating systemic covariation between parent involvement and student achievement” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 572).

Despite the initial findings of Mattingly et al. (2002), questions remain concerning the correlation between parent involvement and student success.

Studies of the impact of parent involvement during the past few years have established that parent involvement has many effects. Parent involvement affects: student conduct in schools; school governance; teacher practice and self-efficacy; the overall effectiveness of schools; relationships between parents and governing authorities; and collaboration with community-based organizations within public schools. Parent involvement also affects the relationships between the governing authorities of schools, such as teachers and principals. Consider the relationship between parents, teachers and principals as a home-to-school relationship. The
relationship between home and school can be modeled in terms of the roles of helper, monitor, advocate, and active decision maker (Abram & Gibbs, 2002, p. 394). Generally speaking, there is an unequal distribution of power between these roles, and the dynamics between governing authorities and parent groups are strained. This strain results in parents being willing to work in exchange for access to power. Access to power is granted only when the parents’ roles are supportive of the school mission or plan; yet, if parents want to initiate change, the strain is increased, and parents are acknowledged but no change occurs in policy or practice within the school or governing authorities’ actions. This tension is further exacerbated by frustrations in parent, teacher, and principal relations.

Methods have been instituted to alleviate some of the problems relating to parent involvement. For example, officials enforcing the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program are considered to be a governing authority. When used by governing school authorities and parents, CSR can strengthen ways to provide structured accountability which supports teamwork among parents, school leaders, principals, and teachers. CSR is at the heart of effectively governing schools; however, parent involvement is difficult to govern, because the relationships between parents and schools can look very different, and take on different forms, in varying circumstances. For instance, the relationship between governing entities is not always strained, unequal, and non-distributed. Epstein’s (2005) case study of CSR at partnership schools is an example of how structured accountability can work well when parents and governing authorities interact. Often, unequal power and strained relationships occur when structured
accountability is not existent in establishing effective parent involvement. When a structured model is implemented, however, it promotes parent involvement and provides positive and collaborative ways to interact.

Beyond positively impacting students, parent involvement can affect community development. One example is the use of a School Site Council (SCC)—a stakeholder committee that represents the school, parents, and community. A School Site Council is a decentralized power within a school, which fosters site-based management. One could say that an SSC acts to channel community needs and development. Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) examined the roles of SSCs in two states and two districts, and argued that their implementation positively affects parent involvement and community development. The positive effect occurs because parents are people in the community and get more community members involved and interested in the school and surrounding community.

Though impactful at the community level, parent involvement can also affect teacher practice in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs at many universities are beginning to include parent involvement components as a part of the curriculum. Research (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) indicates that when teachers do arrive at schools, and are prepared to work with parents, they feel like they can make a difference with parents, and involvement happens as a result. Teacher self-efficacy can occur
when a teacher issues an invitation for a parent to enter the classroom, or simply helps a parent with the construction of their role of participation in their child’s education. In the same vein, when teachers consistently practice effective strategies to promote parent involvement, their efforts can influence the creation of systemic programs in their school or district. Research indicates that one effective way to support a positive home-to-school partnership is through systemic implementation.

Perhaps most importantly, the effects of parent involvement are numerous in the area of student achievement. Investigators have studied the effects of parent involvement in schools in a variety of ways (Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Jeynes, 2003). The effects of parent involvement on student achievement have been studied quantitatively, using various statistical analyses, such as meta-analysis of studies, and correlation studies. Jeynes (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies of student achievement of minority groups across all ethnicities, to examine which components had the greatest impact, and on which measures. The parent involvement components reviewed were: parent attendance at school functions, parent expectations, parent help with homework, parent attitude, and parenting style. The measures were: grade point average (GPA), standardized testing, teacher rating, and a conglomerate of other components. Based on the study, Jeynes indicates that parent involvement has a measurable impact on certain aspects of education, but varies based on student race, and on various components within the educational setting. Overall, parent involvement had the greatest impact on African American students, and the
second greatest impact on Latino students. The lowest impact was on Asian students. The largest measure affected by parent involvement was standardized testing. The finding that parent involvement impacted African American and Latino students the most is significant because, generally speaking, it is common for schools with high numbers of African American and Latino students to have the lowest rates of parent involvement, especially when the schools are located in urban settings.

In a related study, Howard and Reynolds (2008) studied middle-class African American parents and their underachieving children. In this study, parents wanted to be involved in decisions that affected their children at school, but were not given the opportunities to be involved in ways that supported their children. Fan (2001) and Fan and Chen (2001) shared findings similar to Howard and Reynolds, yet explored parent involvement in different ways. One study examined parent involvement across socioeconomic factors, and reported that parent educational aspirations and expectations had a positive impact on student achievement. The other study examined multidimensional aspects of parent involvement. To explore the dimensions of parent involvement, the investigator measured the strength of the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. The results measured GPAs per subject, and supported the idea that parental involvement has a strong effect on student achievement. These studies confirm that parent involvement positively affects student achievement, and that parent aspirations and expectations are among the most effective manifestations of parent involvement.
Parent involvement greatly impacts GPA, and there is evidence that it also affects standardized test scores. Fan and Chen (2001) found evidence that a strong correlation exists between parent involvement and student achievement. The evidence also supports positive effects across all ethnic groups, with the most significant impact on African American and Latino students. These studies have gone so far as to determine that parent involvement is most effective in elementary schools, but is also effective in high schools. There is a massive amount of information about parent involvement and student achievement, but it is crucial to assess the extent to which principals are aware of the research regarding parent involvement.

**Principals and Parent Involvement**

The connection between principals and parent involvement may seem obvious, yet for principals it can sometimes be unclear. Principals have many roles in schools, and leadership styles vary. Moreover, there are mandates from the local, district, and state agencies, and the federal government, that serve as calls to action for principals. Do principals know what those mandates are? Are principals willing to implement the mandates? Is what principals do good for all schools? There are many layers to parent involvement, and the layers complicate how principals follow the mandates.

The role of principal has evolved, especially over the last decade, to include many responsibilities, from manager to instructional leader. When considering parent involvement, the role of manager is not sufficient. The manager is concerned with day-to-day tasks, controlling the environment so that it
is conducive to order, following schedules, and promoting good student behavior. In contrast, the instructional leader is more concerned with curriculum and achievement issues, such as conducting teacher performances and evaluations, understanding national and state academic standards, reviewing achievement data, creating staff development to support areas of growth, planning and creating additional opportunities for instruction, and maximizing the instructional time so students stay on task during the day. The responsibilities of the instructional leader better support parent involvement, which in turn benefits student achievement.

The magnitude of what principals do in schools creates a template for principals as facilitators of parent involvement. Principals also serve as change agents who use parent involvement as an effective school improvement strategy. Based on research, in some instances principals ask teachers to take a leadership role in promoting parent involvement, by planning events or providing support for student learning at home with parents. In this role, the principal provides support to teachers by allocating resources such as physical space, materials, and funding for events or activities. Advocating for change in levels of parent involvement means being directly involved, and allowing parents and community to partner in making decisions about the school, and their children’s education. Whether principals act as leaders, delegators, or advocators in achieving parent involvement, all of these circumstances demonstrate how the role of principal is directly connected to parent involvement.
Even with federal mandates, it is often difficult for principals to take the necessary actions to increase parent involvement. NCLB provides mandates for states and local educational agencies with regard to what is expected for parent involvement. Thompson (2006) states that “parent involvement is defined and mandated in the Public Law No. 107-110, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001” (p. 421). The focus of parent involvement is described in sections 1118(b) through 1118(g), and covers the following topics: school parent involvement policy, policy involvement, shared responsibility for high student academic achievement, building capacity for involvement, accessibility, and information from parental information resources centers (Thompson, 2006, p. 422). With the direction set by NCLB, principals need support from the district office to help develop policy. This requires that a district policy be put into place to begin building a capacity to support the necessary extent of parent involvement. Shared responsibility for achievement is difficult to implement without shared accountability and funding. To further complicate the issue, though implementing policy and garnering parent involvement are crucial to becoming a successful principal, many principal preparation programs do not focus on making policy, or on parent involvement issues. To improve this, it is important to evaluate the ways in which parent involvement is most effective; this will give principals better insight into how to shape principal preparation programs and develop policy.
Related Studies

There are many studies related to principals and parent involvement. As early as 1991, Epstein reported research supported by a grant from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education (NIE G-83-002). The report describes what principals should do to support parent involvement:

- Maintain parent involvement through high school;
- Understand and work with all types of families;
- Select types of parent involvement based on school demographics;
- Identify essential components of parent involvement programs;
- Use administrative tools to build better programs. (pp. 129-133)

In 2001, Griffith completed a study that examined principal behaviors related to building consensus among parent groups with regard to decision-making roles. According to Griffith (2001), 60% of principals in the study identified as principals, and 66% described their behavior as managerial. Managerial behaviors were least effective in building consensus among parent groups. In another study of 144 principals and their leadership methods, Flynn and Nolan (2008) report that principals provide support to teachers for parent involvement through resources and communication. Gordon and Louis (2009) examined the leadership styles of principals as their roles related to community openness and student achievement. They report that principals with different styles are receptive to community involvement, and their receptivity has a positive effect on student achievement.
One study required principals to reflect on their roles. Richardson (2009) examined what principals think about their roles when facilitating parent involvement in school processes (p. 3). The research indicates that principals from different demographics have very different perceptions and successes. For example, the results suggest that female principals perceived themselves as facilitators of parent involvement who include parents in school processes; older principals had higher ratings in facilitating parent involvement; and high school principals perceived themselves as facilitators who welcomed parents into school processes. The results were different from what the researcher hypothesized prior to completing the study.

In a related qualitative study, Good (2008) examined the role of principals in implementing CSR, which requires them to involve parents in the reform process. The researcher reports that principals did involve parents, and that most parent activities were spent educating parents, rather than soliciting their support (Good, 2008, p. 2350). Sanders and Harvey (2002) describes a case study that showed strong relationships between parents and communities. The investigator describes one principal’s view of community involvement as significant, and the school leader’s actions as welcoming, communicative, two-way, and committed to student learning (p. 1366). In another study, Auerbach (2007) notes that, in order to get principals to engage in meaningful parent engagement, beliefs and practices must be explored. The researcher describes the finding as “a tool to raise student achievement and not to empower families or invite democratic schooling” (Auerbach, 2007, p. 723).
Summary of the Review of Literature

Parent involvement is important to the success of students, but can manifest itself in different ways and be defined in different ways, depending on the school, parent, and community that the involvement serves. Parent involvement affects many different aspects of schools. While a lack of parent involvement affects schools negatively, there is a great deal of research and literature to support the idea that parent involvement positively supports student achievement. The role of the principal is a critical component in studying parent involvement, because the principal directly influences the outcomes of parent involvement in schools. Table 1 includes research dealing with how and why parents engage in their children’s education. Barton et al. (2004) discuss how parent engagement is conceptualized in school communities, and suggest that a deeper understanding of why parents get involved in their children’s education is needed.

Table 1

Summary of the Research Literature for How and Why Parents Engage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Barton et al.</td>
<td>Parent engagement supports means parents accessing resources and balancing power structure in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Hoover-Dempsey et al.</td>
<td>Parents are motivated by how they construct their roles and parent self-efficacy to support their child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Walker et al.</td>
<td>Parents have psychological and contextual support as forms of parent involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Anderson &amp; Minke</td>
<td>Parents prefer personal communication in schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 reveals what the literature suggests are the effects of parent involvement. Parent involvement is affected by teacher practices, language proficiency, and poverty. Generally speaking, these factors are all problems for schools to varying degrees. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) explored teacher beliefs and practices about parent involvement. Warren (2002) examined teacher expectations. Epstein and Dauber (1987) studied teacher attitudes and practices used to involve parents in classrooms. Bomer, Dworn, May, and Semingson (2008) examined the content used to train teachers about parents and their families, and how the content may affect teacher attitudes and beliefs about parent involvement. Berliner (2006) analyzed the limits poverty places on school reform.

The research also noted that parent involvement is a strategy used for school reform. Arzubiaga et al. (2009) and Barton et al. (2004) explored immigrant parents and their experiences with parent involvement and engagement. Arzubiage et al. conducted foundational studies involving families of immigrants and concluded that information supports parent engagement. Meanwhile, Fan and Chen (2001), Jeynes (2003), and Howard and Reynolds (2008) explored the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement.
Table 2

*A Summary of the Research of Effects of Parent Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Epstein &amp; Dauber</td>
<td>Teachers had strong positive attitudes towards parent involvement, but practices didn’t support involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Fan &amp; Chen</td>
<td>The meta-analytic results show when measuring by GPA and parent aspiration, parent involvement and academic achievement have a strong relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>Positive effects of parent involvement are present across racial groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Ethnicity and SES of the school did not influence teacher’s expectations for student or teacher self-efficacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Hoover-Dempsey et al.</td>
<td>The study reports no significant difference between preservice teacher participation in parent involvement training with non-participants. Qualitatively, participants reported increases in teacher self-efficacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Jeynes</td>
<td>Parent involvement had an impact on student achievement overall and a greater impact on African American students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Barton et al.</td>
<td>Immigrant parents face challenges trying to negotiate parent involvement. The study speaks from a parent’s perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Berliner</td>
<td>Poverty in the U.S. has longevity and is greater than in other nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Bomer et al.</td>
<td>The study found content used to train teachers supported a deficit perspective of poor students and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Arzubiaga et al.</td>
<td>Immigrant parent culture and backgrounds can be used to support families when viewed as an asset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 presents literature which indicates that principals positively influence the outcomes of parent involvement. Auerbach (2007) examined the factors that inhibit or permit leadership traits that increase parent engagement. Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) described a case study of parent involvement with SSCs. Flynn and Nolan (2008) surveyed 144 principals to examine what types of support principals offer teachers to promote parent involvement. Gordon and Louis (2009) used factor analysis and regression to examine how the principal leadership style affected community involvement. Richardson (2009) examined principals’ beliefs about parent involvement and their roles as facilitators or partners in parent involvement. Griffith (2001) examined the behavior of principals when attempting to build consensus with parents. Good (2008) described the experience of principals with parent involvement as a part of CSR. Sanders and Harvey (2002) described a district’s experience with parent and community involvement.
Table 3

*Summary of Literature of Principals and Parent Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>Principals’ roles vary within schools and demographics. Managerial roles are least effective in supporting parent involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Sanders &amp; Harvey</td>
<td>Principals are leaders and must be open to community collaboration as a strategy of school improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Auerbach</td>
<td>Principals viewed parent involvement more as an improvement strategy and less to empower the parents to be democratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Flynn &amp; Nolan</td>
<td>Principals support teachers with parent involvement and the most common form of parent involvement was via the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Principals were successful at optimizing parent involvement as a component of the Comprehensive School Reform model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Gordon &amp; Louis</td>
<td>Principals roles matter, and where there is shared leadership, there is high student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Richardson</td>
<td>Principals are mostly facilitators of parent involvement and less partners in the process of decision making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The review and critique of the literature, combined with my own experience and insights, contributed to the development of the following conceptual framework for this study.

**Ecologies of Parent Engagement**

Ecologies of Parent Engagement (EPE) set the stage to frame a new sort of parent involvement. Where traditionally, parent involvement has been considered to be what parents do, EPE seek to include why parents become involved. This is a significant difference, because when one considers why and how, one begins to consider cultural aspects that determine the actions of a parent. In this context, culture is defined as how and why a group interacts the way it does.

Barton et al. (2004) assert that when one looks at parent involvement in terms of what parents do, but also why parents are involved, this engages and contextualizes the parents’ experiences and actions inside and out of the school community. What a person does is based on his or her beliefs, and this can be considered a different way to define the culture of a person or group. EPE primarily consider the culture of the family in school. Thus, using the EPE approach means “negotiating common understandings about beliefs and practices and building relationships with each other and with actors within the school, especially when their beliefs and practices (culture) differ from expectations held by these audiences” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). EPE offer a new way to conceptualize parent involvement that frames parents as both authors and agents in the school. In other words, parent involvement becomes a dynamic interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define
their interaction with the school and actors within the school (teachers, staff, and principals). To this end, EPE support the idea that principals benefit from operationalizing and conceptualizing parent involvement in way that is meaningful to parents.

**Community Cultural Wealth**

Parents can serve in schools as resources for principals, and as a means to increase student achievement. Moreover, parent involvement as a resource can be considered community cultural wealth. The wealth of the community (parents as resources) can be viewed in multiple forms of capital. According to Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth is associated with six forms of capital:

1. *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often as a means to attain those goals.

2. *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.

3. *Familial capital* refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among families that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.

4. *Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources.
5. *Navigational* capital refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions.

6. *Resistant capital* refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78-80)

Principals can use the idea of community cultural wealth to understand why parents are engaged, and by understanding the motivations of parents they will be more aware of how to involve parents in ways that support their cultural wealth. Giving parents a voice in school communities, realizing the types of capital the community offers, and achieving higher levels of parent involvement, help the principal fulfill his or her role: each type of capital supports the endeavors of an instructional leader and promotes interactive engagement with the actors of the school.

**Culturally-Responsive Teaching**

Geneva Gay (2000) states that matching the contextual conditions for learning with the cultural experiences of learners increases task engagement and hence task performance (p. 15). This is the general premise for culturally-responsive teaching. Responding to the culture, and matching contextual conditions through communication, caring, and curriculum has significantly increased student achievement for students of color. This researcher would be remiss not to consider this conceptual framework as it relates to parent engagement. Principals may be able to use this framework to promote more parent engagement, because it involves matching the contextual conditions of
schools with the cultural experiences of parents in schools, which typically results in increased parent involvement. By adopting a new leadership style called *culturally-responsive leadership*, principals would be able to work effectively with the community to fulfill many of the mandates of state legislation.

