PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF PRINCIPAL SENSEMAKING TO ENGAGE LOW INCOME AND/OR MINORITY PARENTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

America’s schools seek to close the achievement gap by increasing the academic achievement of low-income and minority students. Parental involvement research asserts that parental involvement affects student academic success across all groups; however, few principals report the use of parental involvement strategies to increase student achievement.

This qualitative study examined elementary principals working with low-income and minority student populations who express a commitment and take leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. This study used sensemaking theory to examine personal and professional factors influencing principals’ commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

Principals’ and low-income and/or minority parents’ perceptions and actions were studied through interviews, observations and concept mapping to analyze the phenomenon of low-income and/or minority parental involvement and to analyze principal sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. This study found that themes emerged related to principals’ epistemology, axiology, and ontology that influence principals’ current commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions in practice. The strongest emerging themes related to epistemology associate with personal family experiences and influential individuals. The strongest emerging themes related to axiology associate with altruism, influence, and ownership. The strongest themes related to ontology associate with the connate meanings of parental involvement, planning for parental involvement, and principal tenacity.
I dedicate this work to:
My parents- Peggy Jo Bailey and Ralph Thomas Heinhorst, and
My children – Jared Thomas Busby and Joelle Leanne Busby
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ............................................................................. 1

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................................. 21

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................... 65

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS OF SENSEMAKING ...................... 95

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES ......................................................... 118

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ....................... 194

Appendix A: Brenda Dervin Graphic of Sensemaking .............................................................. 221
Appendix B: Zhang Graphic of Sensemaking ........................................................................... 222
Appendix C: Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development For Administrators ................................................................................................................................. 223
Appendix D: Conceptual Framework ....................................................................................... 224
Appendix E: Principal Informed Consent Form ....................................................................... 225
Appendix F: Principal Participant First Interview Questions ................................................... 227
Appendix G: Principal Participant Second Interview Questions ............................................. 229
Appendix H: Principal Concept Mapping ................................................................................ 231
Appendix I: Principal Participant Third Interview Questions ................................................ 235
Appendix J: Principal Participant Follow-up Interview Questions ......................................... 237
Appendix K: Parent Recruitment Letter .................................................................................. 238
Appendix L: Parent Informed Consent Form for Participation ................................................ 239
Appendix M: Parent Interview Questions ................................................................................ 241
Appendix N: IRB-1 Amendment .............................................................................................. 243
Appendix O: IRB-1 ................................................................................................................... 245
Appendix P: IRB-1 Attachment ............................................................................................... 261
Appendix Q: School Research Form ....................................................................................... 262
Appendix R: IRB Approval #5081 .......................................................................................... 266

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................................. 267
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences.”
(Weick, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410)

Daily, America’s public schools struggle to make sense of the small structures and small moments happening that may be significant for the academic success of students. American schools are faced with obtaining high academic achievement for each student. Mandates for academic excellence of all sub-groups of students as established by No Child Left Behind federal legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2002) is the current reality for public schools. The increased pressure from standardized testing at the state and federal levels forces schools to analyze and make sense of student achievement with a hyper-focus on the sub-groups not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Adequate yearly progress (AYP) creates accountability of schools and local education agencies receiving Title I funding to measure the annual rate of student improvement. “NCLB requires that all schools and districts be measured on their year-to-year progress on student achievement goals, with the ultimate target of bringing all students to proficiency by 2014” (NCLB, 2002). As the criteria increases and more schools are categorized as failing, schools respond by examining even the smallest of school structures or moments in hopes of finding significance and improving data.

In many schools across the nation, minority and low-income subgroups’ achievement scores for 2011 are far below the NCLB mandated annual benchmark of eighty-seven percent pass rates and lower than the white sub-group population. It is difficult to make state-by-state comparisons on achievement test scores because the state tests are not
uniform. The best method available to make state-by-state comparisons is the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment testing what America’s students know and can do in various cities, states, and subject areas. This test information allows for state-by-state comparisons concerning student achievement. In 2008-2009, NAEP fourth grade national results in reading show that seventy-eight percent of white students, forty-eight percent of black students, forty-nine percent of Hispanic students, and fifty-one percent of low-income students were at the basic level or higher (The Nation’s Report Card: Reading, 2011). Similar discrepancies in performance are found in the mathematics testing. In mathematics, the gap between white and black students is twenty-seven percent and a twenty percent difference between low-income students and the white majority (The Nation’s Report Card: Mathematics, 2011). As the NAEP results show, white students outperform black, Hispanic, and low-income subgroups. These 2008-2009 NAEP results similarly represent the performance of sub-groups on individual state achievement tests. This achievement gap is our nation’s reality and the focus of NCLB.

As leaders of schools, society looks to principals to reduce the achievement gap. Recent research studied what successful school principals do in order to increase students’ academic achievement (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007). A separate study sought strategies used by principals to close the achievement gap (Waxman, Lee, & Macneil, 2008). Three hundred and eleven principals’ reported the following:

• thirty-two percent report the use of tutoring;

• twenty-two percent report the use of remedial, pullout programs or interventions;
• fifteen percent report the use of effective teaching strategies;
• fourteen percent report analyzing achievement data;
• eight percent report teachers’ professional development;
• four percent report the use of mentoring; and
• four percent report utilizing parental involvement (Waxman, et al., 2008).

When viewed collectively, fifty-nine percent of principals’ strategies to close the achievement gap focus on working with students individually through tutoring, pullout programs, or mentoring. Twenty three percent of the strategies focus on teachers and only four percent on parental involvement.

The lack of principal use of parental involvement as a strategy supports this investigation of principal commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions related to parental involvement. This study researched the factors influencing commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions of Title I elementary principals committed to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process, and to fill an existing void in the literature. Title I elementary schools are targeted because these schools receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting student’s educational goals and have large concentrations of low-income students with over forty percent on free and reduced lunch programs (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965).

In discussing the findings, Waxman et al. (2008) asserted that few principals reported providing parent classes to teach the parents how to help their child in math and reading, and an unanticipated finding of the study was “that very few principals reported using parental involvement to narrow the achievement gaps” (p.2). The issue of parental involvement is crucial to discussions about student academic success both in theory and
practice. Parental involvement is recognized in NCLB as being important to student academic achievement in schools; therefore the lack of use of parental involvement strategies by principals could indicate a lack of understanding by principals on effective strategies to engage parents of lower performing students. As a former elementary principal, I am interested to understand the limited use of parental involvement by principals as a strategy to increase student achievement.

Though not largely discussed by public school administrators, parental involvement is a significant part of NCLB. Section 9101 of NCLB focuses on the issue of parental involvement with expectations for local district and school parental involvement policy; shared responsibilities for high student performance; and building capacity for parental involvement (NCLB, 2002). To meet NCLB requirements, schools must prove the integration of NCLB parental involvement policy into school structure and practice. These requirements of parental involvement found in NCLB follow the current trend of parental involvement being part of local, state and national education initiatives (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1993; National Education Goals Panel, 1995, 1999), but NCLB is the first federal mandate to require schools to report on parental involvement initiatives.

Most significant to schools serving student from low-income families and communities is the Comprehensive School Reform models as a condition of Title I funding (NCLB, Section 1118, 2002). Section 1118 of NCLB and the Comprehensive School Reform model outlines parental involvement policy in the areas of Local Educational Agency Policy; School Parental Involvement Policy; Policy Involvement; Shared Responsibilities for High Student Academic Achievement; and Building Capacity for Involvement. Nationally, schools are held accountable to NCLB parental involvement mandates; however, NCLB does not
provide for a mechanism to monitor school actions nor does it require schools to provide evidence of successful parental involvement policy. The lack of monitoring allows schools to self-regulate the degree of authentic effort and compliance to the mandates.

Defining Parental Involvement

In existing literature, multiple definitions exist to articulate what parental involvement means in the context of individual studies, frameworks, or theories. These definitions are explored in chapter two. The purpose of this study is not to establish a definition of parental involvement. This study reviews research associated with different definitions, understandings, and perceptions of parental involvement to establish the phenomenon of parental involvement in research and practice. NCLB mandates a definition of parental involvement for schools to follow; therefore this definition along with other descriptors related to school policy serves as a measure and provides guidance to schools. Section 9101 of NCLB defines parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (NCLB, 2002, section 9101, paragraph 32). This definition stresses two-way communication and the importance of meaningful interactions between school personnel and parents about student academic success and school activities. It is important to note this definition does not describe overt activities, but leaves open the possibilities of ways to engage parents in meaningful, two way communication. The distinction between different types of parental involvement behaviors and actions are relevant to this study’s findings.

Statement of the Problem

Our nation’s schools are failing to educate low-income and minority students at the
same level as higher economic and white students. Schools struggle to change this pattern. Students’ poor academic performance in school often leads to students not graduating from high school, whereby affecting the rest of their lives. As stated in the introduction, schools are failing to successfully reach out to and involve low-income and minority parents even though the literature on parental involvement suggests parental involvement is a powerful strategy to increase student academic success. Schools cannot change the reality that low-income and minority students have significantly more barriers and obstacles to overcome to achieve academic success than white and/or more affluent students, but schools can change practices related to parental involvement. A person’s level of academic attainment holds significance for individual and societal success.

A family’s economic position affects academic achievement. Poverty is found to be the fundamental driver of low graduation rates with a “near perfect linear relationship between a high school’s poverty level and its tendency to lose large numbers of students between ninth and twelfth grades” (Balfanz & Legters, 2006, p. 1). Often low-income and minority students educational attainment is affected by their own parents’ education levels; single mother households; larger family sizes; access to books, computers, and study places; levels of school readiness upon entering school; and attendance at highly segregated, low performing, and under-funded schools (Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova, 2001). These obstacles to higher educational attainment for low-income and minority students have dramatic effects on individual lives and the nation as a whole.

The impact of students not graduating high school is particularly devastating to the economy in areas such as wages paid, taxes, crime, and health care. Over the course of his or her lifetime, a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately $260,000 in
lost earnings, taxes, and productivity (Amos, 2008) as well as making a “million dollar mistake” in potential earnings when compared to college graduates (Joftus, 2002). Additionally, high school dropouts are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001) and account for seventy-five percent of state prison inmates and over sixty percent of federal prison inmates (Harlow, 2003). An increase of only five percent more males graduating from high school would have a $7.7 billion impact on crime reduction and earnings nation wide (Amos, 2008). An increase of five percent seems nominal, yet the effect is exponential.

Beyond crime reduction, almost $2.8 billion in additional annual earnings would enter the economy if more students graduated from high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006) and states could save an estimated $17 billion nationally in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured care for each class of graduating students with increased graduation rates (Amos, 2008). Individuals with low levels of education have less health insurance, longer periods of no coverage or limited and erratic coverage, greater health problems and less healthy lifestyle choices to include greater rates of smoking, obesity and cardiovascular disease (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). Student academic achievement has implications for the child’s entire life. An increase in student academic achievement and an increase in graduation rates correlates to a national reduction of crime costs, health care, and associated social services supports as well as an increase in money entering the economy from the increase of graduates annual earnings.

For low-income and/or minority students, many of the obstacles they face are related to social class and family issues and could be mediated and changed by parental involvement. A widely accepted finding of parental involvement research is that parental
involvement is associated with higher student achievement for students regardless of culture, region, and economic status (Barnard, 2004; Epstein, 1987, 2001; Fan, 2001; Izzo & Weissberg, 1999; Jeynes, 2003, 2005b, 2007; Pena, 2000; Simon & Epstein, 2001). The effect of parental involvement in schools has a profound effect on the current and future lives of students.

In the elementary meta-analysis, Jeynes (2011) found the association between parental involvement and school achievement generally held across race and gender. From this finding, Jeynes (2011) suggests, “parental involvement may be one means of reducing the achievement gap that exists between white students and some racial minority groups” (p. 54). In addition, Jeynes reports that other educators and sociologists have advocated this position such as Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams & Briones (1994); Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1998); and Offenberg, Rodriguez-Acosta & Epstein (1979). Support from the field of education and sociology strengthens the importance for increased parental involvement as a means to reduce the achievement gap and increase student achievement.

The research on the connection of parental involvement and student success is robust, yet only four percent of principals report using parental involvement as a strategy to increase student achievement (Waxman, et al., 2008). Even though parental involvement findings are well established, there is an absence of literature focused on principal leadership and/or practices to effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents. This study seeks to address this problem by contributing to the literature related to principal leadership for parental involvement.
It is important to state that this study views low-income parents and minority parents as two distinctly separate groups; however some parents may have membership in both groups. The focus on low-income and/or minority parents related back to these sub-groups of students performing at lower levels on national standardized testing and the significant socio-cultural barriers affecting this population related to parental involvement. A section of the literature review addresses issues of socio-cultural barriers.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to research the factors influencing Title I elementary principals’ commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process, and to fill an existing void in literature. The purpose of this study is unique in the field of education leadership because of the foci of principal leadership for low-income and/or minority parental involvement and the use of sensemaking as a theory applied to principal practice.