**Chapter Summary**

This literature review outlined the many aspects of parent involvement, and how principals are involved with parent involvement. The chapter began with an overview of legislation that deals with parent involvement. NCLB was mentioned as a reminder of what is expected from Title 1 elementary school principals. Parent involvement in schools, and the status of parent involvement, were discussed as a reminder of the difficulties principals face getting parents involved. The chapter then explored the literature related to the role of principal as instructional leader, and how this relates to parent involvement. Theories including EPE, community cultural wealth, and culturally-responsive teaching were reviewed as leading concepts that informed and framed this study. Additionally, the literature review revealed a gap in the research pertaining to parent involvement and principals, and how principals conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement to support the school community. The theories discussed in this chapter drove the research questions for the study, which, as presented in Chapter 3, attempted to help fill the research gap.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perceptions of Title 1 principals as they operationalize and conceptualize parent involvement in their schools to increase student achievement. I believe an increased understanding of parent engagement would allow principals to better shape current policy as it relates to the mandates of NCLB, and assist other Title 1 principals with the task of getting parents actively engaged in their schools. In seeking to understand the issue of parent engagement, the study addressed two research questions: (a) how and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 school; and (b) how and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools. This chapter describes the study’s research methodology, the methods used, and includes discussion of the following areas: (a) the rationale for the research approach, (b) a description of the research sample, (c) a summary of information needed, (d) an overview of the research design, (e) the methods of data collection, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

In examining how principals engage parental involvement in Title I schools, it became apparent that utilizing a case study approach would strengthen my study. I chose a qualitative model in order to gather information about a group of people and their interactions. The characteristics of qualitative research cater to
the interests of the researcher. Creswell (2008) captured the unique perspective of qualitative inquiry, identified the key features of qualitative data, and described each of their aspects. For instance, qualitative data occur in a natural setting:
“qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study and have face-to-face interaction over time” (Creswell, 2008, p. 175). In addition, the researcher serves as the key instrument, such that: “qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviors or interviewing participants” (Creswell, 2008, p. 175). Not only do qualitative researchers gather data from multiple sources, they then utilize inductive data analysis on the data they have collected. In inductive analysis, researchers, “build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data” (Creswell, 2008, p. 175). Creswell (2008) goes on to discuss that qualitative research focuses on “learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issues, not the meaning the researchers bring to the research” (p. 175). Also important is that “the process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed” (Creswell, 2008, pp. 175-176).
Ultimately, though, “qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. Their interpretation cannot be separated from their own background” (Creswell, 2008, p. 176). All of the features that Creswell (2008) presents were considered in choosing the most appropriate methodology for this study.
The current study was best served by a qualitative method, due to the fact that the “central theme of the work is the concept of culture—a vague and complex term that describes the way things are and the way people should act” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95). This study was conducted to focus on interactions of urban principals in Title 1 schools with parents, and to explore how these interactions shape meaning within the organizational setting of the school. The perceived experiences of urban, Title 1 principals who are responding to their schools’ needs and requirements within the framework of NCLB were better suited to a case study because the research sought to examine the following questions: (a) What social actions take place within a school’s setting between parents and principals; (b) what do the actions mean to principals; and (c) how is engagement organized or conceptualized in social patterns. This study was a case study, which utilized ethnographic techniques.

I sought to gain an insider’s perspective of principals’ lives as they relate to parent engagement. Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe this as understanding the emic view of principals, and this view is paired with the researcher’s view, or the etic view (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95). As a researcher, understanding the emic and etic points of view pairs nicely with the art of portraiture as a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences.

Portraiture is a way to connect authenticity and authority in order to help define truth. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain it, “ethnographies describe the researcher’s work in context to support validity of the work and a portraitist makes deliberate use of the context in several ways to reflect her focus
on a descriptive and specific narrative” (pp. 43-44). Based on this description, portraits prove an effective method of listing or presenting ethnographic data, as evidenced by my research questions. I sought to explore the social interaction of principals and learn how their everyday experiences shape and form their truth about engaging students. The lens of principals in their school setting set the context for the social interaction.

The ultimate goal of this research was to discover or explore what is positive about parental engagement with principals, to write from the principals’ perspective as much as feasibly possible, and to cross boundaries between principals and parents in schools. To convey such complex relationships, it was necessary to find a method that accounts for varying perspectives and subtleties. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture is exactly that; they argue that “portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism and effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (p. xv). Such a flexible method, that allows sensitivity for many issues, relationships, and nuances, proved effective for this study. For example, how do principals of Title 1 schools conceptualize or operationalize parent engagement? This is a delicate situation, as parents in Title 1 schools care about their children’s education, but aren’t always able to support the schools by being physically present. So, the question is how to take advantage of parent engagement—which secures additional funding for students—when parents aren’t able to attend school
functions. Investigation of the human experiences of principals will help other principals to find practical solutions for these sensitive issues.

While this was a qualitative study, which utilized ethnographic tools of inquiry to support portraiture, using a case study was the overall strategy for presenting and analyzing data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest that “case studies are in-depth and detailed exploration of single examples (an event, process, organization, group, or individual).... Ethnographies can be argued as special instances of case studies” (p. 104). Because case studies fit so well into the ethnographic method of inquiry, I applied the case study method to this study to understand parent engagement through closer examination of principals as the primary group focus. When considering educational research, Metz (2000) states that “qualitative research design is preferred by sociologists in studying education in the United States” (p. 41). Case study research relies on a bounded system to examine a specific phenomenon, such as a person, a program, an event or process (Smith, 1978). In the context of this case study, the bounded system was the school, and the interaction of the groups within this organization. I sought to examine and understand the interactions within this system.

**Portraiture**

The qualitative method that best suited this case study is known as Portraiture. I am a principal in an urban setting utilizing parent engagement, and the case study was about other principals’ experiences as they operationalize and conceptualize parent engagement. My intention was to inspire other principals with the experiences of the principals in the study. Principals need to see what
other principals do, and how they view parent involvement through the lens of a principal with similar experiences, who knows first-hand the hardship of implementing federal mandates. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe using portraiture, a form of empirical qualitative research, to tell a story. In the context of this case study, the portraitist (me) wanted to weave the story being told by the participant (the principal) in the context of the natural setting (the school). Additionally, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, portraitists seek to record their perceptions and experiences of people by studying and documenting their voices and their visions (p. xv).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest that portraiture is not simply telling stories, but is intended to inform and inspire readers. In going beyond mere storytelling, “the portrait then creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history. And the narrative documents human behavior and experience in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). The narrative becomes an exchange of voices that create a tapestry for understanding the social interactions within the organizational culture. From the narrative, the portraitist constructs the portrait in context while attending to the following aspects of voice: (a) voice as witness, (b) voice as interpretation, (c) voice as preoccupation, (d) listening voice and voice in conversation. Understanding the use of voice is helpful when presenting emic and etic views in qualitative research, because it is important for the reader to understand the bias of the portraitist, and to see how the context shapes the voice of the portraitist.
This provides richness to the portrait, not commonly found without the use of voice. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) provide excellent examples of ways to use a range of voices, from the most restrictive voice to the most expansive voice.

Each aspect of voice contributes to an important, nuanced approach towards creating a successful portraiture. For example, voice as witness encourages the outsider to look at patterns from a distance, rather than as part of the whole. If you are a principal, studying other principals, collecting data or doing fieldwork supports looking at patterns rather than looking solely from your own perspective (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 87). This is important because an outsider can be too close to and familiar with the setting. For example, as a principal with experiences similar to those of the principals in the study, this encouraged me as the portraitist to be mindful of bias as I sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of others. Voice as interpretation was the most useful for this study of principals and parent engagement, because the researcher can utilize the data gathered in the natural context, in order to find meaning. It allows the researcher to give voice to the interactions of groups in a social setting (p. 91). Meanwhile, voice as preoccupation offers ways for observation and context to merge and shape the narrative—a strategy noted as a method of data collection, in addition to interviewing (p. 93). Voice as autobiography reflects the voices of the portraits, and helps to situate the bias commonly found when research is used as the primary tool for gathering data (p. 95). Listening for voice means listening for the perspective and meaning of the actors, and noting the
engagement of those involved in the portraits (p. 99). In the case of this study, I was listening for the voices of the principals to understand their perceptions. Finally, voice as dialogue is very significant because, when properly attended to, “you feel the symmetry of voice from the emic and etic perspective as both views are expressed and together define meaning, making—and this is where the reader hears the researcher’s methodology—her question her interpretations” (p. 103). In portraiture, listening to voices and conversations assists with making connections to themes and categories as they emerge from the study.

Fieldwork allows the researcher to physically go to the people, the setting, the site, or the institution to observe the participants in a naturalistic way. For my study, I went to the schools early to watch the school dynamics. I wanted to see how the front office interacted with students, and what the students’ attitudes were about coming to school. I wanted to see if parents were gathered in the parking lot after students went into the school building. I wanted to see if there was a designated place for a parent that is welcoming. I was curious as to whether or not parent involvement information was readily available when walking into the building. In discussing fieldwork, Creswell (1998) points out that “qualitative researchers strive for ‘understanding’ that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with informants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (p. 193). Fieldwork is an important aspect of portraiture because it reveals the context for the setting, and places people in a time and place that helps the researcher understand what they do and say. Portraitists view human experiences as being
framed and shaped by the setting. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest that there is an openness, depth, and detail to qualitative research. In the qualitative paradigm, the portraitist is interested in the process, meaning, and understanding of the case being studied.

This study attempted to document parent engagement and social interactions as perceived by urban, Title 1 principals in Arizona as they implement the mandates of NCLB. The data analysis sought to interpret the perceptions of the principals as they attempt to engage parents in their schools.

Using the art of portraiture as a method of study, I (the portraitist) was able to hear and connect the personal stories of the actors (the principals) during the interview process, and gather an understanding to make meaning of their perceptions. Michie (2005) provides a practical example of portraiture being used in urban schools. I was better able to connect with the ideology of portraiture, as described by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, in the stories Michie tells about teachers and their experiences in urban schools. His work was inspiring as I sought to understand the stories of principals in urban schools. Portraiture allows the reader to view the whole. Michie’s work provides a clear description of the emic and etic views, and this was helpful as a principal writing from both views. Using the emic and etic views allows threads or themes to emerge, in order to weave the tapestry of the narrative. In the context of the study, I created portraits of the principals, and themes emerged regarding parent involvement. The portraits were created by listening to the voices of principals, walking with them around their schools, watching them in action, watching the interaction of parents, students,
and other staff members at their schools, and examining documents related to NCLB and parent involvement with their schools. There were several opportunities to gather and analyze data and interweave my experiences as a principal with the experiences of other principals.

**Interviewing**

To gather data for the portraits, it was necessary to interview the principals. According to Seidman (2006), “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of those experiences” (p. 3). After all, “the researcher cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world—we have to ask people questions about those things” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). The method of interviewing suggests that the portraitist is the primary instrument for data collection, and that people are the source of that data, framed by the setting. According to Wengraf (2002), there are specific features of in-depth interviews:

- The interview is a research interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge.
- It is a special type of conversational interaction; in some ways it is like other conversations, but has special features, which need to be understood.
- It has to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity, but what is planned is a deliberate half-scripted or quarter-
scripted interview. The interview as whole is a joint production, a co-production by you and the interviewee.

- It is to go into matters ‘in-depth’. (p. 3)

The choice to use the interviewing method allowed me to enter into another person’s perspective, when I was not able to observe behavior (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Wengraf, 2002). Interviewing helps a researcher to understand and reconstruct the experiences of the individual (Porterfield, 2006). Interviews require a well-thought-out design to be effective. The questions used in this study were structured using the framework of Seidman (2006) and were created with consideration given to the literature of parent engagement and principals.

The art of portraiture is like that of phenomenology, in which there is an examination of detailed descriptions of the experiences of the people being studied (Creswell, 1998). Creswell offered phenomenology as a method that involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to elicit patterns and relationships of meaning (p. 12). Polkinghorn, as cited in Creswell (1998), sees phenomenology as a methodology for exploring the structures of consciousness in human experience. It is this human experience that a portraitist-researcher wants to understand, with the intention to create meaning.

Within the phenomenological framework, portraiture finds context crucial to the documentation of human experience or organizational culture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2007, p. 41). A portraitist holds the view that human experiences are framed and shaped by the setting. The goal of this study was to
create a portrait of principals in the contexts of their schools, with a focus on their experiences with parent involvement. Expanding research on the perceptions of principals as they face the challenges of parent engagement may help other principals when implementing the mandates of NCLB. A better understanding of parent engagement from the principals’ perspective may support and inform training and staff development for urban, Title 1 principals in Arizona.

**Setting of the Study**

In order to prime the canvas—so to speak—of portraiture, the portraitist utilizes vivid examples of contexts from personal and historical perspectives, and also the internal perspectives of the players—in this case principals (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture is about building relationships that will aid in gathering valid data from the research questions. Therefore, the participant must be in a comfortable and familiar setting. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), interviews should be conducted in the participant’s natural setting.

Given the framework of portraiture, the setting for this case study was the principals’ schools in two school districts within an urban city in Arizona. Districts A and B are urban districts with many elementary schools. District A had nine elementary schools and District B had 14 elementary schools. An elementary school is defined as a school containing pre-school through eighth grade students. The school sites were purposefully selected based on four criteria: (a) urban setting, (b) Title 1 status as defined by NCLB, (c) ethnic population, and (d) proximity to my school. The urban school districts and schools were selected due
to the fact that they were close to my location, as the researcher. There was immediate access to and familiarity with the superintendent, and the convenient location helped to mitigate my time constraints and job responsibilities as a full-time principal at an urban, Title 1 school. What follows is a description of the process for district selection. First, a list of Title 1 schools was received from the Arizona Department of Education via district-level grants, and from Title 1 personnel. After examining the list, three districts stood out due to their closeness, and my familiarity with the superintendent, location, and other qualifying demographics, but the portraits were from only two districts, shown in Table 4. After districts with the above criteria were identified, districts were purposefully selected from this list.

Table 4

Demographics of Participating Urban Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Cost per student</th>
<th>% Low income</th>
<th>Made AYP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6,725</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District B</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6,666</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Selection

Participants for this case study were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique. Patton (2002) explained that “purposeful sampling is sometimes called purposive or judgment sampling: In a judgment sample you decide the purpose you want informants to serve, and you go out and get some” (p. 230). A qualitative study requires careful thought and planning for the setting, interview questions, and the participant selection. The participants, urban principals of Title I schools, were selected from two districts by a purposive sampling technique.

The principals were chosen within urban, Title I districts in Arizona. Anonymity of the school districts and interviewees was maintained at all times. The data gathered from all meetings were securely held and stored at all times. Principal participation consisted of three, in-depth face-to-face interviews, along with follow-up contacts. The elementary school, Title I principals had a range of experience, from three years of experience to 17 years of experience. All of the principals had been in their building for a minimum of three years. Getting in contact with the principals began with an email to the districts’ superintendents, followed by a phone call to each superintendent. Once permission was granted from the appropriate superintendents, I emailed principals in the selected districts to solicit their participation. After initial contact was made, we scheduled face-to-face meetings to review the consent form for the study and to confirm participation in the study. A total of nine principals were interviewed. On average, each principal had three in-depth face-to-face interviews. One principal was interviewed four times because I didn’t press the record button at the start of one
interview and I had to go back and reinterview, and another principal was interviewed just twice, because she decided to leave the school and participation in the study stopped after the second interview. Due to the novice skills of the qualitative researcher, only three sets of principals’ interviews (9 interviews in total) were used to create portraits, and the other interviews were used as pilot studies to better understand the research questions and the technique of in-depth interviewing, to practice participation observation, and to gather field experience and notes.

It was very useful to come early for interviews, and stay behind afterwards, to observe the interactions and goings-on of the schools. I also took the time to walk with principals and observe them on a scheduled interviewing day. This gave me more insight and experience in the field, as well as in being a participant observer. During these times I would also take the opportunity to collect documents from the school, such as: parent and school newsletters, school calendars, agendas from programs and parent meetings, flyers promoting resources in the community offered to parents, Title 1 documents such as parent compacts and agreements, PTA information, community worker or community liaison information, flyers about parent meeting and parent programs, and written policies about parent involvement. The principals often gave me copies of school improvement plans, which included parent components, and I also made copies of letters mandated by the Arizona Department of Education explaining the rights of parents if their child’s school was underperforming or not meeting the state’s academic standards. In some cases, these letters were posted on school websites.
Patton (1990) suggests that documents and records are rich sources of information. The author proposes that documents “may reveal things that have taken place before the evaluation began” (Patton, 1990, p. 233). In order to create a full portraiture and conduct an effective qualitative study, it is important to take various sources and documents into account. Because student test scores are public domain, I gathered data from the ADE website. Analysis of data included performance targets, scale scores, and percentages of students scoring at proficient levels in math and reading. The subgroup students—special education, economically disadvantaged, English as a Second Language, and Title 1—were also analyzed for their percentages of proficiency.

**Research Design**

The interview process for this study, based on the art of portraiture, was designed to gather a narrative from each of the administrators. The narratives were then used to attempt to answer open-ended research questions. Observation of principals served as a way to cross-check their visions and beliefs relating to parent involvement. Case study research allows a portraitist to hear the stories of individuals, and not merely collect quantitative data. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggested that “[t]he portraitist-researcher is engaged in the discourse between two mutually informative aspects of methodology: the process of data gathering and the process of shaping the final product” (p. 60). The two-part portraiture process, in the context of this study, helped to achieve unique data that may contribute to how school districts meet the legal mandates pertaining to parent involvement.
I conducted in-depth interviews, collected principal observations, and maintained field notes, all to provide the reader with a detailed description of the individual experiences of the principals with parent engagement. Data collection occurred in three phases, and each phase had a different focus. First, I gathered demographic data of the schools to better understand parent involvement as it pertains to NCLB and Title 1 schools. I then listened to the principals’ stories and experiences regarding parent involvement in open-ended, semi-structured interviews to further gather data to answer the research questions. Each interview session was audiotaped with the intent to transcribe the tapes as early as possible. A third, follow-up interview occurred to clarify any information. The follow-up took place after the interview narrative was transcribed and after a review of AIMS scores.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

Interview data, participant observation field notes, and documents were analyzed for themes and patterns and synthesized to support the purpose of the case study. Principals were interviewed, and within 48 hours the interviews were transcribed. Each interview transcript was printed six times. Each copy served a purpose for analysis:

1. The interview was read simply to make sure the information was clear and that the transcription was done well.
2. Next, the interview was read looking for themes and additional questions that the researcher could choose to follow up on in the next interview or even after all three of the interviews.
3. Then, the transcripts were read for “ah”s or things that stood out in my mind as an elementary principal in a Title 1 school.