Leading researchers and scholars in the field of educational leadership and parental involvement acknowledge the absence of studies with direct application to principal leadership for low-income parental involvement. In a recent chapter, Leithwood (2009) focused on policy questions about parent engagement, Leithwood asserted that “only a handful of studies provide information about principals’ skills, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors likely to foster parent engagement” (p. 11). Additionally, the Harvard Family Research Project (Bouffard & Weiss, 2010) recently asked leading family involvement researchers to express important questions in the field for current and future researchers to answer. Joyce Epstein suggested the question, “How does district-level leadership for partnerships affect school-based programs and practices of family and community
involvement?” and Anne Henderson questioned, “What is the relationship between the practices schools employ to engage families and the extent and impact of family involvement” (Bouffard & Weiss, p. 37-38). The questions for policy and future research offered by these academics support this study’s position that a gap in research exists between parental involvement-student achievement findings and the actions required of school leadership to effectively engage parents.

Not only is low-income and minority student achievement a national problem and the engagement of low-income and/or minority parents a school problem, there is a lack of understanding in the field of educational leadership related to the process of principal “sensemaking” to engage low-income and minority parents. How do principals know or decide what to do? This lack of understanding and research findings hinders the possibility of systemic change related to Title I elementary principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.

The reality in most schools is the existence of structural and cultural barriers to sharing knowledge with other schools; therefore the knowledge of success does not get transferred within practice (Fullan, 2001). Additionally, just by looking at exemplars in an area such as Title I elementary principals who effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents with a result on student learning does not provide guidance for other principals wanted to learn “what to do”. The principals in this study stated having a strong commitment and making continuous attempts to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process, and were willing to discuss and articulate their personal experiences and leadership actions related to their commitment and actions.
To understand a principal’s experience related to commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process, the actual process of sensemaking needs to be studied. Principals making sense of information or current realities related to engaging low-income and minority parents is known as the phenomenon of sensemaking. This study examined principal sensemaking through interviews, observations and concept mapping to enlarge the small cues and details related to their commitments toward success. In research, sensemaking occurs and is studied at both the individual and collective level. This study focused on the individual level of principal sensemaking.

The study's general objectives were 1) to examine two to three Title I elementary principals’ influences, commitment, sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process; 2) to examine low-income and minority parents views related to school actions and parental involvement; and 3) to make applicable recommendations to districts and principals regarding the phenomenon of principal sensemaking and principal leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Significance of Study**

The significance of this study is found in providing the field of education with a deeper understanding of principal sensemaking and leadership actions to effectively engage low-income and minority parents whereby affecting student personal success and impacting the greater good of society at large. The anticipated impacts of a higher student achievement would be greater economic prosperity for individuals, less financial resources directed at social services and incarceration, and a more educated citizenry.
Understanding and influencing a more effective practice of elementary principal leadership and sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents has the potential to change the historic pattern of poor academic performance for low-income and minority students. Elementary school principals are positioned as leaders to create, direct and/or influence the school’s parental involvement policy, culture and climate. This study asserts that Title I elementary principals, as building leaders, must make sense out of their personal experiences, academic training, professional preparation and other information related to effectively engaging low-income and minority parental involvement in order to inform their practice and collaborate with colleagues.

This study asserts principals with a commitment to engaging low-income and minority parents construct and de-construct their understanding of the compelling and competing factors found in areas such as personal experiences, graduate studies, professional practice, professional development, and research to inform their practice. This hypothesized action of construction and de-construction, or sensemaking, directly influences principals’ actions to effectively engage low-income and minority parents. This study’s importance is found in the potential that the findings will inform principal practice and provide a deeper understanding of the influences and processes that lead a principal in the creation of practices to effectively engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.

Additionally, such findings are significant to future research in higher education and the content of principal preparation programs in the area of educational policy and principal leadership. If the difficulty of engaging low-income and minority parents is minimized through continued research, then the research should impact coursework and
preparation programs both in teacher and administrator education. Teaching the research in collegiate coursework impacts future outcomes for low-income and minority students associated with parental involvement and increased student achievement. A proposition in this study is that principal leadership for low-income and minority student engagement will influence an increase in student academic achievement for low-income and minority students and strengthen a life trajectory leading to future success, healthier lives, and continued education.

Research Questions

The following two questions frame the broad areas of this study’s inquiry.

(1) *What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?*

(2) *What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents in their schools; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?*

Research Methodology and Design

As a qualitative researcher, I want to be closer to the lived experiences of those being studied. With this, there is a journey of discovery and a search for meaning. Qualitative methods of research “are less likely to make unwarranted assumptions about the meaning and significance of experience” as well as view “a person’s understanding of the situation as something to be discovered” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 45). I seek to discover the meaning and significance of the commitments, decisions and efforts made by elementary principals to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process.

For this heuristic phenomenological qualitative study, a social constructivist
worldview and postmodern perspective is applied. This heuristic phenomenological study primarily focuses on Title I elementary principals’ commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents with a secondary focus on the phenomenon of low-income and minority parental involvement.

Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experience. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments. This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15)

This study included the data sets of principal and parent participant interviews, principal created concepts maps, principal observations and related school documents. The principals in this study have served in the current Title I elementary schools for at least three years and expressed a commitment to parental involvement.

Parents are included in this study to understand the parent perspective of school and/or principal actions to engage parents in the school process as well as to obtain parent recommendations regarding more effective strategies to engage parents. The parent participants were parents in the same buildings as the principal participants, but the parent interviews were focused on personal experiences related to any elementary school in which the parent has experience with a child in attendance, not just the principals being studied. I intentionally did not ask parents about the principal participants directly nor did I analyze corresponding parent data sets to the corresponding principal data sets.
Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are used and defined as follows in this research study.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – The concept of adequate yearly progress is found in Section 1111(b)(2); §200.3 and includes (1) an emphasis on accountability of schools and local education agencies receiving Title I funds rather than emphasizing the Title I program itself or even the yearly performance gains of participating children; and (2) a definition that holds local education agencies and schools accountable for the amount of improvement they make each year (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

Altruism - Altruism is defined as “principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others” (www.dictionary.com) and “the unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (www.merriam-webster.com). Altruism is an emerging theme in this research study.

Axiology - Axiology is the study of the nature, types, and criteria of values and of value judgments especially in ethics (www.merriam-webster.com). Axiology studies the domain of values, ethics, and aesthetics (Baptiste, 2001; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Axiology is used as a philosophical frame in this study to organize emerging themes.

Conrate Meaning of Parental Involvement - In the English language, a word connate means “existing in a person or thing from birth; innate; of the same or similar nature; allied; congenial” (www.merriam-webster.com). For principals, the most predominate behaviors and activities are school based. Parents described parental involvement behaviors and activities as both home and school based, but more prominent were home based behaviors and activities. The concept of connate meaning of parental involvement describes the similar yet different principals’ and parents’ perceptions of parental involvement. The connate meaning of parental involvement is an emerging theme in this research study.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act – “The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is a U.S. federal legislation enacted in 1965. The ESPEA was enacted as a part of the "War on Poverty" and it is the most far-reaching federal law affecting education. The Act was originally authorized through 1970, however the government has
reauthorized the Act every five years since its enactment. The current reauthorization of ESEA is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The Act provides funds for primary and secondary education, and explicitly forbids the establishment of a national curriculum. Additionally, the Act emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability. As stated in the Act, the funds are authorized for professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion. The provisions of the ESEA are codified at 20 USCS §§ 6301 et seq.” (uslegal.com).

*Empathetic Imagination* - *Empathetic imagination* is a term used by Mark Johnson (1993) to capture the manner in which individuals seek to identify with others. *Empathetic imagination* is “imaginative empathetic projections into the experience of other people” (p. 199). *Empathetic imagination* allows a person to ‘participate’ in the other person’s experience by imagining oneself in that position; imagining what it is to truly like to inhabit that person’s place (Johnson, 1993).

*Epistemology* - *Epistemology* is the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. *Epistemology* is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). The study of *epistemology* questions the nature and scope of knowledge; how is knowledge acquired; how is knowledge created; and how we know what we know. *Epistemology* is used as a philosophical frame in this study to organize emerging themes.

*Individual Agency* - The concept of *individual agency* describes principals’ actions to create space for parents and students to exercise power and voice. The principals seek to provide parents and students with agency and to participate in problem solving. *Individual agency* is an emerging theme in this study.

*Influence* - In this study, *influence* is defined as “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command” (www.merriam-webster.com). *Influence* is an emerging theme in this study.

*No Child Left Behind Federal Legislation* – “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform.
Pursuant to 20 USCS § 6301, NCLB ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (uslegal.com).

Ontology - Ontology is defined as: “1) the study of what is, or what exist; the study of entities or things; and 2) the study of what it is to be or to exist; what all the things that are have in common” (Lawson, 2004, p.1). Ontology is a philosophical concept focused on studying reality and being. The study uses the philosophical frame of ontology to organize what is or exists in principals’ practice.

Ownership - Ownership is an emerging theme that appears as principals describe their commitments and why it is important to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. This type of ownership, defined as relational ownership, is “the relation of an owner to the thing possessed; possession with the right to transfer possession to others” (www.memidexdictionary.com).

Parental Involvement – Parental involvement is defined many ways in literature and practice. In this study, parental involvement is considered the behaviors and activities parents engage in related to the school process. Various definitions, concepts, and frameworks are presented in the literature review of this study. The principal and parent participants in this study are asked to describe the behaviors and activities they think constitutes parental involvement.

Relational Views of Parental Involvement - The terminology or concept of relational views of parental involvement is not found in literature. I created the concept of relational views of parental involvement for this study to distinguish a differences found in initial studies of parental involvement that focused on overt parent actions to the more recent studies of parental involvement focusing on the more-subtle parent actions and family-school-community partnerships and communication (Jeynes, 2005b, 2007, 2011; Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, & Meza, 2010). Relational views of parental involvement provides greater focus on what actually influences parents’ to be involved in schools; addresses issues related to socio-cultural factors; and includes school actions to include engaging in
two-way communication related to student academics and school activities. This study asserted that relational views of parental involvement incorporate both direct and indirect influences of parental involvement related to student outcomes in holistic, systems-thinking, partnership approaches.

*Respect for Persons* – *Respect for persons* in moral and political philosophy means “a kind of respect that all people are owed morally just because they are persons, regardless of social position, individual characteristics or achievements, or moral merit” (Dillon, 2010). *Respect for persons* is also a concept found in Kantian moral philosophy asserting, “Respect is due to every rational being, and so must be distinguished from liking, or admiration, or even esteem. It is best understood through what it forbids, which is treating a person as a mere means to an end of one’s own: ignoring their personhood or their humanity” (Blackburn, 2008). In the area of research ethics, *respect for persons* as found in the Belmont Report (The Belmont Report, 1979, p. 415) “incorporates at least two ethical convictions: first, that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and second, that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.”

*Sensemaking Approaches* – *Sensemaking approaches* capture the process and evolution of people making sense out of contradictions in their lives when the state of what is perceived to be is different from the state of what is expected to be or there is no obvious way to engage in the world (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The conflict between the two states requires the individual to negotiate, or make sense of the incongruence and requires the individual to engage in the process of sensemaking. This moment of incongruence is described in the literature as gaps in reality (Dervin, 1983), identifying a problem (Zhang, Soergel, Klavans, & Oard, 2008), a growing sense of doubt (Klein, 2006), and problematic situations (Weick, 1995).

*Social Justice* – This study uses the definition developed by the Social Justice Symposium at Berkley. *Social Justice is a process, not an outcome, which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action* (http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/sjs/).
Tenacity – Tenacity is the act of being tenacious; tenacious is being “persistent in maintaining, adhering to, or seeking something valued or desired” (www.meriam-webster.com). Tenacity is an emerging theme in this research study.

Title I Schools – Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965).

Variance Maps/Concept Maps – Variance maps “usually deal with abstract, general concepts and is essentially timeless; it depicts how some factor properties of things (conceptualizing as variable) influence others” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 43). “Concept maps are graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge. They include concepts, usually enclosed in circles or boxes of some type, and relationships between concepts indicated by a connecting line linking two concepts. Words on the line, referred to as linking words or linking phrases, specify the relationship between the two concepts” (Novak & Cañas, 2008, p. 1)

Summary

Low-income and minority students are being academically left behind in American schools even though the federal regulations of No Child Left Behind is aimed as minimizing this occurrence. Individual and societal consequences exist for students with low academic achievement and not graduating from high school.

The landscape of parental involvement stretches across and within multiple interconnected areas of research and practice. Theoretical and empirical publications, governing policy and school practices inform each other and create connections between theory, research, policy and practice. Research shows the association between parental
involvement and school achievement generally holds across race and gender with parental involvement as a means to reduce the achievement gap (Jeynes, 2011). Few principals use parental involvement strategies to close the achievement gap, yet principals can learn and institute practices to effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

This study specifically targets Title I elementary principals’ commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions as the primary units of analysis situated within low-income and/or minority parent involvement. The significance of this study is found in providing the field of education with a deeper understanding of principal sensemaking and leadership actions to effectively engage low-income and minority parents whereby affecting student personal success and impacting the greater good of society at large.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to research the factors influencing Title I elementary principals’ commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process, and to fill an existing void in literature. Two primary literatures were reviewed for this study - *parental involvement* and *sensemaking theory*. Principal leadership for parental involvement was reviewed related to parental involvement.