4. Parent involvement literature was reviewed to see if there were any similarities between the transcripts and the literature review; thus, I used the summary table in Chapter 2.

5. The transcripts were reviewed with respect to each aspect of the conceptual framework, such as cultural responsive teaching, cultural community wealth, and Ecologies of Parent Engagement.

6. Lastly, the transcripts were read one last time after comparing the research questions and the interview questions.

While doing the separate readings, detailed notes regarding the patterns and themes were written down in composition notebooks. Because it took multiple readings to analyze the data, I created a system of writing the date each time I read a transcript and using color to code themes. For example, when I was looking for matches between the literature and ideas in the interviews, I would use a highlighter. I would use yellow to identify or categorize ideas from the literature, and orange to highlight ideas from the conceptual framework. I would even use different color ink to write notes in composition books.

The participant observation field notes were collected and analyzed in a similar way. At first, I would arrive early for each interview and take notes while waiting to see the principal, or sit in my car and take notes after I left the school, but as I got better at observation I started to record my notes by just speaking into the recorder and then transcribing what I said to myself. This allowed ideas and
thoughts to flow more easily. Notes were used to triangulate what the principal said in the transcript with what was observed while shadowing them. The participant observation field notes were used to find voices and better cement the portraits of the principals. All field notes were examined to see if principals were caring, connected parent involvement to culturally relevant activities, and communicated with parents in a culturally responsive way. For example, if there was a statement about a principal being caring, I tried to find examples where I witnessed the principal being caring “in action”. Artifacts and documents collected were used to consider how parents were engaged with activities in the schools, such as agendas for meetings, letters to parents, school improvement plans, parent and school participation agreements, and test scores to support the ideas of student achievement found in the literature for parent involvement. As I went through this detailed reading process, I kept a journal of ideas and thoughts. The journal was used throughout the writing process to synthesize and connect the data.

Validity

The validity of this project is concerned with having an approach which achieves an effective portraiture. Goetz and Le Compte (1984), as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), suggest that “validity may be the major strength” (p. 5) of the case study. The validity of any project extends to how the results can be considered and generalized. For instance, Miles and Huberman (1994) see validity as the truth value. They believe that it is necessary for the researcher to consider: “Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they
credible to the people who we study, and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at?” (p. 278). All of these aspects of validity were considered in developing the research design, and validity was established in two ways. First, a panel of administrator experts reviewed the interview questions to establish if the questions measured the intent of the case study and were aligned with the research questions. These administrator experts were members of a cohort of principals working as a professional learning community. These principals visit high-poverty schools and high-performing schools in and out of the state of Arizona with similar demographics, to better understand what these schools are doing to get such high student achievement. This expert panel was being coached by national experts at a prestigious university in California to better understand the issues associated with urban school transformation and improve student achievement in their Title 1 schools. Seese, Madaus, Bray, and Kehle (2007) propose that an instrument can be developed for a study by using the content of experts who possess technical expertise and knowledge of the issues. Secondly, the pilot study revealed how effectively the research questions were answered, and created an opportunity to amend the questions. In addition, the pilot study measured how effectively the interviews helped to answer the intended research questions.

Reliability

Reliability is critical to any study. Stake (1995) emphasizes the importance of using multiple data sources in a case study to provide multiple perspectives and increased reliability. In this study, interviews were used in
conjunction with documentation and data collected from AIMS, as well as participant observation field notes. Overall, reliability was measured by converging the multiple sources of data gathered from principals, NCLB and Title 1 data, field notes, participant observation, and the portraitist’s reflection journal.

Framework for Data Collection

The framework for this portraiture study followed culturally responsive teaching and community cultural wealth theory. With respect to culturally responsive teaching, three components were used to code interview data: culture, caring, and communication. The inquiry into community cultural wealth can be associated with Creswell (1998), who suggested that:

inquiry is a process of understanding a social or human problem, based on a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in the natural setting. The words used to explore community cultural wealth are as follows: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

Methods of Data Collection

I initiated the data collection by sending an email to the superintendents of the schools, asking for permission to interview principals. Once permission was received, I sent an email to the principals asking to meet to discuss the study. A telephone call to the principals was followed by an email to schedule an appointment. I then met with each principal to discuss the criteria for the study and to get a verbal commitment, before giving the consent form to participate.

A list of principals of Title 1 schools was acquired from a Title 1 school directory given by a district director of Title 1, and this directory was used to
contact superintendents and principals. An initial email contained a formal explanation of the study and research contact information. Data were collected through three in-depth sessions, where the principals were interviewed individually. Interview questions were designed to fit into the culturally responsive teaching and community cultural wealth theory frameworks. I took detailed notes while shadowing the principals, with rich descriptions of the principals’ actions observed. Artifacts and documents from school sites were analyzed.

**Research Questions**

Research questions should represent specific restatements of the purpose of the study (Creswell, 1998). These questions were open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; they restated the study’s purpose and, more specifically, began with words such as “what” or “how”, but not “why”. The goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of principals implementing the mandates of NCLB in Title 1 schools. During the course of this study, the following questions guided the study. Both questions contributed to the overarching question for the study, which asks how principals engage parents in school, and how they implement Title 1 mandates.

1. How and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 schools?

2. How and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools?
Interview Questions

The portraiture research involved collecting data by using a method of in-depth interviews. Portraitists aim to capture the “dance of dialog” from a position on the periphery of the action, a place from which one can observe patterns and see things that might not be visible to the actor [participants] (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The researchers further explain that, “with voice in dialog, the portraitist purposely places herself in the middle of the action (in the field and in the text). She feels the symmetry of voice—hers and the actor’s—as they both express their views and together define meaning-making” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 103). Through the interview process, the portraitist moves from thin to thick descriptions.

Principal Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your life history and what brought you to this principal experience?
2. What are your experiences with parents at your schools?
3. How do you operationalize parent involvement?
4. How do you conceptualize parent involvement?
5. What assets do parents bring to your school to support student achievement?
6. What are your experiences with NCLB as it relates to parent involvement?

Table 5 shows how each question related to the research questions, and therefore contributed to the overall study.
Table 5

Matrix of Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Principal Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 Schools?</td>
<td>1. What are your experiences with parents at your schools?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2. How do you operationalize parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What are your experiences with NCLB as it relates to parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools?</td>
<td>1. Can you tell me about your life history and what brought you to this principal experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What assets do parents bring to your school to support student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How do you conceptualize parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Culturally-Responsive Teaching Theory was used to frame the interview questions for principals. Table 6 is a matrix of the three components that relate to the study of Culturally-Responsive Teaching, and the interview questions that match each component. The components involve a definition of caring, the understanding of curriculum content, and aspects of communication. The interview questions are aligned with the research questions for this study.
Table 6

Culturally-Responsive Teaching Matched to the Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally-Responsive Teaching</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring is concern for person and performance, action-provoking, prompts effort and achievement, and multidimensional responsiveness (Gay, 2000).</td>
<td>1. What are your experiences with parents at your schools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What are your experiences with NCLB as it relates to parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum content must be accessible to students and connected to their lives and experiences outside of school (Gay, 2000, p. 111).</td>
<td>1. How do you operationalize parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication varies with communication styles, has culturally different discourse structures, has ethnic variations, and has gender variations</td>
<td>1. What are your experiences with NCLB as it relates to parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

In this study, three principals in different schools and districts in Arizona were interviewed as case studies. The narratives provided by the principals were examined in order to extract keywords, themes, and concepts. The data were examined within the theoretical frame of Culturally-Responsive Teaching. The ethnographic method of portraiture allowed for mutual and simultaneous shaping of factors with emerging themes and categories that could be coded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Straus & Corbin, 1990). Such codes are developed as tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive
information compiled during the data collection process. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that it is not the interviews themselves, but the meaning that matters. One important part of developing themes is creating research data memoranda, whereby the portraitist writes ongoing memos to trace the process of description and interpretation. Miles and Huberman further state:

Memoing helps the analyst move easily from empirical data to a conceptual level, refining and expanding codes further, developing key categories and showing their relationship, and building towards a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions in the case. (pp. 158-159)

**Pilot Study**

Once the case study was approved, I conducted a pilot study in other school districts with other principals to revise, edit, and rethink the interview questions and cross-check reliability. I needed to make sure the interviews contained open-ended and inquiry-based questions. The data from the pilot study were analyzed using the coding as the case study. Culturally Responsive Teaching was used to frame the data after the interviews had been transcribed and coded. Evidence from the pilot study further guided the research procedures and research questions by identifying gaps or interview questions that needed to be revised, added, and deleted. The pilot study was also useful in eliminating confusing words and narrowing the focus on several interview questions to gather valid data. The pilot study also enhanced the researcher’s novice research experience of interviewing, prior to gathering the primary data for the case study. As a novice
researcher, many mistakes influenced the selection of the principals for the portraits, and more principal interviews were conducted than portraits written.

**Limitations**

This case study was limited to two school districts in urban, Title 1 schools in central Arizona. The documents gathered were in the public domain and specific to the schools and districts being researched. Because the participants in the study were limited to two school districts, the findings cannot be generalized to other urban schools in Arizona and principals of Title 1 schools in other districts in Arizona.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the case study research, the design of the study, the participants, and how the data were collected and analyzed. In the interviews, using open-ended questions allowed for a more natural conversation, and follow-up questions were used for in-depth clarification or redirection. This chapter articulated the framework used to develop the portraiture, and which led to the strategy used to categorize and code data, which informed how evidence converged to produce reliable findings. It was important to establish a reliable methodology in order to collect substantive data in a new aspect of parent involvement. The existing studies about parent involvement focus mostly on what parents do for schools, and rarely look at the lived experiences of principals in Title 1 schools and the mandates of NCLB. Following suit, the perceived issues that exist with urban, Title 1 principals have not been studied as they relate to Culturally-Responsive Teaching. This study adds information about principal and
parent engagement, framed around caring, communication, and curriculum content. In Chapter 4, the data are analyzed to establish credibility using all sources of data, including interviews with principals, documents, field notes, and journal entries.
CHAPTER 4
DATA AND ANALYSIS

This qualitative case study used portraiture, an empirical process of gathering and synthesizing data, to complete portraits of three elementary school principals. The study examined how principals operationalize and conceptualize parent involvement with respect to cultural responsive teaching components and community cultural wealth. Specifically, the study sought to understand the lived experiences of principals implementing parent involvement under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The portraitist visited three urban elementary schools located in Arizona. The participants consisted of the principal of each school. Each participant was interviewed, with follow-up sessions as needed for clarification, and was observed in his or her school setting. Field notes were carefully collected, along with demographic data and documents such as: school calendars, parent literature, school newsletters, program agendas, meeting notes, and PTA information that pertained to school improvement and parent involvement plans. Qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions:

1. How and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 schools?
2. How and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools?

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, the portraits of the three principals are given, in order to provide insight into the lived
experiences of principals and parent involvement. In the second section, the data are analyzed for common threads or patterns revealed in the principals’ stories. The data are filtered and analyzed through the theoretical framework of culturally responsive teaching and community cultural wealth.

The portrait of each principal includes three components: caring; communication; and curriculum, with the intertwined thread of culture. Caring is a concern for person and performance, is action-provoking, and prompts effort, achievement, and multidimensional responsiveness (Gay, 2000). Communication refers to the varying styles of exchanging information, which have culturally different discourse structures, ethnic variations, and gender variations.

Curriculum content must be accessible to students and connected to their lives and experiences outside of school; thus, curricula should incorporate their culture (Gay, 2000, p. 111). In addition to these three components, patterns and themes of disconnected ideas are noted, to improve the quality of the portraits and to further the ideas intended for principals.

Because the ideas discussed above are intertwined in the thread of culture, I must make sure the idea of culture is clear. Lee (2007) defines culture in the everyday practice of schools as “curricula that capture what is important to know in the subject matter that engages students because it is aligned to the routines of their lives” (p. 34). Gay (2000) states that “Culture encompasses many things, some which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implication for teaching and learning, and among these are ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, communications, learning styles, contributions,
and relational patterns” (p. 107). This is significant for principals as they seek to provide culturally-responsive leadership.

In the third section of this chapter, interviews, documents, and observation data are analyzed to support—or not to support—the portraits of the principals. Lastly, emerging themes that are uniformly viewed as common to the principals are noted, along with my personal experiences as a principal in an urban, Title 1 school. Taking account of the context of the data was crucial to documenting the human experience as the administrators implement the mandates of NCLB. Context was used to place the principals in time and space to aid in understanding what they say and do to engage parents in their schools.

**Principals**

The three elementary school principals that participated in the study were located in central Arizona, in districts that can be classified as urban. Each principal had a minimum of five years’ experience in his or her current position at the school. The backgrounds and experiences of the principals are described in their portraits. As previously mentioned, I am a principal in an urban school, in Arizona, with demographics similar to the principals in the study. I have over 19 years’ experience in the field of education, and 10 years of administrative experience. My lived experience will be intertwined throughout the portraits as well.

All interviews were completed in one to two hours, with several opportunities for follow-up and clarification. The portraitist went to the principals’ schools for their convenience. All interviews were audiotaped and
transcribed. During the interviews, the principals spoke freely and shared their stories about parents, their schools, and themselves.

The experience of observing the participants varied. There was a correlation between principal work patterns and participant observation patterns. If the principal came to school early, or worked late, there were better participant observation notes, and more opportunity to observe the principal, than if the principal came late and left early. Participant observation was difficult, as I was a full-time principal in an urban school, but there were opportunities to visit principals outside of the school day during parent events. This happened less than I would have preferred, and most participant observation was during scheduled interview days. However, one principal arrived late and left early, so the participant observation occurred only during the working day, walking through the school visiting classrooms and talking with the principal during and after classroom visits. The time of year also influenced the participant observations, as some principals worked during the summer to organize and plan for the following year, but one principal took vacation during the summer. Principals were more available during the summer months, but there was less time to observe their interactions with parents. Time of year also influenced the quality of principal observation. The month of May was the best time to observe the principals interact with parents, as many activities were planned after AIMS (in April), such as graduations, field-trips, and student performances. One principal’s attributes were very apparent during student performances, as the interaction with parents...
was authentic and genuine. This principal felt that her school family was her extended family.

Field notes were kept to ensure a rich description for the portraits, as discussed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) methodology for rich portraits, and to achieve the thick, rich descriptions prescribed by Merriam (1998). In presenting these portraits, the intent is to allow the authentic voice of each principal to be heard. The length of each portrait, and the descriptive detail included, was influenced by a number of factors. The amount of time I was able to spend with each individual varied. On occasion, the interviews were interrupted by busy schedules and unexpected events. In addition, some principals were comfortable sharing a great deal of information, while others were more reserved. It is important to note that an essential element of portraiture is the building of a trusting relationship between interviewer and participant. I believe that my ability to build this type of personal connection with each principal contributed to the richness of the data, although this varied slightly among the principals. Personalities also played a role in the amount and quality of data gathered. One principal was quite direct and to the point, which resulted in a brief, descriptive piece. In contrast, other principals were more descriptive and reflective in what they shared, which resulted in a lengthier portrait.

**Portrait of Abigail**

Abigail is an elementary school principal in central, urban Arizona, in a school with a poverty rate of 86%. The student population of the school is 690, with a Title 1 cost of $1,021 per pupil. Abigail is a Hispanic woman with strong
ties to the community, as she grew up in the surrounding projects. She mentioned in the interview being mistaken for a black child because her skin was dark and her hair was frizzy. Abigail remembers walking to school and attending the school she is now the principal of. Although Abigail speaks Spanish fluently, she does not appear to have a strong accent. She seems very modest, and lives in a suburban community. She mentioned the option of having her own children attend the school at which she is principal, but they attend a high school in the suburban community in which they now live. This principal is a parent first, and understands the demands of working parents. She and her husband—a very successful businessman in the same community in which she works—are pillars, providing valuable resources to the community they grew up in.

Abigail mentioned that she wonders if she is the right person to be a principal. She understands the requirements for student achievement, but is not always willing to sacrifice relationships with staff and community to accomplish this task. She discussed being torn between preparing students for life and equipping them with essential skills that they will need for survival, and preparing them to pass standardized tests, with many ethnic biases, which are not true indicators of student learning or being adequately prepared for the 21st century. Abigail sees her job as principal and instructional leader as difficult. She mentioned that the experience becomes more and more challenging each year. The job requires more time away from her family, and the long hours never go away because there is always more work to do. Abigail is a success story for her school and community, but the success comes at a cost.
Despite the difficulties associated with being a principal, Abigail loves her school. The school sits on a busy street in the south central part of town, in an area with many industrial-type businesses located nearby, and across the street from a well-known housing project. There is an iron fence around the school, painted blue, and there are nicely-painted murals on just about every wall facing the street.