This study sought to understand the factors (such as personal, academic, and professional experiences) influencing principal commitment and leadership actions to engage low income and minority parents in the school process and how principals make sense of theses influences to inform practice. Schools leaders know that parental engagement is important to student academic success, yet most school leaders have received little, if any, training on facilitating effective parental involvement policy and practices to engage low income and minority parents. Though multiple studies focus on parental involvement, few studies provide specific research-based school level findings and recommendations related to principal actions and practices to involve low-income and minority parents. This study’s importance is found in the potential that the findings will inform principal practice and provide a deeper understanding of the influences and sensemaking affecting principals’ effectively engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process.

**Research Questions**

The research questions of this study sought to identify factors that influence a
principal to prioritize and take leadership actions to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process; the actions initiated by the principal; and the resulting effects as perceived by principals and parents. The following two questions frame the broad areas of this study's inquiry.

(1) *What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?*

(2) *What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents in their schools; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?*

These research questions guide the literature review in the two stranded areas of:

1) parental involvement, including principal leadership for parental involvement, and
2) sensemaking theory.

**Literature Foci:**

**Parental Involvement and Sensemaking Theory**

As stated, this literature review draws from research targeting the phenomenon of parental involvement, principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in schools, and sensemaking theory. This literature review is organized in two main sections: section one discusses research related to *parental involvement*, including principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents, and section two discusses research related to *sensemaking theory*.

**Focus One: Parental Involvement**

The first focused literature review section details research related to parental involvement to situate the study and identify significant findings related to this study. Research related to the phenomenon of parental involvement establishes the background, frameworks, and importance of this phenomenon. Research related to the principal
leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process identifies varying contexts and realities of this phenomenon as well as school and principal practices to engage these parents.

The parental involvement section discusses different stages of parental involvement research, changes in definitions of parental involvement, and various frameworks associated with parental involvement. From the literature review research, I developed a concept I have titled relational views of parental involvement. The terminology or concept of relational views of parental involvement is not found in literature. I created the concept of relational views of parental involvement for this study to distinguish a differences found in earlier studies of parental involvement that focused on overt parent actions to the more recent studies of parental involvement focusing on the more-subtle parent actions and family-school-community partnerships and communication (Jeynes, 2005b, 2007, 2011; Mapp, et al., 2010). Relational views of parental involvement provides greater focus on what actually influences parents’ to be involved in schools; addresses issues related to socio-cultural factors; and includes school actions such as engaging in communication related to student academics and school activities. Through this concept I establish that relational views of parental involvement incorporate both direct and indirect influences of parental involvement related to student outcomes in a holistic, systems-thinking, partnership approaches.

Principal Leadership for Parental Involvement. Research related to principal leadership for parental involvement is discussed within the parental involvement literature review section. This section presents the literature findings related to school and principal commitments, policies, and practice associated with engaging low-income and minority
parents. Other areas examined were case studies of principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents, a model of administrative professional development and barriers to low-income and minority parent involvement.

**Focus Two: Sensemaking**

The second focused area of the literature review details research related to the theory and process of sensemaking. This section discusses sensemaking broadly and examines the work of leading researchers and frameworks used to explain the process of sensemaking. The research sensemaking theory and process provides a process by which to study principals’ sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents.

The use of sensemaking approaches to guide research studies is not necessarily unique, as multiple studies exists utilizing sensemaking approaches in the fields of emergency management (Muhren & Van de Walle, 2010; Weick, 1993, 2010), military command (Baran & Scott, 2010; Connaughton, Shuffler, & Goodwin, 2011; Jensen, 2009), organizational management (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hope, 2010; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, et al., 2005), information management (Klein, 2006; Paul, 2010), and medical decision making (Klein, 2006; Korica & Molloy, 2010). A research agenda focused on sensemaking theory and leadership began in the late 1990’s (Angus-Leppan, Metcalf, & Benn, 2010; Baran & Scott, 2010; Hunter, Cushenbery, Thoroughgood, Johnson, & Ligon, 2011; Maritz, Pretorius, & Plant, 2011). A few studies exist with the focus of sensemaking theory in the areas of educational organizations (Krumm & Holmstrom, 2011), teacher practice (Coburn, 2005; Morine-Dershimer, 1987; Pak Tee & Tan, 2009; Philip, 2011) and school leader practice (Evans, 2007; Simkin, 2005). However, in the field of education administration, applying sensemaking approaches to understand principal sensemaking is unique;
therefore, it is necessary to provide a thorough explanation of sensemaking approaches found in the literature to fully inform the audience. This literature review explains sensemaking approaches though research conducted and frameworks developed to articulate the process of sensemaking.

Section One Literature Review: Parental Involvement

For over forty years, researchers, scholars and practitioners have studied parental involvement. This desire to understand family structures and involvement intensified with the release of the findings of the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), which concluded that home factors influence educational outcomes more than school factors. Social scientists began to study multiple areas related to families and school achievement. The specific study of parental involvement began in the 1980’s (Jeynes, 2010a) and is still a robust research agenda and prominent policy focus. The continued interest to understand parental involvement and the effects of parental involvement on student success is further intensified by national pressure and policies such as NCLB to increase student achievement.

In the literature on parental involvement, the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement/motivations is heavily studied. The positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement is found in multiple studies (Barnard, 2004; Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Domina, 2005; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Fan, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan-Holbein, 2005; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2003, 2007, 2011; Miedel & Reynolds, 1998). This positive correlation is well established and widely accepted as provable.
The present reality in many schools is that the rhetoric and reality of parental involvement is juxtaposed and not integrated in a way to explain how the two inform each other. As stated in chapter one, NCLB section 9101 recognizes the importance of parental involvement as a vehicle for student success. Section 9101 of NCLB (2002) defines parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities”. No Child Left Behind (2002) includes expectations for parental involvement in local district and school parental involvement policy; shared responsibilities for high student performance; and building capacity for involvement. Schools must prove the integration of NCLB parental involvement policy into school structure and practice. Parent involvement is required as a component of Comprehensive School Reform models and as a condition of Title I funding for schools serving over forty percent of students from low-income families and communities (NCLB, 2002, Section 1118). Parental involvement has a prominent position in current policies and school reform.

Schools receiving Title I funding must show compliance with NCLB mandates for parental involvement. The compliance is mandated, but the mandated compliance is without external verification. The NCLB legislation (see following section) provides recommendations to schools concerning parental involvement practices, but schools make decisions on the approaches to parental involvement they employ. In the following excerpt, Epstein (1995a) describes this phenomenon.

There are two common approaches to involving families in schools and in their children’s education. One approach emphasizes conflict and views the school as a battleground. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment
guarantee power struggles and disharmony. The other approach emphasizes partnership and views the school as a homeland. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment invite power sharing and mutual respect and allow energies to be directed toward activities that foster student learning and development. (Epstein, 1995a, p. 711)

The issues described by Epstein, power struggles and disharmony, are rooted in some public schools. The reality is some schools are a battleground for parental involvement even though these same schools most likely show compliance with NCLB parental involvement mandates. Schools must report parental involvement practice and policy but do not have to engage in evaluation or provide opportunities for stakeholder voice.