Driving down the street towards the school, I passed an Elks lodge, a hospital, many convenience stores, and a few plazas with coin laundromats and check cashing establishments. The houses along the busy street are small, with minimal landscaping and many dogs. There are only two ways to enter the school: either the front parking lot, or the gated and secured teacher parking lot. A large sign at the entryway of the school carries the letter A with a plus sign—the school was recognized as an A+ school under the previous principal’s leadership. The building is white, with royal blue writing and trim around the buildings. This is a school that has connections to the community over many generations, as noted on the wall inside, where there is a plaque of dates and board members.

Upon my entering the school, the office staff were friendly. School spirit was pervasive, and there were images of the school’s tiger mascot everywhere, along with an abundance of blue and gold. The office was clean and neat. There was a counter, and a progression of desks behind the counter, occupied by the attendance clerk, office manager, assistant principal, and principal. After the slew of desks, there was a hallway and a door to the nurse’s office. Anyone who enters the school has to pass by the front office. Once inside the office, the office
manager asked politely if I needed anything, and I said I was there to see the principal. The office manager pointed me in the direction of the principal’s office, where the principal was sitting at her desk. There was a round table in front of her desk, and she pointed to the desk as I took a seat. Her office was decorated with blue, gold, and tigers. The principal was small, dressed in a blouse and pair of slacks, and smiled as we were seated. Abigail had a huge smile, seemed very mild-mannered, and seemed excited to talk about her school. She discussed her extensive history with the school and all the school does within the community.

Abigail was a classroom teacher for 11 years before becoming a principal. Becoming a classroom teacher was not her first career path out of college; she was in the insurance business, but decided that taking complaints day in and day out was not for her. She was a Spanish major, and fluent in the language, and she thought she would do a better job of teaching, so she went back to school and got post-bachelor’s teaching credentials. She asked a friend from college who was a teacher about student teaching, and who eventually remained at the same school where she did her student teaching. While student teaching, the principal of the school at the time took a liking to Abigail and asked her to become her successor. Next, an instructional coach position was created to give Abigail some administrative experience and to allow her to work one-on-one assisting teachers. Over several years, Abigail worked, took courses, and earned principal certification. Many years later, Abigail became the principal at the urban, elementary school in central Arizona where she began her teaching career, and agreed to participate in this study.
Caring

The notion of caring applies to Abigail’s educational situations in two ways. First, schools and principals must take care of the students, and care about how best to engage parents. Second, it is critical for parents to care, because this positively impacts student achievement, and funding for Title 1 schools is directly linked to student achievement scores. Parent engagement is a powerful resource principals can use to increase student achievement, and is therefore key to his or her success and tenure at the school.

In the interview, parent involvement was a central topic, and Abigail discussed her current approach to parent involvement, explaining that her ultimate goal is for parents to feel that the school is theirs and their child’s home away from home. When Abigail first began, the teachers did not want parents at the school. It was a struggle to get teachers accustomed to the idea of parents in the cafeteria or the playground alongside students. Family is an integral part of the community, though. At this school, it is a family affair to go to school in the morning. Mothers primarily walk students to school with siblings in strollers. Abigail’s actions are more than just empathetic; she adds multidimensional responsiveness to caring. For example, even though Abigail grew up in the neighborhood, and is familiar with the culture, she goes out of her way to respond to parents in many ways. She stated:

One of my favorite parts of the job is working with parents. I make it a point, when they have concerns, to take the time and listen to their concerns even if I know it’s not in the best interest of the child . . . but I’m always open to listening.
Abigail reiterates her caring nature towards parents when she states the following:

What I’m noticing, and especially this school year, I have lots of parents come in to express their concerns about mostly our beliefs here at school like our rules or any social issues they have. I haven’t had one parent come in and talk to me about academics. And this has been our 15th day of school, 14th day of school, and I’ve spoken to maybe nine parents since school started about different issues. And it has to do with why they don’t like the teachers they have, because she’s mean. And when I asked him, can you be specific as to why they are mean, have you talked to the teacher? Every conversation has been productive and pleasant. At the end, we’ve resolved the issue but not one of those conversation have to do with academics, not one.

As a result of listening to parents and responding differently, Abigail began to work with the PTA to find out what parents want to see in their school.

Abigail also demonstrates caring by responding with understanding. She stated, “If parents are not participating, it doesn’t mean we are going to forget about this child because they don’t have the support at home. Again, I think we have parents at all different levels of support.” Abigail responded by realizing that parents do not always know how to help their children, and are not always in the best position to do so. She gave this example:

We have about 65% of our students who are second language learners, so I know that a lot of them are having a difficult time helping their children if they don’t understand, if they can’t read the instructions for their homework, or if they can’t read with them in English. I just know as a parent myself that I don’t know how to help my own kid even though I’m educated. I can’t help with math content because I have no idea how to do it.

Abigail gave examples of multidimensional responsiveness through listening to parents, taking the time to understand what they want, and realizing as a parent herself that parents sometimes lack the tools to support their children academically—but that they can support their children in other ways.
Communication

An obvious way to communicate effectively is to make sure we communicate in a shared language, or a language that parents understand. Communication can go further, however, and consider discourse structures, ethnic variation, and gender variation. Discourse structures are the ways in which individuals communicate, such as in a passive-receptive posture, or using participatory interaction. Gay (2000) described *passive-receptive* as one person speaking while everyone else listens, and *participatory interaction* as responding while the speaker is speaking (p. 91).

During the interview, Abigail stated that she believes parents need to be heard, and that she encourages communication with her parents. She has an open door policy, and believes one cannot communicate with a parent without trying to understand their perspective. She talked about meetings, and differences in the productivity of meetings depending on the audience, speaker, and location. Less formal meetings with her parents, about things that are less academic but focus on parent concerns, such as safety, are more productive. She mentioned that parents are more responsive in small groups of similar ethnicity (Hispanic) and gender (women).

Curriculum Content

Curriculum content, as described by Gay (2000), refers to content in the classroom, but can also be applicable to principals when working with parents. A goal with respect to curriculum content is to connect with ideas that are relevant to parents outside of the school, to encourage their interest and engage their
support for classroom ideas. Abigail mentioned that parents were familiar with times tables (multiplication facts), and wanted to help their children, but realized that students were not learning math through the times tables method anymore. She stated this was a perfect opportunity to seize parents’ attention and offer them a way to help their children learn math with the school’s new math series. The series provided in-depth knowledge of multiplication, and teachers met with parents to show them ways to practice multiplication using strategies other than rote memorizing of multiplication facts.

Abigail then talked about a parent meeting where she asked parents what they wanted for their students. Safety was a big issue. Parents were concerned with the way teachers treated students, and why certain rules were in place. Parents also wanted more social events, like family dances. Abigail gave the following example:

I can recall that we tried to do a program with ASU maybe a couple of years ago where they wanted to do a baseball clinic . . . and I kept telling them, it had to be at the school, or the kids are not going to go. And they wanted to do it at the park down the street. And they didn’t have the turnout that they expected, whereas, if it would have been held here, because they provided meals for the kids and participants, and they provided support from their baseball team . . . and things like that, but yet because it was held somewhere other than school, there wasn’t the participation.

Abigail stated that safety was the issue in this case, and that parents want more social events at the school, where they feel safe and well respected.

Abigail also mentioned that parent turnout is high for programs that involve student performance, for ESL classes, and for the United Dream Academy (pseudonym). The ESL class meets the needs of parents outside of the
school for English language instruction, to help them survive, and the United
Dream Academy teaches parents how to navigate the educational system and
offers college resources for their students. These programs and events are a way
to connect with parents and to their world outside of the school. In turn, parents
are more open to supporting the school curriculum.

**Documents and Observations Shaping the Portrait of Abigail**

In Title 1 schools, principals are required to have a parent involvement
policy, a school improvement plan, and a compact or agreement between parents
and the school about their roles. Both the policy and compact express the school’s
earnest desire to work with parents as valuable resources. The policy describes
how it is reviewed annually, and the compact describes what parents can expect
from teachers and staff at the school site. More specifically, the policy lists many
opportunities for parent engagement throughout the year, and states in writing the
school’s willingness to communicate in both Spanish and English. Most
documents are public records, and include letters to parents about performance
labels, along with student test score data.

In addition, I observed that Abigail, as principal, was very responsive to
parents, and would drop everything to meet with them regarding incidents. She
took time to investigate discipline incidents and schedule meetings with parents to
discuss the results, and to ensure clear and open communication between the
school and home. During the observations, Abigail was visible, and available to
interact with parents, during the most salient times—usually before school in the
cafeteria and after school during dismissal. Many parents have established
relationships with Abigail, and she knows parents and students by name. During parent meetings, student performances, and assemblies, a translator was always present to ensure parents could communicate and understand. In one of Abigail speeches to her families, she mentioned that they are an extended family to her. During the school day, Abigail is typically not in her office, but in classrooms, making sure that teachers’ instructional objectives are posted and that teachers are teaching to the Arizona Academic Standards.

I mentioned previously that my own experiences are intertwined with those of the principals studied. Abigail and I share a unique experience. Her own children attended her school, and she could understand the parent’s role from her own perspective. I was able to understand her role as principal from a parent’s perspective, as my daughter attended Abigail’s school—though before she was principal. I was therefore able to compare parent involvement at the school both before and during Abigail’s time as principal. I had first-hand experience of parent involvement and the opportunities that were afforded parents, and many of these opportunities were above and beyond what I would do as principal at my school. As a parent and principal, I would often duplicate parent involvement efforts seen at Keisha’s school with parents at my school, especially communication endeavors and providing information in dual languages.

Although I enjoyed these experiences as a parent, Abigail and I share the same passion for parent involvement, but she had more resources available to parents, due to the size of her school than I did.
Overall, being a parent of a student at Abigail’s school (outsider)—as well as a fellow principal (insider)—confirmed that she was culturally responsive from a parent/principal perspective. Collecting and analyzing parent involvement documents helped to balance the biases from my etic/emic viewpoint, and Abigail’s transcripts received an additional review, relative to those from the other principal interviews, due to the familiarity of the school.

Abigail’s school is larger than those of the other principals. The school has almost four sections of each grade level from Kindergarten to 8th grade. One community publication makes reference to the school, and to the community’s ties to the principal and the school community. According to the public record, student achievement data have declined with her tenure. For the last two years, Abigail’s school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and the school was recently labeled as a D school for the state accountability system. According to the Title I School Improvement-Consequence Chart from NCLB, there are action steps that must be taken when a school does not make AYP. In the first (warning) year, there must be: (1) prompt notification of status to parents; (2) development of an Arizona school improvement plan (ASIP) within 90 days; and (3) the district must provide technical support to the school. If the school does not make AYP in this warning year, the action steps are as follows: (1) prompt notification of status to parents; (2) develop/revise and implement ASIP within 90 days of identification; (3) district must offer technical assistance; (4) district must offer public school choice (transfer) promptly; and, (5) school must set aside 10% of Title 1 funds for professional development of teachers. The last two
consequences are detrimental to the school. When students transfer to another school, the school budget is consequently lowered, because funding for Title 1 is allocated per pupil. In addition, setting aside 10% of the school budget for staff development lowers the amount of the Title 1 budget that can be used for student tutoring and supplemental instructional materials to support classroom instruction.

Not making AYP was very disappointing to the teachers, because Abigail supervises a veteran staff and has worked with this staff as a teacher, coach, and principal. Student achievement is both personal and professional for this principal. As a principal under the same pressures with respect to student achievement, I cannot imagine supervising and evaluating former colleagues, which must be difficult for Abigail—though parent involvement is a great resource for the school and staff to help increase student achievement.

**Portrait of Keisha**

Keisha is an elementary principal in central Arizona in a school with a 90% poverty rate. The student population of the district is 6,800, with a $1,239 per-pupil cost of instruction. The district is labeled as urban, and has a high population of second language learners, whose primary language is Spanish. Keisha is a White principal, born and raised outside the state of Arizona. She actually grew up in Detroit, and also mentioned living in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She went to Texas for school, and worked in Nicaragua for three years, with no desire to return to Wisconsin. Keisha has many years of teaching experience in bilingual education and bilingual gifted programs. She mentioned how her life was complicated (in a good way) when she was asked to begin a dual language
program with a $1.4 million grant. According to Keisha, the dual language program was a success, with teachers earning dual certifications in bilingual education or English as a Second Language endorsements. The program’s first year was with K-2 grade parents, and eventually went to the 8th grade. By the time the students from Keisha’s school reached high school, she was in dialogue with the high school on ways to better support the students. Her students were fluent in Spanish and English, and were high achievers. In Keisha’s own words, “Spanish 101 isn’t going to work.” She regretted the day that Proposition 203 came along and basically closed down the dual language and bilingual programs. She then took a principal position at an elementary school with some unique characteristics. She was married at a late age and does not have children of her own. Keisha described her passion for empowering people and the importance of people in communities having a voice. This principal had an extensive background in community relations.

The day was warm, and I rode with a friend on my way to the school. My friend was driving, so I was able to closely observe the surroundings. As we drove along the street the school was on, there was a long distance before getting to the school, and I could not help but notice all the small businesses along the street. Most of the businesses had signs in Spanish. There were clothing stores with advertisements for shoes, boots, and jeans, and there were laundromats, check cashing establishments, appliance rental stores, and one large grocery store. There were also many Mexican restaurants along the way that appeared to be family-owned establishments. The busy street was miles long, and for the two miles
approaching the school there were signs that stated the school was up ahead. I remember wondering how the school was able to get the city to give such effective signage about the school and the speed limits. It is unusual to have signage stating “school in progress,” and that the speed limit is 15 miles an hour, for a distance of two miles around a school. As a principal of an urban school, I have been unable to even get stop signs at a four-way intersection for my students.

The school was close to the district office, and had a traditional outdoor school design, where you walk in and out of one building to go to the next building or classroom. The buildings were tan, and there was a path to drive to the front office. There were gates surrounding the school, which only had one entrance. As I got out of the car, I did not notice many people around, and the doors were locked. You could tell that security was a priority. When I knocked on the door, someone came and opened it. It was the principal. Once inside the building, it seemed as if we were in a different world. The walls were colorful and very inviting, with murals of kids and a substantial amount of artwork. The building had a Spanish motif, with brightly colored and decorated tiles. The office seemed warm, and the office staff, students, and parents in the office were smiling. There was a short introduction where the staff met me, and then we went straight to the principal’s office. The décor was humble, with wooden furniture, lots of bookshelves, and notebooks on the shelves. The ceilings seemed lower than I had noticed at other schools. We sat at a small, round table.
Keisha was petite in stature, with silver hair, and she was spunky. She had a take-charge kind of attitude, and you could tell she loved her job, because she was excited about it and seemed anxious to be part of the study. We sat down, and Keisha began to share her surprising background. Keisha had been in the field of education for 42 years after graduating from college as a teacher in 1970. She had worked in many different states and countries and, now bilingual, attributed her success and experiences with having the ability to roll her Rs. She mentioned working as a pastoral minister in a parish and diocese where community organizing was a priority—she was a Catholic sister (nun) at the time. She worked with the Industrial Areas Foundation, which was nationally known for having community organizers who worked on leadership development. After 24 years, at age 40, Keisha decided to leave that church after a long relationship with nuns: her mother was a convert, and so Keisha had been raised around nuns and had decided to become one immediately after high school. Her departure happened soon after realizing there was no room in the church for leadership as a woman. Keisha explained:

When you realize that there’s not room, there’s no room for leadership, per my perspective, in Catholic Church. It’s not going to change for me, so I’m out of here. Yeah, because in community organizing that I was doing, I knew parishes better than some of the pastors that were there. And it’s like; I couldn’t get around the table. You know, when you have pastors asking you if you’re making the coffee or taking notes . . . It’s like excuse me. No. Can’t do this anymore. . . so in terms of leadership in community organizing, a lot of women who were lead organizers were Catholic sisters. So I saw that as an avenue to really be in leadership and learned lots. I mean, it’s politics, the understanding self-interest, understanding how you have an agenda. It’s all based on relationships, and it better be based on relationships, because if you focus on task, you’re going to wear everybody out and they’ll go away.
Being a principal gives Keisha the opportunity to fuel her passion and work closer with the community, and her experience as a nun and community activist color everything she does with parents in her school. Keisha believes empowering parents to create opportunities for themselves is important, but more specifically that students need to see their parents in leadership roles. When students see their parents as partners with the school, they increase their efforts to improve achievement.

**Caring**

Culturally-responsive teaching captures the cultural context of students’ experience to help engage them in learning, using caring as a component, and this concept can be extended to engage parents as well. When parents are engaged, student achievement increases; therefore, principals are wise to use this component. Again, in this context, caring is not just a warm sense of concern for others, but an empowering call to action on the part of the principal, which requires acting with multi-dimensional responsiveness.

Keisha did an amazing job of sharing the ways in which caring can engage parents. She explained that she often begins engaging parents by having what she calls a “house meeting.” These are meetings with parents, and teachers who have been trained to conduct these meetings. The goal of the meetings is to address the needs of parents. Keisha said:

Yeah, I wanted to talk about student achievement, but we weren’t ready for that yet. We talked about the traffic on the busy street coming to school, parent concerns along the canal, and drugs in the neighborhood. There were a few more things that were important to parents before we started talking about academics.
Keisha cared enough to take action. Her caring led to house meetings where traffic along the busy street became a priority issue, because a student was hit by a car—the student was not killed, but suffered broken legs. In this case, the type of action was not about parent involvement; it was taking action for safety, which was a main concern of the parents. As Keisha explained:

The problem is not mine to fix. I mean, yeah, I could probably call and get something done really quickly, but that’s not going to train anybody to do anything. It was pulling parents together and developing research teams and this meant meetings with the city. Meeting with the city department of transportation . . . with roads . . . you name it . . . we taught parents action research. We had folks come here, because it was easier to get them here than for us to get a whole crew of parents downtown.

For Keisha, caring was more than feeling sad and wanting better for her parents. She wanted them to act, so she acted.