**NCLB, Title I, Section 1118 Parental Involvement Policy**

Section 1118 requires specific actions for local education agencies and schools concerning parental involvement, and provides suggestions for schools as to what this policy may entail in practice. The schools must have a written parental involvement policy called the school-parent compact, which is created and agreed upon with parents. The school-parent compact outlines how parents, school personnel, and student share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement as well as the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help students achieve the State’s high standards.

The school-parent compact is one requirement related to shared-responsibilities for high student academic achievement. This compact must describe the school’s responsibility for high-quality curriculum and instruction in supportive and effective learning
environments so that students will meet state standard. Additionally, the compact must describe parents’ responsibilities for “supporting their children’s learning in ways such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in their child’s classroom; and participating as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and the positive use of extracurricular time” (NCLB, Section 1118, 2002). Section 1118 also stresses the importance of on-going communication between teachers and parents which minimally requires annual parent-teacher conferences in elementary school during which the compact is discussed; frequent reports to parents on their children’s progress; and reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child’s class, and observance of classroom activities.

NCLB requires schools to build capacity for parental involvement “to ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement” (NCLB, Section 1118, 2002). The section outlining building capacity provides five actions the schools “shall” take and suggests an additional nine actions the school “may” take. The “shall” include 1) providing assistance to parents to understand state content and academic achievement standards, state assessments, and how to monitor student progress and work with educators to improve their child’s academic achievement; 2) provide materials and training to help parents work with children to improve achievement such as literacy training and using technology; 3) educate principals, teachers, and all staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of parent contributions as well as how to reach out to, communicate and work with parents; 4) coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs with other agencies; and 5) make sure information related to school
and parent involvement are sent home in a format and language the parents can understand. The other nine actions from Section 1118 a school “may” take.

- Involve parents in the development of training for teachers, principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of such training;
- Provide necessary literacy training from funds received under this part if the local educational agency has exhausted all other available sources of funding for such training;
- Pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions;
- Train parents to enhance the involvement of other parents;
- Arrange school meetings at a variety of times, and if necessary in places other than the school building, or conduct in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation;
- Adopt and implement model approaches to improving parental involvement;
- Establish a district wide parent advisory council to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in programs supported under this section;
- Develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities; and
- Provide such other reasonable support for parental involvement activities as parents may request.

The establishment of parental involvement policy as a part of national legislation established specific expectations for schools especially significant for schools receiving Title I funding. The definition of parental involvement established by Section 1118 of NCLB reflects current policy, understandings, and perspectives of parental involvement with a focus on low-income and/or minority parents.

**Parental Involvement: Changes in Definitions**

Parental involvement is defined in multiple ways. The meaning of parental involvement depends on the context and can include a wide range of behaviors, actions, beliefs, connections, and experiences within and among families, schools, and communities.
Multiple definitions exist in the literature; therefore, each context must articulate what the term parental involvement means.

Parent-school partnerships are extraordinarily complex. Considering the millions of individual parent and educator minds that continually assimilate values, develop worldviews, engage in communication, and interpret behavior, it is difficult to define parental involvement and parent-school partnership in a single policy or regulation. (Price-Mitchell, 2009, p. 10)

Many scholars and researchers of parental involvement suggest different structures to explain the actions, beliefs, and influences of parents related to home, school, and community based involvement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1995a, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Swap, 1990, 1993; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman-Nelson, 2010). Initial models and frameworks viewed parental involvement in terms of overt actions, focusing on observable types of actions and activities. More modern theories and frameworks of parental involvement have a holistic, socio-cultural orientation and include more subtle aspects of parental involvement.

Parental involvement is described by Hill et al. (2004, p. 1491) as, “parents’ interactions with schools and with their children to promote academic success”. The language used in recent literature, as discussed by Price-Mitchell (2009) changed from parental involvement or parent participation to parent-school partnerships and most recently parent engagement; the term parent engagement emphasizes

...the importance of parent’s active power-sharing role as citizens of the education community rather than people who participate only when invited...the shift in language has yet to change the fragmented focus of the research, and many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement. (p. 13)
The idea of parent partnership and parent engagement most closely captures this study's views of the beneficial interactions between parents and schools; however, the historic term for parental involvement was utilized in this study because of its common use and understanding with educators and parents. It is important to stress this study specifically frames parental involvement in the school process as a holistic, socio-cultural orientation to include the subtle aspects of parent involvement. Later in this chapter, the term *relational views to parental involvement* is presented to capture the literature and area of study that views parental involvement from a lens informed by a holistic, systems-thinking, partnership approaches.

**Parental Involvement: Areas of Study**

The literatures related to theories and models associated with parental involvement explain parental involvement through theories, models, dimensions, and other types of frameworks to illustrate the phenomenon of parental involvement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Weiss, et al., 2010). These theories and models describe different aspects and contexts of the phenomenon of parental involvement. Due to the maturity of this research agenda, a great deal of literature exists. This study isolated the work of the leading researchers and scholars in the field to inform this review and organized the literature into five main areas of study related to parental involvement.
From a review of literature, this study selected the following five areas of study to illustrate the varying foci of parental involvement research. These areas represent a comprehensive collection of the leading research:

1) spheres of influence of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995a; Simon & Epstein, 2001);

2) behavioral, cognitive, and personal involvement as types of involvement (Grolick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Grolick & Slowiaczek, 1994);

3) influences on and consequences of parental involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996);

4) motivations and decisions of parents related to involvement (Green, et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005); and

5) partnerships, systems-thinking approaches to parental involvement (Price-Mitchell, 2009; Swap, 1993).

These five areas of study describe the depth and breadth of parental involvement research and literature.

**Spheres of Influence.** As a widely recognized leader in the field, Epstein’s (1995b; Simon & Epstein 2001) model of parental involvement and spheres of influence are widely cited. Over twenty years ago, Epstein (1987) stated, “There are many types of parental involvement, and it is unclear how each type contributes to school effectiveness” (p. 120). Epstein developed a theoretical model of overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children’s learning to describe parental involvement (Simon & Epstein, 2001). Each of Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence - family, school, and community - are shaped by the experiences, philosophies, and practices within each entity as well as the
force of time, age, and grade level. In addition to this model, Epstein (1995b) classifies six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Even though Epstein’s model is widely cited, this model is criticized as being unidirectional and “does not consider the multi-dimensional or tacit aspects of learning between parents, educators, students, and the community” (Price-Mitchell, 2009, p. 13). Epstein’s spheres of influence include family, school, and community, but the phenomenon of parental involvement is studied related to parents’ actions and not schools’ actions.

**Dimensions of Parental Involvement.** A second area of study of parental involvement presented by Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) details three dimensions of parental involvement. These dimensions separate the involvement in terms of behavioral involvement, cognitive/intellectual involvement, and personal involvement. Behavioral involvement reflects the actions the parent takes including both home and school based activities; cognitive/intellectual involvement reflects the actions the parent takes in regards to the intellectual development of the child; personal involvement reflects the parents’ attitudes and beliefs about school, learning, expectations for success, importance of school, etc. (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994). This perspective also focuses on types of parental actions.

**Parental Involvement: Influences and Consequences.** A third area of study of parental involvement, a model of the influences on and consequences of parent involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996) attempts to understand what is limiting parental involvement in the schools. This model takes into consideration the characteristics of the family, neighborhood, child, teacher and school as well as teacher/parent beliefs and
teacher/parent practices. This model takes more of a socio-cultural approach to understanding the phenomenon of parental involvement and includes characteristics of teachers and schools, but there is no direct focus on school leadership.

**Parental Motivation and Parental Decisions.** A fourth area of study of parental involvement seeks to understand the motivations and decisions a parent makes in regards to involvement in their child’s education. A process model of parental involvement, as suggested by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), provides a lens from the parent perspective concerning decisions about involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) focus on “the constructs that appear to influence parents’ fundamental involvement stance” which are “the processes and mechanisms most important to parents’ thinking, decision-making, and behaviors underlying their decisions to become involved in their children’s education” (p. 5). This area of study of parental involvement process articulates the process through five district levels of participation (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). This model provides a scaffold of influences on parents, their decisions, and the resulting affect on student achievement, but this model does not provide insight for educators related to the individual, school, or community influences that influenced parents’ decisions to be involved.

**Partnerships and Systems-Thinking.** A fifth area of study of parental involvement focuses on partnerships and holistic views. The Partnership Model (Swap, 1993) and Systems-Thinking Model (Price-Mitchell, 2009) provide a lens to parental involvement focused on partnerships. Swap (1993) describes four different home-school interaction models ranging from limited parental involvement to parental partnerships. The four home-school interaction models are 1) the protective model, 2) the school-home
transmission model, 3) the curriculum enrichment model, and 4) the partnership model (Swap, 1993).

1) The protective model reflects the school intentionally limiting most home-school interaction to reduce conflict between families and educators.

2) The school-to-home transmission model reflects the school making the decisions regarding when and how home-school interactions occur.

3) The curriculum enrichment model reflects the collaboration of curriculum activities between the families and school faculty.

4) The partnership model reflects a partnership between families and communities to support students’ learning in multiple ways.

According to Swap (1993), the partnership model is the model that represents a true partnership between the home and school. The partnership model includes four following activities: (a) creating two-way communication; (b) enhancing learning at home and at school; (c) providing mutual support; and (d) making joint decisions. Swap’s (1993) partnership model provides schools with recommendations for implementation. This partnership model provides a collaborative frame of parental involvement that most closely reflects the definition of parental involvement utilized by NCLB (2002).

Similar to the Swap’s partnership model, Price-Mitchell (2009) asserts that a holistic view of the various systems involved in this phenomenon is needed to understand the influences on and impact of parental involvement. A systems-thinking approach “requires re-orientation from the historic view of linear, cause-and-effect relationships toward a more holistic understanding of partnerships” (Price-Mitchell, 2009, p. 14). The various constituents are integrated as a whole in systems thinking and the theory of living systems.
“Systems-thinking embraces a view of the world through relationships, connectedness, and context rather than quantitative measurements (Price-Mitchell, p. 14). A systems thinking approach to parental involvement acknowledges the boundaries parents, school personnel, and community members share and requires that these populations build relationships and engage in dialogue.

**Summary.** The five frameworks presented are useful to help understand the phenomenon of parental involvement and the ways in which the phenomenon has been framed including multiple dimensions, influences, and actions associated with parental involvement. The partnership, systems-thinking approach changes the paradigm of parental involvement and brings parents into the center of the school structure, function, and decision-making. The partnership, systems-thinking framework includes the influence of the school personnel on parental involvement and was used to frame questions and findings in this study and is most similar to the spirit of parental involvement found in NCLB.

**Relational Views of Parental Involvement**

As previously described, the terms used to describe parental involvement changed over time. The terms school-family-community partnerships and parental engagement emerged as thinking shifted to include the broader context and influences of parental involvement. This study developed the concept of *relational views of parental involvement* to distinguish a difference from the initial studies that focused on overt parent actions to studies focusing on the more-subtle parent actions and family-school-community partnerships and communication (Jeynes, 2005b, 2007, 2011; Mapp, et al., 2010).

*Relational views of parental involvement* provides greater focus on what actually influences
parents’ to be involved in schools, addresses issues related to socio-cultural factors and includes school actions to include engaging in two-way communication related to student academics and school activities. This study asserts that relational views of parental involvement incorporate both direct and indirect influences of parental involvement related to student outcomes in a holistic, systems-thinking, partnership approaches.

**Home-School Communications.** In *relational views of parental involvement*, the home-school communication is found to be very important to partnerships success and engagement. Home-school communication has many forms, but Hiatt-Michael (2001) asserts that the most powerful form is personal contact. Personal contact requires that school personnel such as teachers, administrators, parent liaisons, to reach out to the parents and engage in personal communication. Forms of effective communications presented by Hiatt-Michael (2001) and Epstein (1996) are phone calls, invitations and written correspondence, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and other face-to-face interactions. These described forms of personal contact are central to partnership and system-thinking approaches to parental involvement.

*Relational views of parental involvement* views school as a “homeland” for parental involvement as found in the partnership model advocated by Swap (1993). The home-school interaction models identifies that the power to determine the level of collaboration between schools, families, and communities resides in the schools and is determined by school leaders’ actions.

**Justification of Relational Views of Parental Involvement.** Two recent meta-analyses challenge the normative thinking that parental involvement actions are external, overt, home-based, school-based actions. The result of these meta-analyses, both
conducted by Jeynes (2005a, 2007), “indicate that the most puissant aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle, such as maintaining high expectations of one’s children, communicating with children, and parental style” (2007, p. 748). Jeynes (2005a) as well as Mapp et al. (2010) and Sheldon (2005) assert that the major factors contributing to fostering parental involvement may be a more subtle action than previous research suggested. Pulling from the work of Mapp, et al. (2010) and Sheldon (2005), Jeynes (2010b) provides the example of subtle school actions of teachers, principals, and school staff being “loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents” (p. 748). This study seeks to get at these subtle school actions of principals and other school personnel that are important to engage low income and minority parents.