Keisha also spoke about teaching the parents skills that would be useful in public meetings, such as to how to introduce one’s self, and how to keep the conversation at an equal level. She discussed teaching parents to think on their feet and anticipate the questions and answers they may receive, and how to be ready to respond. Keisha shared how her caring enabled parents to get what they needed, before they began talking about academics. Keisha reflected:

We did that, and actually it was really providential, because all the signage that you see out in front of the school, the city was starting to investigate, experiment with all different types of signage for schools on busy intersections. With that we got the school name written across the street, big, big, white letters. Because we had a stop-and-go light, we don’t do the cones where it’s 15 mph because we already have 30 mph signs, new signage was added. By the end of it all, the parents did it.

Keisha went on to discuss how the success of this project led to more community projects, such as canal sweeps and city cleanings. Keisha said, “Throughout my
tenure, we’ve had parent academies where we easily pull 300 to 400 parents to talk about education.” In other words, parents will come if you care about what they care about. If the agenda is meaningful and relevant to the needs of parents, parent involvement can be less challenging.

**Communication**

As stated by Gay (2000), communication is at the heart of teaching and learning. More specifically, language is at the heart of teaching and learning. Just as teachers must communicate in a language that is accessible to students, principals must communicate in a language that is accessible to parents. Moreover, “the quality of the performance of these tasks is a direct reflection of how well they can communicate with their students” (Gay, 2000, p. 79). Keisha’s actions as principal showed what it means to take Gay’s statement and apply the concept to interacting with parents. As the first step, Keisha spoke the language of most parents fluently, but she also gave examples of communication that constitute more than speaking the parents’ language. For instance, she gave examples of how structured discourse, ethnic variation, and gender-specific strategies can be used to communicate with parents.

A prime example of communication was how Keisha incorporated structured discourse. Keisha stated that, as a result of incorporating structured discourse: “everything changes and parents are partners and you are constantly explaining the changes.” Keisha described structured discourse as involving multiple initiatives that communicate differently and in ways that are familiar with parents. She talked about the United Way Dream Academy (pseudonym).
This parent academy teaches parents about the system of education, using their own language, and examples from the Mexican system of education as a comparison. Most of the parents of students in Keisha’s school were educated in Mexico, and are not accustomed to the United States school system. The academy helps the parents make connections to ideals expressed in the language, or educational jargon, of schools. The academy instructors—both male and female—are recent immigrants, and use a participatory-interactive engagement style, where parents can ask random questions as they come to mind. Parents can engage through vocalized motion and movement responses as they speak. This process is preferable to one in which parents engage in a passive-receptive posture, where everyone listens quietly to the speaker and is expected to wait until the speaker is done to ask questions. With participatory-interactive engagement, parents are able to personalize their experiences and get more in-depth about the subjects they are discussing. Often, parents are allowed to talk about their experiences, and their child’s experiences at the school, even if their concerns are off the topic at hand.

Keisha spoke about Arizona state laws that do not allow students to be in the same room with English speakers, and the labels used to refer to students. During the United Way Dream Academies, parents asked how they are to support their children in this kind of ambience, how they can gain a voice to demand changes, and how kids are going to get better at learning a language if they have no language models. One parent pointed out the difficulty of understanding whether to use English adjectives before or after verbs, because Spanish grammar
is the opposite of English in this regard. When there was discussion in an
Academy about discipline at home and at school, strategies were given to
mothers, because, of the participating parents, the fathers were generally the ones
to handle all discipline. Keisha even spoke about bringing in interfaith groups.
Despite separation of church and state, Keisha included the interfaith group. This
was an ethnic variation and a gender-specific discourse to which parents
responded well, because they had respect for some of the religious groups. Parents
at Keisha’s school were mostly Catholic, and attended mass. The parents were
used to listening to (male) priests, and respected their suggestions and ideas. The
members of the interfaith groups varied in ethnicity too.

The key point that Keisha made is that, even with an interpreter and
meetings held at school, communication is not ensured. Often, schools may not be
equipped to provide various types of structured discourse, but they can seek out
opportunities that are culturally responsive to the communication styles of
parents.

**Curriculum Content**

As mentioned earlier, the literal use of curriculum in interactions with
parents is not typically useful; rather, schools should try to connect with parents in
their world, using what their students are learning in ways that are relevant to the
parents. Keisha gave a good example of this:

All parents love their kids. They might take care of them different ways
and at different levels. But the bottom line, they don’t keep their good kids
at home until we figure out how to do education and then send us their
good kids. They’re sending us their treasures.
Keisha elaborated that she believes parents care, and starting to engage with what interests parents is key. Parents are interested in their children, and in order to connect with parents Keisha’s school decided to show parents in a discrete way how their children compared to other students in their classroom. The teachers decided to assess the students, to give each student a number, and to display the student achievement of the classroom in a graph, including benchmarks for what was expected of students at their grade level, and how they should progress throughout the year. Identifying the rank of each individual student made learning personal for parents and their children. So, for example, if a student was number 12 on the graph, and the number 12 was in the 40th percentile, their parent could see the rank, along with how their child compared to other students. Keisha said that the parents really liked the concept, and they felt they had specific strategies to help their child, because each child is different and what they might need to know varies from child to child. Keisha observed that when student achievement was personal to parents, and connected to what was relevant to their child, parents were more engaged.

Teachers at Keisha’s school had these conferences three to four times a year, and parents saw how their children were progressing throughout the year, in comparison to other students. The parents and teachers took a problem-solving attitude towards learning—an approach different from what typically happens at parent-teacher conferences. Usually, parents meet with the teacher one-on-one, and the teacher talks about how the child is performing. The teachers at Keisha’s school liked to meet with groups of parents, because parents got the same
message, and were given the opportunity to ask other parents about techniques they had tried with their children. Parents were able to listen to parent stories.

When principals pursue culturally-responsive interactions with parents, this indirectly supports student achievement, as it relates to parent engagement. Keisha stated that she had to get permission from the district to make student achievement more personalized for parents.

The last example given by Keisha of a strategy that made education relevant to, and resonated with, parents is as follows:

We ran [a house meeting with parents] in January, one in February, and one in March. We asked for 10 volunteers, and parents always have pictures of one of their kids if not all of them in their wallets. So we said, pull out a picture and come up here and stand. There’s 10 of you up here. I need five to just stand over here, because if we think about the percentages, you five won’t even graduate from high school. Out of the five of you that are left, we know that probably two might attempt college, but won’t make it because they’re not really ready. They might have to spend more money on community college or whatever to get ready. Out of the three of you, one of you out of the three is going to make it. Based on numbers, based on all the research we’ve looked at in terms of minority children. You could hear a pin drop. So the question went back to them: what do we do? How do we begin to address this?

Keisha’s communication and desire for student and parent success is passionately illustrated with the words she chose. When parents used pictures of their children, the ideas became personal. Although Keisha is a White principal, and does not have any children of her own, she was very sensitive to the cultural needs of her community, and knew how to explicitly relate to the needs of parents, because she believes that all parents want the best for their children. She knew that creating a better life for children, and having them get college degrees, was important to her parents.
Documents and Observations Shaping the Portrait of Keisha

As I observed Keisha in her natural setting, I could tell she had a close and professional relationship with her staff and their families. I recall her making a concerted effort to locate a staff member, whose wife had received a serious medical report. The staff person did not have a cellphone, and needed to contact his wife. Keisha called someone to personally and physically find this staff member on behalf of his wife. This closeness and professionalism resonates throughout Keisha’s portrait and interview. She enjoys helping others and providing support. Keisha and I have also shared similar principal experiences. She wants to empower parents, and looks for opportunities to do so. Our neighborhoods are similar, and safety is a big concern for students walking to and from school. At my school we have many homeless shelters and transient people close by; Keisha is concerned about safety because of the busy street and drugs in the neighborhood. But I would never have considered one of Keisha’s approaches to empower parents. During the observation, I witnessed the “walking school bus”: parents wait for students and are designated at certain locations to walk with students, both before and after school. This way, students are supervised to and from school. At my school, we do have crossing guards, but the crossing guards are only located at certain traffic points.

In most Title 1 schools, principals are required to have pertinent documents regarding parent involvement. Keisha shared these documents with me, and I found her district’s involvement in creating these documents exciting. Her district has a department dedicated to community development. This is rare
for small school districts. Instead of having parent compact and parent
involvement policies posted on its website, Keisha’s district has made a YouTube
video to explain to parents how parent involvement is addressed within the
district. The video is interactive, and provides detailed information regarding
parent involvement. The process was discussed in the interview, but viewing the
video made the idea very clear.

Classroom teachers use data to engage parents. Parents are asked to come
to school and sit at their child’s desk and pretend that they are students. The
teacher explains the objective of the meeting, which is to give parents the
opportunity to write academic goals for their children. For example, if a child is in
1st grade, the teacher discusses what the most important skill is for 1st grade. In
the video, the teacher mentions that students must learn how to read. The teacher
then shows parents two strategies used in the classroom to increase a student’s
ability to read. The teacher first shows parents what is done in the classroom, and
then shows parents how to do the same thing at home, with minimal adaptations.
For example, the teacher explains that students must learn phonemes—sounds and
letters put together to make words. The teacher states that there are 77 sound
combinations that students must know fluently in order to reach the 1st grade
reading goal of 66 words a minute at the end of the year. Next, the teacher tells
parents that 1st graders must know 225 sight words at the end of 1st grade. After
telling parents the expectation for the end of the year, and showing parents
strategies to assist at home, the teacher passes out folders with classroom data and
individual student data. This way, parents see the end-of-year goals, and where
their child is, compared to other students in the classroom. Parents then write a goal for their child, based on current data and where the student needs to be at the end of the year. The goal is reviewed later in the year.

Parents are given three opportunities to look at data and learn strategies, and then they have one private conference with the teacher. Parents are given simple strategies to help their child at home. For example, with the sight word/high frequency word goal, parents are given Post-it notes and are asked to choose a number of words they want their child to learn, to write the words on Post-it notes, and then to post the words on doors around the house, on cereal boxes, and on bathroom mirrors, so the students can see them while brushing their teeth. The ideas is that the repetition of seeing the words helps students to recognize words and read better, sooner. When a parent was talking to the parent liaison at one of the meetings, she said that she thought the meeting was very helpful. Without it, she said she only got the information that her daughter brought home, and getting information about what you need to learn from a 1st grader was difficult. The parent said that she liked meeting with whole groups, because she was able to hear parent suggestions and stories. The principals doing parent conferences this way said that they were getting better student achievement results—an 8% increase in student achievement when using this strategy to engage parents, versus schools not using this strategy. The parent engagement opportunities mentioned in Keisha’s interview are supported by two additional public domain websites—at www.ed.gov, and a professional organization website newsletter—with publications featuring the techniques that Keisha described her teachers using.
This is strong evidence that Keisha was walking the walk, as she was talking the talk.

**Portrait of Curtis**

Curtis is an elementary school principal in central Arizona, in a school with a 95% poverty rate. The student population of the school is 618, with a per-pupil allocation of $1,050 via Title 1 mandates. The district is labeled as urban, and the school sits on a street that is very busy and known for illegal activity as it relates to women. There is a transition shelter just around the corner from the school. There are many nearby small businesses and family-owned Mexican restaurants.

The day was bright and sunny, and a warm breeze was blowing, as I drove to the school building to meet Curtis. The school looked worn down, had brightly colored trim, and was surrounded by a wrought iron fence. The school’s design was that of an outside school, where students walk outside from class to class. The school was built around 2000. There was a nicely painted mascot on the wall facing the street. There was only one way to enter the school, and the entrance was very plain, with white paint on the walls and blue trim. The desks were arranged in a circular fashion, at a distance from the entrance. There were no pictures or decorations.

As I walked into the principal’s office there was another door, and windows through which I could see the courtyard. The courtyard was well manicured, and decorated with flowers and tile pavers. There were places to sit on benches around miniature gardens. The campus was very clean.
After the woman at the front desk area informed the principal that I was there, he came walking from around the corner. He was masculine in stature, and had a very stern face. He was dressed in a pair of khaki pants and a button-down shirt with a sweater. His shoes were causal and looked very comfortable. He welcomed me to his school and we walked into his office. While in the office, I looked around, and there were several bookshelves with notebooks, and all the furniture was wooden. We sat at a small, round table. I sat facing the window and a door made of glass. From my seat, I could see the courtyard and the cafeteria. The principal sat facing me.

Curtis is bald, and his age shows in his face. He was originally from California, and is now married to a kindergarten teacher in another district. He has two daughters in graduate school out of state. He stated that, since his girls were away, he looked forward to retirement within a few years. Curtis has been in the same district for most of his career. He was a teacher, an assistant principal of a middle school, and is now principal of an elementary school. Curtis has been at his school for five years; before he became a teacher, he served in the military. He explained that he decided to become a principal because he experienced a principal who had suffered from mental illness. This experience led Curtis to believe that there are not enough qualified people to fulfill the role of principal—so he began working on his certification. He recalled that it took him two years to finish his certification, while also working full-time, and that he went to school at night. Curtis mentioned that he was brought in to his current position because the previous principal had very poor relationships with parents. During this
introductory discussion, Curtis did not smile, and I sensed he wanted to get down to the business at hand.

**Caring**

There are many ways to understand the concept of caring. Gay (2000) explains that caring, interpersonal relationships are characterized by “patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants” (p. 47). Curtis spoke about caring in the sense of validation. He called himself a “servant leader,” and explained that he felt it was his job to remember the customer. He says the parents are the customers in his profession, and as professionals principals should provide parents with quality customer service. Curtis also feels that human interaction is a critical piece of parent involvement.

More specifically, Curtis said:

I think the more parent involvement that we have, the better. I like to keep the parents informed at the school site, working with us. Because I think that helps hold everybody’s feet to the fire and also provides to the staff for high levels of student achievement.

Curtis really views himself and the staff as servant leaders, and the more the client is around, the more service-oriented he hopes his staff is with parents on campus.

Curtis further explained his role as a leader:

I always try to be cordial to parents, make sure that they feel welcome at the school site. If they have an issue, I’m the person they need to see. I keep an open door policy and feel like the overwhelming majority of our parents responded to that positively.

Curtis stated that he and the staff are not doing their jobs unless parents are satisfied. Getting parents involved sends a message that the school cares, and that
Curtis and the teachers are there to serve the parents. Curtis’s statement directly supports his idea of caring.

**Communication**

Communication is complex. Language and culture influence the way messages are transmitted. Whether explaining events, or justifying decisions and actions, language must be used to communicate to parents. Curtis sees communication as an important aspect of parent involvement, and tries to communicate with parents often to get their input and feedback. Curtis provided the following example of communication at his school:

Then for our site council, we’ll have site council meetings. We’ll consistently draw 20 to 25 parents for those. They vote on things, and do the fundraisers and so forth. Parents get involved in what we are going to fundraise, how much are we going to donate for this beautification project, fundraisers to support class field trips, giving funds to new teachers to help them decorate the classroom. All of the votes that we need to take for Title 1. Do we want to hire an extra instructional aide? Do we want a reading interventionist program? They’re always really positive. If the funds are there, let’s do it if it’s going to help us.

Curtis sees allowing parents to provide input as validation, and when parents feel validated, they are more willing to communicate and be engaged.

**Curriculum Content**

Typically, in discussions of curriculum, the consideration is for what is taught, not how it is taught. To consider how things are taught in the curriculum suggests that the curriculum should be suited to the needs and interest of students. This aspect is applicable to parent involvement. Although principals do not necessarily teach directly, they must get parents engaged, in the same way that teachers must get students engaged. Therefore, if a principal wants to involve
parents, the needs and interests of the parents should be at the heart of the involvement.

Curtis discussed his attempts to meet the needs and interests of parents. He described his general attitude towards the role of parents as: “I just like them being here and supporting what we do—everything from cafeteria clean up to helping put up display boards around the campus and stuff—the more the better.”

During the interview, Curtis told me how they tried valet parking at his school. He explained that some schools were doing valet parking because they were concerned about students getting out of cars, running across the street, and the parking lot being congested. He wanted parents to basically get the students to school, and the students to get into the school quickly to clear the parking lot. Curtis mentioned how parents disliked the valet parking idea because parents did not feel comfortable telling other parents what to do: “It turned out that we got teachers to do it, because we did not want parents sitting up fighting anyway.”

Curtis later discussed his ideal model for meeting the needs and interests of parents. He thinks it is critical to have a system in place for parents to work at different levels, receive training, tutor students, and be flexible. He spoke about a model where a lead teacher gives workshops to parents on how to teach simple academic concepts to children. Then, the parents volunteer as aides in the classroom and to teach other parents. In Curtis’s words: “That, I think, would be the best parental involvement available, would be just training, personnel to do the training, and the parents working with students and staff for high achievement.”
Documents and Observations Shaping the Portrait of Curtis

Although many documents were collected which helped to shape Curtis’s portrait, such as school improvement plans, parent involvement policies, and parent compacts, one document stood out the most. Curtis had a letter describing the consequences already in place, because of the student achievement results posted on his school’s website. The letter described the current situation at the school:

…. XXXX school operates a Title 1 program. NCLB requires that all Title 1 schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in all indicators (test scores in reading and math) for two consecutive years. Parents of children attending Title 1 schools that have not made AYP are required to be notified of the school’s AYP status.

Parents of children attending Title 1 schools that have not made AYP have the option of Public School Choice with free transportation to a school not identified for improvement.

The letter went on to state that the unnamed school was in a Title 1 school improvement state, and that funding was limited to transferring and transportation to other schools in the district making yearly progress. Only the lowest-achieving students from low-income families were given priority. The letter outlined the improvement plan the school had developed in an effort to increase student achievement. One of the strategies designed to address failing to make AYP was increased parent involvement. This letter helped to focus the lens through which Curtis views the situation, because his demeanor is more serious and customer service oriented, and he has a sense of urgency. He actually stated that parent involvement would help “hold teachers’ feet to the fire.” This sounded like a principal wanting and needing results. As the principal of a Title 1 school, I would
not tell parents that, because AYP goals had not been met, their child was able to go to another school, but that transportation was only provided for the poorest and neediest families. As a principal, how do you address these issues with parents and solicit their involvement at the same time? As Curtis and I walked around the campus, and he observed teacher instruction, the sense of urgency was more intense, and he provided instant feedback to the teachers regarding their instruction.

During the interview, Curtis mentioned that his ideal parent involvement program would be for parents to work at school with students, to support student learning as tutors, and for parents to assist with social issues that interfere with learning. As Curtis walked around the school, I could sense his agitation with students and teachers. There was a situation in the middle school grades where a student did not have materials needed for class. The conversation between the teacher and student was lengthy. The teacher asked the student why he did not have his pencil and notebook, the student replied that he did not know, and then the student had to ask several of the other students for a pencil and piece of paper. This took more than a few minutes of class time. As we walked out of the classroom, the principal said:

If we had help, with parents stressing the importance of school and being prepared, we wouldn’t have wasted precious academic learning time to find pencils and disturb learning. What if this happens more often than not? Let us multiply this action by five more students…that is at least 35 mins of instruction time lost…and if we multiply that over a period of five days….we are losing instructional time to increase student achievement.
The letter is a testament to the kind of pressure that is placed on principals to increase student achievement, and this resonated during walkthrough experiences at the school. During participant observations, Curtis made it a habit to walk around his campus, and he is rarely in his office. He feels that his clients are better served with him observing and monitoring instruction first-hand. He and I shared similar experiences of observing classrooms to monitor instruction, but we don’t share the same ideals related to parent involvement. Curtis views parent involvement from a perspective closer to the deficit model. In my observation, there was a tendency to blame parents for student behaviors that should have been taught at home, and a belief that, if parents did their jobs, the school’s job would be easier. I often had students off-task and not prepared for class—as was the case during a walkthrough at Curtis’s school—but I viewed this as the teacher’s responsibility to engage students in meaningful experiences, so students would be more willing to be prepared for classes, and their behavior more appropriate for learning.

**Emergent Themes**

The development of emergent themes reflects the portraitist’s first efforts to bring interpretive insight and order to the collection of data. It is the job of the portraitist to draw out dialogues and patterns that structure a framework for the narrative. The principals told their stories and shared insights about implementing NCLB as it relates to parent involvement, and the portraitist must weave the stories into a tapestry with thread-like themes to create a finished product.
In this section, themes are presented in the order they were uncovered in the stories of principals. Connections are presented, along with disconnections noted by some of the participants. In looking at the overarching questions for the study—how principals engage parents in the school, and implement Title 1 mandates—several themes emerged: *Numbers versus Achievement*, *the Exchange*, and *Building the Parent Community*.

*Figure 1. Emergent themes*
Numbers versus Achievement

As the principals tried to carry out the vision of improving student achievement, in order to secure Title 1 funding using parent involvement as its vehicle, they were faced with a requirement for meetings and parent participation as part of decision-making. NCLB mandates that parents meet annually to discuss the budget, to update or renew the parent involvement policies, and to be informed about the achievement labels of their school. Many of the principals needed parents to attend meetings and document their processes. However, having a large number of parents at these meetings did not translate into increased student achievement. Abigail and Curtis both discussed that parent involvement at business meetings was low. Many parents were interested in what their children were doing, and the principals stated that parent attendance was high for student performances (with standing room only) and meet-the-teacher nights. However, attendance was low for Title 1 or student achievement meetings. Curtis remarked:

At our site, we have a core of engaged parents. And some of our parents work and I understand that. But I’d like to see consistent attendance that was north of 150 parents. But for the Title 1 meeting, we probably have 30 to 35 parents. It’s those events. And, we had the food. We had the cookies and we had the punch. And we sent out notices but we didn’t get the attendance that we wanted.

Curtis had a school population of 610 students, so he perceived 30 to 35 parents as a very low turnout. Abigail too encountered the problem of low turnout at meetings, and expressed a similar sentiment. According to Abigail:

I think if they didn’t appreciate what we had to offer, they wouldn’t show up. And so, there are things that we’ve done on campus where the turnout had been very low or limited, so we know it’s not what the community is looking for….but sometimes trying something different … we don’t get
the attendance…we thought we might get. Any time it involves student performances or student participation, we do get very good attendance.

What Abigail and Curtis described is typical of what was discussed in the literature review.

Generally, according to the literature, parent involvement activities are about how many parents can you get at your school. Epstein and Dauber (1987) describe six types of parent involvement, such as: parents meeting the basic needs of the child, coming to school for conferences and performances, helping in the classroom, and advocacy and decision-making. Abigail confirmed that parents came to school for performances, but were not interested in decision-making and advocacy. Curtis described his ideal parent involvement as help in classroom instruction, but currently he mostly has parents attend student performances.

Some of the research described in the literature review was conducted more than a decade ago, yet the activities involved are still relevant in schools. These activities are not usually directly led by the principal. Keisha’s experience, on the other hand, was different. Her initial focus was on achievement, and that brought the numbers to her school. Keisha had 300 to 400 parents come out to parent meetings. She noted that this was before Senate Bill 1070. Keisha’s student population was just over 1000 students. What could result in such varying turnouts?

The difference between Curtis, Keisha, and Abigail was the exchange. The literature supports the idea of exchange in two ways: first, exchange of what parents do, and what they get in return; and second, what principals do and what
they get in return. When the exchange is balanced or equal, then the return is great. When the exchange is one-sided, then the return is minimal. This is seen with the ecology of parent engagement. When there is an exchange of power and resources, and parent engagement moves beyond what parents will do at school for principals and teachers, this makes the exchange one-sided, which yields minimal parent engagement. Parents do not want to engage if the school and teachers are the only parties reaping the benefits in order to meet their mandates.

Another example is direct or indirect involvement of a principal with parent engagement. The difference between types of involvement is seen clearly with the principals in the study. For example, Curtis has minimal involvement, and his involvement is indirect, limited to allocation of resources and making sure the community worker does his or her job. All the meetings and interactions with parents are carried out indirectly, via the community worker. Abigail, on the other hand, uses a more hands-on approach. She attempted to meet with parents, but was not as successful, because the input she solicited was about the school’s needs and how to continue past traditions. Keisha was directly involved, leading community meetings about concerns that mattered to parents. Thus, in her case there was an even exchange of power and resources. The numbers of parents who were engaged also varied. Curtis’s school achieved an average engagement of 30 to 40 parents, whereas Abigail’s school engaged 300 to 400 parents.

**The Exchange**

As educational leaders, the principals shared a vision for student achievement and the need for parent involvement, but their visions were
approached from different viewpoints. Parent involvement can be seen as an
exchange of resources within a partnership, where the school and principal partner
with the parents. Curtis and Abigail realized that when parents are involved, their
job is easier. Whether parents help with the support and training for social settings
provided at home—which tends to decrease disciplinary action in school—or help
with duties within the school, parent involvement means fewer responsibilities on
the shoulders of teachers and principals. Parents realize that students need an
education to be successful in life, and look to schools to provide a positive
learning environment for their children.

The exchange in the typical parent-school relationship views parent
involvement as a matter of what the parents can do for the school. In contrast, the
exchange that Keisha had with her parents was personal. She wanted to provide
parents with tools to change their lives or immediate living situations. The
exchanges that Keisha provided for her parents were concerned with meeting
basic human needs, such as safety. As a result, Keisha’s return on the exchange
was greater, as seen by the extensive parent participation which resulted—greater
in number than Abigail and Curtis’s parent involvement.

Keisha also mentioned that the exchange could be sustainable for years.
The parent involvement took on a life of its own, and parents were more willing
to express their views and use their voices where the students and education of the
community were involved. Keisha’s experience with exchange is closer to the
ideals or intentions of NCLB. The exchange at Keisha’s school supported making
decisions about school funding and how Title 1 funds should be spent, but the
exchange did not exist until Keisha was able to address the needs of the parent community at her school.

Building the Parent Community

The emergent theme of building parent community proved to be a springboard for the other ideas that surfaced. Each principal in the study referred to the importance of parent involvement. However, the principals had different backgrounds and skill sets that prepared them to varying degrees for their community-building experience. Only one principal, Keisha, had experience that directly related to building communities.

Keisha’s experience as a nun, and working with leadership building within a minority community, was vastly different from the experiences of the other two principals. Abigail lived in the community and was raised within the community. She spoke the language and knew the families. But, despite ties to the community, she still mentioned in her interview that she had not received training in the area of community building. Curtis was an ex-military man, and he had been in the district for a substantial amount of time, but, like Abigail, he had not received any training in community building.

Curtis and Abigail explained that other staff members were provided to their schools by their district to serve as community workers. Both Curtis and Abigail mentioned that their community building roles involved supporting the community workers. At best, the principals’ experiences involved having state-required meetings. The principals identified the tools they would need for support, as they sought to hear and listen to the parents. Keisha already possessed these
tools; her experience with community leadership was instrumental in engaging parents in public conversations and civic dialogue. She talked about teaching parents how to set an agenda for meetings and how to keep conversations on a level playing field, while being able to articulate questions and anticipate answers when speaking with public officials.

In the following quote, Abigail painted a clear picture as to the distinct difference in parental voice:

So, we wanted the parents to tell us what they wanted. And we had a meeting, and we had about 20 people come to the meeting. And we’re like asking them for their input, and they didn’t have any suggestions for us. And it’s like, wow, I want it to be theirs not ours we came up with all kinds of stuff. And in the end, it was more about them helping us versus them coming up with ideas.

This is precisely the experience Keisha had. Building a parent community is not simply about achieving parent involvement to satisfy the mandates of NCLB. It is a way to achieve a relationship between the schools and parents. In many ways, the emergent theme of Building a Parent Community helps to facilitate the other emergent themes of Numbers versus Achievement and the Exchange. Overall, the emergent themes give insight into parent involvement, and how principals engage parents and adhere to NCLB mandates.

As supported by emergent themes, parent involvement can be a resource to increase student achievement (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Abram & Gibbs, 2002; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen 2001; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Jeynes, 2003; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Thompson, 2006.) NCLB states specifically what schools should do to involve parents. It is
mandated and defined in the Public Law No. 107-110, sections 1118(b) through 1118(g).

**Research Questions**

The overarching research questions for this study are: How do principals engage parents in school and how do they implement Title 1 mandates? Because principals in urban schools have low rates of parental involvement and high rates of poverty, and generally need additional funding sources to provide educational services to students, the overarching questions explore how urban principals involve parents and implement Title 1 mandates. In addition, discovering the answers to the questions uncovers the lived experiences of individual principals in their schools. Principals must use every resource available to increase student achievement.

During data collection, the principals’ responses to interview questions, and the experience of shadowing those same principals, brought to light how principals involve parents in their schools. The principals in this study mentioned having district support for implementing Title 1 mandates. This support was in the form of personnel. Two of the three principals who were subjects of the study had community workers; one principal had a community liaison. The community workers reported directly to the Title 1 director in the district, and were asked to collect documentation from principals regarding the required annual Title 1 meeting, the agenda, the parent sign-in forms, and other pertinent information that supported parent involvement policy updates, school and parent compacts, shared responsibility for academic achievement, and parent classes or activities that
included parents at the school. The community liaison operated in the same fashion but under a different title, and reported to the principal.

Principals rarely referenced NCLB mandates. They used the term “Title 1”, and they seemed to have an understanding that they operate as they do because they are asked to do so and want to secure Title 1 funding. There was a disconnect between their actions and the NCLB laws. The principals in the study stated that they were trying to fulfill the mandates as prescribed by the Title 1 director or federal grant person. They were more familiar with the NCLB requirement for student achievement, and the Title 1 requirement of making sure parents were aware of the school’s performance label. On the websites of two schools, there were letters to parents that related to NCLB. The first post said:

In January of 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law to improve educational opportunities for all children attending Title 1 schools. This federally funded program provides assistance to schools serving students who are at risk for academic failure. The legislation supports the school district’s effort to provide a strong standards-based educational program for students, along with accountability for student achievement.

According to Camburn, Rowan, and Taylor (2003), Epstein (1987), Gordon and Louis (2009), Griffith (2001), Peterson and Ladky (2007), and Richardson (2009), some principals lead in promoting parent involvement, while other principals leave the selection and use of parent involvement practices to their teaching and support staff. Principals engage parents with assistance from the district, along with designated staff, as a minimal standard for quality parent involvement. In the study, the principals’ engagement with parents varied from promoting activities to directly facilitating and monitoring parent engagement. In the case of two schools,
failure to make AYP would diminish funding for the school if students transferred, because funding is based on a per-pupil cost that determines the Title 1 funding allotment for the school.

**Research Question One**

*How and in what ways do principals perceive, engage, and build parent participation in their Title 1 schools?*

As the need for Title 1 funding increased, and mandates for student achievement were implemented, principals began to perceive parent participation as necessary. The principals engaged with parents and tried to build a parent community as best they knew how. The Exchange was a theme that echoed throughout the study for each principal. It can be seen as synonymous for the perceptions principals have about parent involvement. Each principal stated that parent involvement was needed to increase student achievement, yet each went about developing parent involvement in a different way. Two principals stated that parents are valuable, and that the validation for parents comes from being asked for their input about school decisions. In addition, two principals wanted parents to feel welcomed at their school sites. According to one principal, “I want them to feel like this is their home away from home.” According to the other principal, “I want to serve parents and make sure they are satisfied as they are our customers.” The same two principals felt that if parents supported the school by disciplining and teaching students how to behave at home, then that made their jobs easier. Moreover, these principals mentioned that fundraising, helping teachers, and doing duties to relieve teacher responsibility, was a great exchange,
which provided a positive learning environment for students. One principal mentioned the exchange of relationship building: that teachers feel rewarded when their engagement with families is positive, and that their work makes a difference in the lives of students. The same principal mentioned personal gratitude when parents allowed staff to share in the achievements of the students, which positively contributed to the wellness of the school. Students in turn felt positive about helping the school community. The exchanges became win-win situations, and everyone involved benefitted in some way.

When principals were asked about their perceptions, they all stated that parents have the ability to influence and motivate their children to want an education. These principals have positive perceptions of parent involvement, but realize that parent participation is limited. In some instances, parent participation is limited because of the language barrier, and because of content taught at school. One principal gave herself as an example: she stated that she is a working parent and is not always available. Moreover, if she were asked to help her son with homework, she would not be able to help because she does not know the high school higher-level math. She explained that her own situation inspired her to provide ways to support learning at home, by giving parents ways they can help. Her school hosted parent math nights, because parents were asking why their children did not have to memorize multiplication tables. The principal took the time to explain how the new math series is more conceptual than practical, and via exchanges parents learned how to broaden their children’s conceptual math skills, instead of memorizing math facts. Ideally, principals realize that parents do
not always know what they do not know, and through the exchanges both parties can assist with student achievement.

Throughout the portraits, the theme of Numbers versus Achievement continued to emerge. Essentially, this theme deals with the question of whether principals want high participation numbers, or meaningful activities with parents and students that increase student achievement. Many principals initially sought to have more parents physically at their schools, and participating in activities that increased student achievement. For example, site council, Title 1 meetings, and math and literacy nights were activities of choice for principals. Overall, participation rates were low across the board, but there were higher participation numbers for student performances and graduations—often, there was standing room only for these functions. However, the principal with the highest numbers of parent participation (higher than the other two principals) had 300 to 400 parents come to meetings that discussed student academic performance.

One principal shared that she was able to engage a large group of parents because she addressed the issues that parents prioritized. For example, at her campus there were concerns about student safety. Parents were concerned about students walking to school on the busy streets, drugs, and prostitution in the neighborhood. This principal shared her story about public conversations and civic dialogues with the city and police department to alleviate some of the safety issues. These conversations and meetings changed the face of the community, and engaged the community’s interest in the school. Once the community was engaged, the principal worked towards building the parent community, and
listening for the voices of parents in the school. By addressing the concerns of the parents—in this case safety concerns—the principal established a relationship where she worked together with parents, and this contributed to parents’ willingness to be engaged in various contexts with the school.

**Research Question Two**

*How and in what ways do principals draw on community cultural wealth in their Title 1 schools?*

The aim of research question two was to gain insight into the practice of the principals, who function as building leaders. The answers to the question were revealing, because it is easy to view parent involvement from a deficit model. In the deficit model, principals from urban, Title 1 schools view parents as poor and not having much to contribute to attempts to increase student achievement. The theory of community cultural wealth calls into question the notion of deficit thinking, and provides a framework for principals to consider an asset approach to parent involvement. Essentially, this theory promotes the idea of other kinds of wealth parents have that they can add to the community of a school.

When principals were asked about community cultural wealth, they were unsure about what I was asking. Although there are six types of capital within the construct of community cultural wealth, one form of capital predominantly stood out from the rest: *resistant capital* refers to parents consciously instructing their children to engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo (Yosso, 2005, p. 81). Of the types of capital, resistant capital was mentioned most by the principals in the study. Two principals stated that if parents taught
their students to behave, and taught appropriate social skills, then the school would not have to deal with as many issues. When principals have to deal with student discipline, the issues mostly concern social skills. Dealing with these types of disciplinary issues takes the student out of class, consumes valuable learning time, and usually involves more than one student. Another principal said, “I know parents can help with this because when the parents are supportive of the discipline at school, the students behave better.” When there is an alignment between what parents say is appropriate and what the principal says is appropriate, discipline issues rarely occur in the classroom. This alignment between the parents and the school is very important, and links to another form of capital: aspirational capital.

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. Aspirational capital breaks the link between parents’ current occupational status, and their children’s future academic attainment (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). According to examples from the principals, when parents demonstrated to students that their education was important, the students valued the education they were receiving at school by completing homework, coming to school, and arriving at school on time. One principal believes that parents want the best for their children, and are not keeping the best children at home until the educational system gets things right.

Aspirational capital was also very prominent in the mandates of Senate House Bill 1070. One of the consequences of Senate House Bill 1070 was that parents without proper documentation risked being deported from the United
States. This situation relates to aspirational capital because these parents believed that education would change their children’s lives significantly—so significantly that they were willing to risk being deported. Because one of the principals understood the aspirational capital that parents brought, she restructured meetings. Even though there were 300 to 400 parents attending meetings prior to Senate House Bill 1070, she found a way to keep the lines of communication open, and assisted parents in mitigating the risk of deportation, while still staying involved. Working together was easier for this principal because she knew the capital parents brought to her school. The idea of working together is also familiar to parents, because families work together.

*Familial capital* refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among family. This form of capital engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). One principal stated that she wanted parents to consider her school a home away from home. All principals in the study discussed the Exchange, which they understood to mean working together for a common goal for the benefit of all involved. Another principal stated that the commitment to family, and to the well-being of the community, was a resource she could use to engage parents in her school. This principal promoted meetings that dealt with issues in the community first, before addressing her academic needs. In her experience, after the community was engaged, the engagement would trickle down from the community setting to the school setting. This principal used her understanding of this capital by assisting parents with conducting meetings with city members and police departments to secure safety
for students. After students saw what parents were doing in terms of safety issues, they were proud of their parents and more willing to go to school to learn. An understanding of this capital also encouraged the principal to support families with community leadership and, as a result of the process, families began to know other families, and saw that they had the same needs for their children. Finally, understanding this capital led this principal to a means for sustainable parent engagement. She mentioned that it was a family affair to come to schools, and students that did not have parents walking them to school received surrogate parents. They even organized a walking school bus with specified bus stops, and parents would supervise the stops and walking groups.

All the principals drew in some way on aspirational capital as they described events and training provided to schools. Specifically, the United Way Dream Academies (pseudonym) provided a 16-week training program where parents were taught ways to navigate the educational system in the United States, by comparing it to the educational system of their native land (Mexico, for many of the parents at these schools). All principals stated that notices were sent to parents, and that every parent in the school received an invitation over the phone to attend the training. This effort was made to get parents engaged because the principals valued the networking opportunities, and understood how powerful it is for parents to realize that they share the same concerns and issues. These classes provided opportunities to meet other parents, and, because classes were offered both during the day and in the evenings, brought to school a population of parents
that usually are unable to come to school. During the meetings, parents shared meals and ate together, just like an extended family.

*Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Though all principals in the study understood the importance of language, and every principal made sure that information was communicated in Spanish and English, only one principal used this capital. She discussed how she created a dual-language school after receiving a grant. She explained that she understands that communication requires more than a translator: that parents need to engage in the language that their children speak at schools. Parents have the ability to communicate with their students, and schools can make use of this ability to engage parents in academics and formal registers of Spanish and English. This principal’s dual-language school served as a bridge between the language at school and the language at home, because she valued the linguistic capital of parents. Understanding this capital brought more parents to engage with the school, and increased communication with different audiences. Overall, the principals shared how difficult it was to tap into this rich capital with English-only laws in Arizona.

Other important forms of capital include *social capital*, which can be understood as networks of people and community resources; and *navigational capital*, which refers to the skill of maneuvering through social intuitions. These two forms of capital were the least to be considered by principals. Many of the ways principals engaged parents conformed to the ideas of social capital and
navigational capital, but the principals did not give examples of purposefully using these forms of capital. Overall, the principals in this study drew on the cultural community wealth of parents.

Researchers have studied parent involvement and student achievement, and have found that parent involvement can increase student achievement. By considering culturally-responsive teaching, cultural community wealth, and EPE, student achievement can increase and lead to secure maintenance of Title 1 funding to support schools. NCLB has drawn attention to parent involvement in schools, and principals must adhere to the guidelines mandated by NCLB. However, there are benefits to moving beyond merely having parents at schools. Parent involvement is a tool that can be used by principals to engage the community and to increase student achievement.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the portraits of the three principals were presented, with themes that emerged from their stories. Each of the portraits was “fashioned through discussion between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the sketching of the picture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 56). The portraits were created from the narratives, replete with the contextual background of each principal. The principals’ contexts were used to place the principals in a specific time and place, to understand the lived experiences of urban principals in central Arizona. Their portraits could then serve as a resource for exploring issues of parent involvement in their schools. The results can then be generalized to
other urban, Title 1 schools in Arizona to help with implementing NCLB mandates.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & REFLECTIONS

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The intent and purpose of this law was to close the achievement gap with legislation that promoted accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind in education (NCLB, 2002). On the surface, NCLB has been implemented for the betterment of all students. However, the parent involvement component of NCLB appears to be a struggle for principals of urban school. Poverty is associated with urban schools, and many parents in urban school districts are not able to be involved in school in the traditional sense. Many urban parents work two jobs, and are concerned primarily with providing their families and children with basic human needs. The situation of urban parents is often problematic for principals, who are concerned about the connection between parent involvement, student achievement, and Title 1 funding: parent involvement increases student achievement, and without high test scores a principal could lose Title 1 funding for their school. Losing a budget of $1,000 to $2,000 per student could be detrimental to urban schools, given the historically poor financial conditions of such schools, and especially in the current economic climate. Principals are held responsible for getting parents involved in their schools, and for increasing student achievement. By understanding the research as it relates to parent involvement and student achievement, a principal can follow NCLB mandates, increase student achievement, secure funding for their school, and consolidate their current position as principal.
A paradox is that the school communities with the least parent involvement often have the students most in need of additional resources, such as Title 1 funding. Principals of urban schools cannot afford to lose funding for their schools, and often parents cannot afford to sacrifice work to become involved. In order to be in compliance with NCLB requirements, principals must notify parents of test scores on AIMS that affect the school rating and performance labels, and parents must attend meetings to discuss the parent involvement policy and to decide how schools should spend Title 1 funding. There are punitive consequences for schools and principals if student achievement does not increase and parents are not involved.

The literature supports the idea that parent involvement is problematic for principals. There are many reasons why parents don’t become involved, but when they are involved student achievement increases, and this increase is directly related to the interaction between schools and families. The methods in this study used a lens that is very practical, and sought to understand how principals make sense of their responsibility to educate urban students in the context of a Title 1 school. Through the portraits and experiences of principals, it became clear that principals want to increase student achievement, and see parent involvement as a vehicle to achieve that. However, no manual exists with clear instructions on how this is done effectively—for schools, the one-size-fits-all approach is not working.

In this chapter, the research questions are addressed, by summarizing the emergent themes revealed in the principals’ portraits described in Chapter 4. This chapter also aligns the research findings with the theoretical framework used to
support the study: culturally-responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and ecologies of parent engagement (EPE) (Barton et al., 2004). These theories serve as the theoretical lenses for analyzing the emergent themes concerning parent involvement in schools. Culturally-responsive teaching is a construct for considering parent engagement. It considers the contextual needs of students and parents of color, and responds in multi-dimensional ways. The effort used in culturally-responsive teaching could serve as a model for principals who try to engage their parents in a similar manner. Community cultural wealth supports the idea that parents come to the community with assets, and when parents are considered as an asset, they can help to increase student achievement. EPE sets the stage for a new type of parent involvement, where schools are not as worried about what parents do, but instead consider why parents do what they do. This conceptual framework focuses more broadly on what parents do inside and outside of the school, and considers parent expectations and how those expectations are aligned or not with the principal’s or school’s expectations. EPE helps frame parents as actors and authors in schools. It allows schools to accept and draw from multiple experiences and resources to define interaction within the school setting.

The next section of this chapter provides conclusions based on the data analyzed in Chapter 4. Finally, recommendations and reflections about the study are discussed.
Summary of Emergent Themes

Three themes emerged from the study: Numbers versus Achievement, the Exchange, and Building the Parent Community. Numbers versus Achievement speaks to the idea that principals are usually concerned about the numbers of parents at their schools, since historically those parents who come to schools are good parents. NCLB asks principals to invite parents to their campus and engage them in the decision-making process. Coming to school and attending meetings alone does not necessarily increase student achievement, however. It is one thing for parents to attend school functions; it is another thing for them to understand what students need to learn and how to help them. The three principals in the study described their experiences with getting parents to school as difficult, and—with the exception of Keisha—they had limited parent involvement. Keisha was effective in supporting parent engagement and was the least concerned about NCLB requirements. She had high parent engagement numbers and increased achievement. Keisha engaged parents in meaningful activities. She believes that all parents love their kids, and her focus stayed on them and what they wanted for their children as students.

Keisha also mentioned that engagement is on-going, and not spotted with events here and there. Consistency was an important variable for increased numbers and increased student achievement. Keisha’s engagement was structured, and parents were explicitly taught what to do as it related to a goal that was individualized for their child. This endeavor was also well supported by the district, and Keisha’s own experience in community leadership. Both her
experience, and support from her district, made student engagement a success at her school. These findings are consistent with the literature. Sanders and Harvey (2002) found that principals are successful when they work collaboratively with the community, as Keisha described in her portrait. Flynn and Nolan (2008) found that the Internet is the most valuable way to engage parents—Keisha’s district created a video, published on YouTube, explaining helpful ways for parents to assist students at home, and making parents aware of the student achievement goals. Gordon and Louis (2009) describe how shared leadership warrants increased parent involvement. All principals involved in the study viewed parent engagement as a school reform strategy, this reform being an exchange between parents and the key players of the school, who have the power and resources to support student learning.

In Curtis and Abigail’s schools, the Exchange of resources and power were commonplace, and typical of schools generally—most schools have parent-teacher conferences, dances, student performances, parents volunteering, or doing fundraising and attending site council meetings. But the Exchange in Keisha’s school was unique: parents were empowered, and students observed the exchanges as parents learned how to get things done within the community, and in turn sought more opportunities at the school site. It was notable that the more directly involved each principal was, the more engagement they received from parents, but only one principal remarked on the correlation between principal engagement and parent attendance, and the relevance of issues as a motivator for parents to come to school. Subsequently, for the most part, all the principals
showed that they were culturally responsive, though Keisha had the advantage of experience, which led to her culturally-responsive leadership. Culturally-responsive leadership can be characterized by the end result of empowerment. Throughout Keisha’s portrait she was always seeking ways to empower parents to take charge of their community, and this skill indirectly affected her school in a positive way. If a principal can build a community that is sustainable, and parents are empowered to take charge of their community, then taking charge of student learning and achievement comes as second nature. As a principal, I always say a healthy community is a healthy school.

The stories and lived experiences of these principals are real, and express the sentiments of principals in urban settings. The portraits provide a real-world perspective on how principals perceive, engage, and build participation in their schools. The principals in the study instinctively know that parents are valuable, and that their presence supports student achievement, but only one principal recognized the value of drawing on the community wealth of the school. None of the principals used the term “community cultural wealth,” but when the term was described, they could relate to the concept.

Resistance capital, a characteristic of community cultural wealth, was the form of capital that most principals could relate to. All the principals felt that parents were true motivators for students’ achievement, because many parents want their children to have better lives than their own. The principals felt that parents could teach their kids perseverance and to resist the status quo. Social and navigational capital, two others forms of community cultural wealth, were the
least prevalent of the six forms of capital in the portraits, though some of Keisha’s experiences with Arizona laws may have influenced her limited use of these forms of capital. For example, students’ use of social or navigational capital can be significant when they are separated from other students based on the language they speak, or fear deportation if suspected by legal authority.

Conclusions

As shown by the lived experiences of principals of Title 1 schools, in an urban area of Arizona, we can conclude that parent involvement is needed, and contributes to the success of a school. As I reflect on the assumptions made, some were affirmed and some were disregarded. An initial assumption was that principals have not conceptualized what parent involvement should look like in their schools. This assumption can be disregarded. Each principal in the study had a vision of parent involvement, even if they were not able to implement the vision. Involving parents requires more than simply wanting parents at your school; it means having both parties involved benefit from the exchange of power and resources provided to and from parents. Although the role of the principal has changed, and we want principals to be instructional leaders, an additional component should be considered as it relates to parent involvement: the knowledge and experience within the community. As discussed with respect to Keisha, quality parent involvement programs do not evolve overnight. It takes many action items and appearances to gain the trust of the community and to empower members. NCLB’s mandates tie funding to parent involvement—which is critical for student achievement, even without taking into consideration the
interests of the parents, or the cultural dynamics of a community receiving federal dollars.

Another assumption made was that, because parent involvement is newly mandated, principals have either followed district policy or continued to do what was in place when they came. This was inaccurate. The principals in this study had been at their schools for a considerable amount of time, and had time to cultivate the school community. Hopefully this study will allow other principals to consider different ways to engage parents. Even without vivid models of parent engagement, the principals in this study gave it a shot. For example, Abigail continued to have meetings, and allowed parents to operate in the capacity they felt most comfortable with. Curtis continued to try different initiatives. An idea he had about valet parking at school was unsuccessful, but he continued to try by making sure parents felt welcome and knew about his open-door policy.

Not one principal used the term “community cultural wealth,” nor was there any specific information about culture and community in their school improvement plans, parent involvement policies, or school compacts. Although the principals appreciated many facets of parent involvement, the most common was support for disciplinary issues that arise at school. With the exception of Keisha, the experiences of the principals in this study were not very different from my own experiences with parent involvement at school. Keisha’s portrait provided an example of engagement that I had never considered. I always thought that language was a barrier to parent involvement for me, and that not speaking Spanish fluently would limit my success and access to parents. In the study,
Abigail was a fluent Spanish speaker who had majored in the language, and her parent involvement resembled the involvement at my school.

All of the principals in the study were aware of the threat of financial penalties connected to not making improvements in student achievement, but did not directly relay the information as an NCLB requirement. I believed that, because community cultural wealth is significant to me as a principal and a parent, colleagues share the same belief, and this assumption was affirmed by the principals, who could give specific examples of how they viewed parents from an asset perspective rather than from deficit perspective. All of the principals in this study were willing to offer their opinions and look for strategies to better engage parents. Consequently, they all felt that the United Way Dream Academy was by far one of the best programs to engage parents—though it did not necessarily directly increase student achievement.

This study concluded that principals in urban Title 1 schools could engage parents in their schools and draw on the community cultural wealth of parents. Believing that parents add value to a school’s educational process, and considering parent involvement from an asset model, the elementary school principals in the study used parent involvement as a resource to increase student achievement. Parent involvement, in compliance with NCLB, presented the ideas of Numbers versus Achievement, Building the Parent Community, and the Exchange, to support student achievement. However, securing Title 1 funding and making adequate yearly progress (AYP) were the principals’ ultimate goals.
The portraits of the principals reveal that they view parent involvement in different ways, and experience different needs for their school communities. While the principals did not use the terms “community cultural wealth” or “culturally-responsive teaching,” their practices reflected the constructs of the theories and demonstrated an openness to ideas for culturally-responsive leadership. More often than not, the principals received support from the district in terms of personnel, and facilitated parent engagement to meet the mandates of NCLB. Initially, the principals set out to engage parents to be in compliance with the law, but as a side benefit better understood what parents wanted and needed. The principals in these portraits were more aware of the voices of parents in their schools as a result of parent involvement mandates. All of the principals mentioned that they valued increased student achievement more than merely getting large numbers of parents at their school sites. The principals were able to reflect on their practices and analyze how parent involvement was operationalized at their schools. The awareness of the exchange of support within schools was further heightened and considered as meaningful when paired with viewing parent involvement from an asset model.

Shadowing principals and analyzing documents were critical for validation of the three portraits presented in the study. Walking with principals and being on their campuses while they engaged with parents and students helped to develop the portraits of the lived experiences of the principals. Analyzing documents and data brought insight to the mandates of NCLB for principals in Title 1 schools. The letter to parents posted on two of the principals’ websites, which explained
the possibility of funding loss and NCLB accountability as it relates to parent involvement, communicated explicitly how schools are affected by NCLB.

**Reflections and Recommendations**

Because this study presents portraits of principals in two districts in Arizona, the results do have certain limitations. Implementing the NCLB legislation presented a number of issues for principals to be concerned about. The principals in this study used components of culturally-responsive teaching and community cultural wealth to better understand how to operationalize parent involvement. Other principals of Title 1 schools could use the findings of this study to reflect on their current practices and to increase parent involvement in their schools. Understanding the value that parents bring to schools when working with students of color could serve as a resource to other principals and encourage them to consider the positive aspects of parent involvement.

Secondary school administrators could apply the principles from this study to the creation of a learning community in their school, with the intention of increasing parent involvement and student achievement. As AYP targets emphasizing accountability continue to be a factor in schools receiving Title 1 funds, secondary principals could determine how they could use parent involvement as a resource. Lastly, NCLB views parent involvement in terms of quantity, and fails to consider the quality of engagement or the needs of the community. NCLB mandates also fail to account for the differing needs of communities and the different types of involvement these communities may be able to foster. Another study could be done to analyze other ways to provide
parent involvement that meets the needs of parents, which could in turn inform policymakers. As mentioned briefly, there needs to be an analysis of how state and federal laws affect schools, and how their compliance or inability to comply affects the quality of education they are able to provide their students.

Other principals could also benefit from understanding how, with the help of specific training from university principal programs, they can take advantage of opportunities for leadership within their communities. There needs to be training for principals in leading public conversations and civic dialogues that affect communities and schools. Researchers could replicate this study in suburban and rural districts where Title 1 funding is used, and similar questions could be asked of principals about how they operationalize and conceptualize parent involvement in their schools and communities. Further, since the use of portraiture is valuable to the process of understanding the phenomenon of parent involvement, the field of educational leadership could benefit from my studies as a principal of a Title 1 school looking at the current experiences of other principals in similar schools. I was able to see the good work that principals do, and consider the successes and possibilities that are unique to my school culture. Being around other principals and discussing their experiences gave me many ideas.

The main contribution of my research to my discipline is in the area of parent involvement. Parent involvement is critical to the success of students. Parent involvement and parent engagement support student learning, and can make the difference between a student being successful and not being successful. As a principal, I see first-hand the difference in behavior, effort, and motivation,
depending on how actively involved parents are in students’ lives. With respect to
discipline, if parents are involved, behavior changes. If parents are involved,
homework gets done. Students want to please their parents, and are excited when
their parents are interested in what they are doing—and tend to work harder.
Many students want to make their parents proud of them. I noticed that when
parents and schools work as a team, change happens. Dialogue and
communication works both ways: parents that are involved learn more about the
resources available to support their families, and resources are used in meaningful
ways. This begins to be a win-win for everyone involved. When students want
their parents to be proud, and parents support student learning, student
achievement increases, and there is more Title 1 funding to support learning.
When there is more learning, student achievement increases, resulting in proud
students, parents, teachers, and principals. Everyone is encouraged to do better
and everyone gets something from the deal. The equal partnership encourages
buy-in, and when there are vested interests for everyone involved, success
happens. An idea—and a true model for parent engagement—could be to formally
structure the support that a school provides, by having parents and school staff
meet annually to revisit and discuss the needs of the parents and the commitment
of the school to support student learning. Starting the year off with this type of
dialogue is sure to establish the win-win needed for a true two-way partnership of
parent engagement.

This study also contributes to the existing literature on parent
involvement, student achievement, effective schools, principal leadership, and
supporting culture in schools. There are many studies of parent involvement, but very few of student achievement as it relates to sustaining Title 1 funding, and studies of parent involvement are rarely written from the qualitative perspective of a principal experiencing NCLB compliance issues. Rarely is there a focus on how a principal’s relationship with parents affects student achievement. This study gives clear examples of how principals can work with parents to affect student achievement. Research on effective schools supports the idea that school dynamics and organizational cultures determine their effectiveness. This study explored the roles and actions of parents, teachers, and students that support a positive climate for learning, so that schools are seen as a safe place for learning. The dynamics of parents, teachers, and principals were observed and placed in the context of parent involvement.

This study looked at the roles of principals, and what tools are available to support the ever-changing role of the principal. Curtis is an example of a manager, whereas Keisha’s role closely resembles that of instructional leader. This study has the potential to inform principal training programs and pre-service teacher programs, which would benefit from including a training component designed to help school organizational cultures understand the dynamics of the communities they serve. The training Keisha received, as described in her portrait, is a skill set that could be obtained and shared by others, regardless of their ethnicity or race. This is vital for principal leadership and for Title 1 schools, because most Title 1 schools have a large minority population, whether in rural or
urban settings. Equipping principals with the tools to increase parent involvement and student achievement should be a goal of any principal or leadership program.

Theorists Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) and Geneva Gay (2000) strongly influenced my thinking. Lawrence-Lightfoot showed me how to use my voice and experiences to explore a topic of interest. She brought clarity to the idea of blending two worlds or schools of thought, and gave clear examples of blending research strategies with the ideas of art. I enjoyed this point of view, because in my mind the blending of two worlds made sense. This study was ideal for blending the practical experiences of what principals do, with educational theories. More specifically, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) describes the many uses of voice. This helped me to understand the emic and etic views by which to present information, when the qualitative researcher’s experiences are filled with bias. Using this research method, I was able to learn what other principals do, and examine what I did, and compare the two to report the positive and provide a meaningful contribution that other principals could use in the day-to-day operation of their schools. Gay’s (2000) ideas about culturally-responsive teaching led me to consider the ideas of culturally-responsive leadership, and I was able to frame my thoughts with the portraiture to view leadership in a culturally-responsive way. Throughout my experiences as a principal, I often wondered how other principals worked to get parents involved. There were practical strategies that seem to work when dealing with parents at my school that were similar to what Gay (2000) considers culturally-responsive teaching. The idea of catering to the interests of students within the context of their world was
perfect for parent involvement, but it wasn’t until I was able to analyze the transcriptions of the interviews with principals that this idea surfaced. It was not until I examined the transcripts that I realized why parents were not visible at school: parents’ interests and school interests were not aligned. Parents were most visible at school when we focused on what matters to them: their children. Parents want to see and know what their kids are doing, and this is what gets them to school. Even in the case of Keisha’s portrait, she focused on meeting parents’ needs in the context of what was meaningful in their world, during their time, prior to soliciting support from parents about what was meaningful in our world and not directly related to their children.

The other theorists—Carol Lee (2007) and González, Moll, and Amanti (2005)—also prompted me to think critically about parent involvement in the context of communities and schools. Lee (2007) provides a thorough explanation of using cultural modeling in schools, and the difference between her work and Funds of Knowledge, the research associated with Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (2001). I would be remiss not to directly quote Carol Lee. She specifically says in her personal dialogue that:

funds of knowledge used the community experiences of students and tries to situate them in a school setting to increase student engagement, and the focus of the research regarding Funds of knowledge is about teachers coming to the community in which they serve. Cultural modeling focuses on what youth do directly outside of school and not on what they do in conjunction with adults in their communities. (Lee, 2007, p. 34)

This quote allowed me to connect the role of principals in schools to the roles and needs of a school community. Culture looks different when paired with different
actors in a school. This sparked the coining of the term “culturally-responsive leadership,” as I considered culturally-responsive teaching.

The field of education is rich with examples and teachable moments, and one of the most conflicting issues in my field is increasing student achievement. If principals aren’t able to increase student achievement they could lose their jobs and/or funding for student learning. This is very conflicting, because Title 1 schools have the disadvantage when it comes to increasing student achievement of America’s poorest children. The disadvantage is not the student body; it is the poverty associated with students in an urban setting. Poverty comes with its own set of issues that don’t lend themselves to increasing student achievement.

Principal need resources, but they also need to know what is working, especially when dealing with elements that are out of their control. The part of the study that contributed the most to my understanding was examining Keisha’s approach to parent involvement, and realizing how her training as a nun was the most useful to help with increasing student achievement and parent involvement. Although this was only one example, examining Keisha’s training in community activism and community leadership was empowering to me and the parents at her school. Keisha led community changes that allowed students to see their parents in leadership roles. Her experience and understanding of communities confirmed the idea that if parents are leaders in their communities, it follows that it will be easy for them to be leaders in schools. The two-way exchanges led to many opportunities for schools and families to partner in support of students. This is truly the intent of NCLB—the spirit of the law that sometimes gets lost in policy.
The study shed light on some practical tools to assist principals with mandated policies that can get lost in implementation process.

The nature of qualitative research is to inspire and give perspectives from a non-traditional research lens. I believe this study gives principals hope, and could save jobs. Abigail, in particular, mentioned that she loved her job, but didn’t like implementing policy mandates. As a result, she left her position as principal. If good principals continue to leave the profession, it is likely that we will have more principals with a leadership style similar to Curtis’s. Although Curtis wanted to increase parent involvement, he was the least involved in activities to achieve that. Schools—especially Title 1 schools—need caring principals promoting community leadership, which translates to school leadership. When students see their parents being empowered, they are more likely to imitate their parents’ leadership characteristics and see their parents as role models, leading to lifelong success.

I was motivated to conduct this study because I am a principal experiencing low student achievement at a Title 1 school, and I need to use every available resource to reverse that situation. I know first-hand the pressures on principals to increase student achievement, and my boss has had a very frank conversation with me regarding student achievement. I understand that principals rarely have the time or professional learning community to explore what is working. This study was a humble attempt to provide a resource that principals could use in a professional learning community to discuss or consider parent involvement. Most importantly, I wanted to explore this study because I am
passionate about the resources that parents bring to support schools and their children. Historically, Title 1 schools have viewed parent involvement using a deficit model. I wanted to contribute to the wealth of knowledge regarding parents and their wealth—particularly cultural wealth. Many principals don’t have time to attend workshops, and it wasn’t until I began pursuing my doctoral degree that I considered leadership from a social justice perspective. Our field needs principals who are concerned about poor communities. As principals, we have many opportunities to influence decisions that are crucial to the well-being of underrepresented students. I believe this study promotes an awareness and a call to action for supporting the needs of principals in Title 1 schools.

Qualitative research has a strong grounding in anthropology. When we research people, it is important to understand the dynamics involved. Such research is multifaceted and very complex. I initially thought it was about expression and voice, but qualitative research is a science saturated with the ideas of studying people in the true context of their environment. I realize that there is value in thoroughly understanding the varying lenses and data-gathering options. I realize that field notes, artifacts, participant observations, and interviews, are equally valuable data-gathering and research tools, and provide validity and reliability. The biggest lesson I learned was that it takes time to learn the ins and outs of each procedure and protocol. As the researcher, I needed to choose the style which best suited the study and its approach to gathering data: this was portraiture. Qualitative research requires a reflective and organizational skill set. Interviewing, and using interviewing equipment, requires practice prior to
interviewing for your study. I would have preferred that my dissertation experience had not been my first exposure to qualitative research.

This study has been a wonderful learning experience. I became a better researcher, and realized that I enjoyed the process of studying people and cultures. I often wished that I had been exposed to these research opportunities earlier in my career or educational pursuits. I have definitely been encouraged to continue to explore qualitative research and portraiture in the field of educational administration. I am entertaining the idea of working at the university level to support students like myself. I enjoyed the process of developing a skill set that I didn’t have before. However, a downside of the process was the change in the actual program structure, and how this affected my productivity. I felt that the changes in the program were not communicated with the needs of the students in mind, and this could have been detrimental to the conclusion of my study if it had not been for other faculty stepping up and supporting students. I was extremely grateful to the staff that support student learning generally, and the success of my study specifically, in spite of structural changes to the doctoral program that did affect this study.

Finally, if I could have redone the study, I would have taken more time to complete the research, and pursued the ideas as a full-time student using an ethnographic study, rather than a case study. That way, I could have expanded the number of districts included, and the number of principals interviewed. I could have included interviews with teachers, parents, and students, and it would have been less intimidating for them if I was studying principals as a full-time student.
with prior principal experience. I regret not having more experience with the foundational concepts or formal training with data-gathering procedures and protocols. I would have preferred it if this had not been my first attempt to do a qualitative case study using portraiture.

I would build or extend the research as follows: This research could be extended by viewing school involvement from a parent’s lens, and I also wanted to explore critical race theory as it relates to Title 1 school principals. A book chapter that caught my attention, by Carol Lee (2007), describes “funds of knowledge,” and explores how their research is different. Many models exist which explore culture as it relates to school. I want to add more of that perspective, and I think the study could be extended by exploring the historical events associated with parents in the state of Arizona, as I notice that state and federal legislation was a variable affecting parent involvement. I think that a two-way parent involvement model could be explored from a creditable source. More principals need to explore trends in education and provide solutions as they experience them.

A major strength of this study was that the researcher’s intentions were to share the good things in education, and that the idea was not to look parent involvement from a deficit model. The stories shared were real, and they were stories that principals could relate to. The research was centered on real issues that principals deal with in their daily school operations. The research attempted to apply theoretical ideas to practical situations. However, there were limitations to the research. First, the research was limited to principals in Arizona at Title 1
schools, with primarily Hispanic students. The research involved using primary sources for gathering data, and I was very much a novice with respect to qualitative research. As a consequence, unexpected mishaps did occur with the equipment and timing. This was a case study, which are typically opportunities to explore phenomena in their natural setting, but the settings for this study were purposefully selected due to the close proximity of the districts and their familiarity. I wonder what the study would look like as a five-year ethnography, interviewing many more principals, in a larger district, serving a different population of students.

Arizona has some unique educational law regarding English language learners, not found in other states. Due to the wealth of information associated with parent involvement, student achievement, and culture, but my own limited knowledge base compared to this wealth of information, this study took a broad approach to understanding some universal ideals within a small and restricted context. The broad focus is very limiting, and the conceptual framework could be narrowed somewhat to increase the clarity of the concepts. The study involved elementary school districts and elementary school principals. Exploring the research within a k-12 district would generalize the results, and the trends could be explored over a period of time. The principal and parents could be paired, and there could be an exploration of student achievement, culture, and parent involvement over time throughout the educational experiences of students.

If I were to advise somebody conducting a study of this nature, I would suggest that they take at least one class about anthropology, and two classes to
better understand qualitative research. My experiences were exploratory, as I had taken a class, but the class was paired with quantitative techniques. Although taking a class that explored both methods helped to spur my interest in qualitative research, after one settles on a method one should take a class to explore all of the design possibilities for case studies to reflect the ethnographies. For example, there should be a class that provides examples and research ideas for just using portraiture. I would encourage research which studies within a time frame better suited to the nature of the study: a case study is usually a single case and time, but ethnographies follow trends over a longer period of time. I would recommend a shadowing experience similar to an internship or apprenticeship with an experienced qualitative researcher, to learn the ins and outs of interviewing, being a participant observer, gathering documents, looking at artifacts, and organizing data and field notes. Having a class on tools and software available to use, with a demonstration of the pros and cons of the software, would be highly recommended.

Finally, I would encourage a researcher to explore an issue of personal interest and passion, which contributes to the field of education and deals with a current problem faced by principals from an asset perspective. I would encourage the researcher to become intimate with the historical lens of the school, community, neighborhood, city and state where the study is conducted.

**Chapter Summary**

With the enactment of NCLB, schools have been placed under pressure to increase parent involvement. This qualitative study attempted to reveal the lived
experiences of three principals of schools in an urban district in Arizona. Interviews, observations, test scores, documents, and field notes were used to gather data for this case study. The study highlighted the theories of culturally-responsive teaching, community cultural wealth, and EPE. As the need to increase student achievement becomes more urgent, it is necessary to explore every resource available. By reflecting on ways to conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement, principals can be successful and share positive stories about their experiences with others.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

RESEARCH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
What perceptions do principals of Title 1 schools have of parents at their schools?

1. Since you have been at this school, what do you think is the role of the parent at your school?
2. What do you think your role of principal entails as it relates to parental involvement at your school?
3. As a principal, is there a preferred role of engagement for parents at your schools?

What perceptions do principals of Title 1 schools have of NCLB requirements for parent involvement?

1. Since you have been at this school, how were you made aware of the requirement for NCLB for Title 1 schools?
2. What was your process for involving parents in developing and approving a parent involvement policy and compact for your school?
3. In your opinion, were parents interested in processes used to develop a parent policy or parent compact?
4. In your opinion, if there is a process for parent participation or if there is a policy developed or approved, does this reflect what parents want?

What perceptions do principals of Title 1 schools have of programs and current practices or strategies used to involve parents at their schools?

1. Thinking about the programs, practices, and strategies used at your school, which do you think are significant to involving parents?
2. Which programs, practices, and strategies involve you?
3. Which programs, practices, and strategies involve teachers or other staff members of your school?
4. What resources are available to parents, and why do you support them in your school?
5. How were current programs, practices, and strategies selected for your school and do parents value these?
6. What evidence tells you that parents support these programs, practices, and strategies selected for your schools?

What perceptions do principals of Title 1 schools have about parent involvement as a resource to increase student achievement?

1. If you were to advise someone about parent involvement programs, practices, or strategies, what would you say helped to increase student achievement, if any?
2. What has been most helpful to you in terms of how you have used parent involvement to increase student achievement?
What perceptions do principals of Title 1 schools have of community cultural wealth?

1. Do you believe parents have the necessary skills to assist their children with student achievement in your schools?
2. What skill set would you, as a principal of a Title 1 school, value most in parents who are involved in your schools?
3. What assets do parents provide that help the school community to reach their goals for AYP.
APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM
Part 1: Research Description

Principal Researcher: ______________________________________________________

Research Title: __________________________________________________________

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores how principals of Title 1 schools conceptualize and operationalize parent involvement. Your participation in this study requires an interview, during which you will be asked questions about your opinions and attitudes relative to your experience as a principal. The duration of the interviews will be approximately 60 minutes for a total of three interviews. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed, by which the researcher will be able to capture and maintain an accurate record of the discussion. Your name will not be used at all. You will be assigned a pseudonym, by which you will be referred to on all transcripts, collected data, and documented research.

This study will be conducted by the researcher, Loraine Payton, a doctoral candidate at Arizona State University. The interview will be undertaken at a time and location that is mutually suitable.

Risk and Benefits:

This research will hopefully contribute to understanding the principal’s experiences with parent involvement and NCLB mandate. The potential benefit of this study is to increase parent involvement in Title 1 schools and to improve the strategies schools use to involve parents. Participation in the study carries the same amount of risk that individuals will encounter during a usual classroom activity. There is no financial remuneration for your participation in this study.

Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality:

Under no circumstances whatsoever will you be identified by name in the course of this research study, or in any publication thereof. Every effort will be made that all information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. All data will be coded and securely stored, and will be used for professional purposes only.
How the Results Will Be Used:

This research study is to be submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Fulton Teacher’s College, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. The results of this study will be published as a dissertation. In addition, information may be used for educational purposes in professional presentation(s) and/or educational publication(s).

Part 2: Participant’s Rights

1. I have read and discussed the research description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
2. My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status, or other entitlements.
3. The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion.
4. If, during the course of the study, significant new information has developed and becomes available that may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
5. Any information derived from the research that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
6. If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the researcher, Loraine Payton, who will answer my questions. The researcher’s phone number is (602) 348-9393. I may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Bryan Brayboy, at 480-965-5327.
7. If at any time I have concerns regarding the conduct of the research, or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact University Institutional Review Board at __________________________.
8. I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant’s Rights document.
9. Audiotaping is part of this research. Only the principal researcher will have access to written and taped materials. Please check one:

☐ I consent to the audiotape.

I do NOT consent to being audiotaped.
My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s signature ______________________ Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Name: (Please print) ________________________________________________

Investigator’s Verification of Explanation

I, Loraine Payton, certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to ____________________________ (participant’s name). He/she has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator’s signature _________________ Date: _____ / _____ / _____