The research of Jeynes (2010b), Mapp et al. (2010) and Sheldon (2005) provide the most promising studies in the area of parental involvement to inform educator’s thinking. The following conclusions presented by Jeynes (2010b) have the potential to transform the way schools think about parental involvement:

First, educate parents to comprehend, and then act on, the fact that it is probably some of the more subtle aspects of parental involvement, such as high expectations and communication, that are the most important. Second, educate school leaders, teachers, and staff to understand that raising parental participation may be more a function of subtle but important demonstrations of love and respect than a matter of instructing parents to apply particular methods for helping children. (p. 769)

If schools embrace Jeynes’ conclusions, the schools will fundamentally change the way in which they work with low-income and minority parents; schools will act and
respond differently. Relational views of parental involvement require parents and community to be active participants in the dialogue and decision making of schools.

Ideas and research findings associated with this study’s termed relational views of parental involvement surfaced during the same time period state and national legislation began mandating these types of partnerships as policy. These partnership policy mandates led to discussions regarding the ability of schools to effectively facilitate school-family-community partnerships. “As school, family, and community partnerships have risen high on the national agenda, the profession and the public have come to recognize the need to train teachers, administrators, and other school personnel in school-family-community collaboration” (Kirschenbaum, 2001, p. 185). Relational views of parental involvement approaches to parental involvement require a paradigm shift for many schools operating with linear thinking about parental involvement.

Principal Leadership for Relational Views of Parental Involvement Approaches

As previously stated, today’s educators know that parental involvement is important to student academic achievement; however, the areas of theory, research, policy, and practice are not integrated in a way to systemically inform school leaders’ actions. Important to this study is literature about educational policies and practices directed at engaging low-income and minority parents to include teacher and administrative practices and perceptions. This body of literature focuses on the policies, actions, and beliefs of teachers and administrators as well as school culture, related to parental involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Epstein, 1996, 2005; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Hiatt-Micheal, 2010; Hill, Tyson, & Bromell, 2009; Izzo & Weissberg, 1999; Kreider & Weiss, 2010; Leithwood, 2009; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000; Rodriguez-Brown, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009;
Scanlan, 2010; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). This body of literature represents the most recent parental involvement research studies.

Beyond the information related to increased academic achievement, the vast amounts of information and research findings related to low-income and minority parental involvement is not readily available to school leaders. It usually requires individual initiative and self-determination to study the theories, frameworks, models and other findings associated with parental involvement and socio-cultural-economic influences affecting parental involvement.

Often, policies and programs designed to increase parental involvement in education are established without the full benefit of the combined knowledge gained through research, experiences of practitioners, and needs of parents and students, reducing the effectiveness of policies and the likelihood that research will inform policy and practice effectively. (Hill & Chao, 2009, p. 2)

For school leaders to influence a culture and climate associated with high levels of low-income and minority parental involvement, these leaders must develop a comprehensive understanding of the influences affecting parental involvement and then initiate policy and practice to engage these parents.

The current state of parental involvement policy in schools can be found in a recent review of empirical studies and literature conducted by Kenneth Leithwood (2009). For this review, Leithwood (2009) analyzed fifty-six empirical studies and six literature reviews in order to summarize recent evidence concerning direct parent engagement in schools, the influencing factors of parents’ engagement, and how the teachers, principals, and school personnel foster parental engagement. From the analysis, Leithwood (2009)
focuses on four policy questions about parental engagement in order to present “best-evidence recommendations for parents, school staff and educational policy-makers” (p. 8). The four key policy questions addressed by Leithwood (2009) target

a) “the abilities, dispositions, and behaviors needed of parents, teachers principals and school staff to foster parent engagement”;

b) “the factors contributing to poor communication and tense relationships between parents and teachers or principals”;

c) “the features of the context (e.g. school environment, socio-economic status, urban-rural characteristics, school-community relations, etc) enhancing different types of parent engagement”; and

d) “sources or types of assistance in the development of resources and training programs to foster parent engagement” (p.8).

These policy questions, when answered, will guide the practice of school leaders. Leithwood is considered a giant in the field of education policy and leadership. His attention and review of literature related to parental involvement indicates that the phenomenon of parental involvement is important and worthy of study by leading researchers and scholars in the area of educational leadership and policy.

Framing Principal Professional Development. To understand principal formation through professional development to include motivations, influences and process of sensemaking to prioritize engaging low-income and minority parents, a framework of professional development from Daresh and Playko (Daresh, 2004; Daresh & Playko, 1992, 1995) was utilized. The Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development for Administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 18) uses a triangle to illustrate the tri-
dimensions of academic preparation (traditional university courses); field-base learning (internships, planned field experiences, practica, etc.); and professional formation (mentoring, reflection, platform development, style analysis, and personal and professional development) to define the equal supports and preparation needed to prepare for principal leadership roles (See Appendix C). This framework was utilized to apply emerging themes from data analysis to the supports and preparations established by Daresh and Playko to related to principal professional development.

**Principal Leadership Actions.** The landscape of research of parental involvement is robust, yet a relative small number of studies target the role and actions of school administrators in regards to engaging low-income and minority parents. For this study, principals’ behaviors and actions were reviewed both independently and collectively including school behaviors and actions. Principals'/schools' behaviors and actions are interdependent; however, this study isolated research describing influencing factors related to principal commitment and leadership to engage low income and minority parents. From the review of literature, three themes of findings emerged related to successfully engage low-income and minority parents in schools. These three themes are school policy, principal/school commitments and beliefs, and school practices.

In this study, the findings related to policy answer *what* are the expected actions associated with parental involvement; the findings related to commitments and beliefs answer *why* principals take actions to engage low income and minority parents; and the findings related to practice are viewed as answering questions concerning *how* to engage low-income and minority parents. In reality though, the areas of policy, commitments and beliefs, and practice inform each other. This study artificially separates these areas to
analyze each one during the literature review but this separation is not continued in chapters four and five. In chapters four and five, I analyze emerging themes in the areas of knowledge and experiences; beliefs, values, and ethics; and practice and sensemaking.

**School Policy.** School policy includes structures, guidelines, rules, behavior expectations, agreed upon actions, etc. that are found in federal/state policies, mission/vision statements, teacher handbooks, parent and student handbooks, school improvement plans, professional development sessions, staff meeting agendas, & meeting minutes and other contractual or documented items.

Findings related to the influences of what principals do related to policy are in areas such as school mission and vision (Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Leithwood, 2009; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Scanlan, 2010), school policy (Swap, 1993); hiring and evaluating personnel (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Swap, 1993); staff development (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; DiCamillo, 2001; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Jeynes, 2010b; Leithwood, 2009; Moles, 1993; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Swap, 1993); parent education/trainings (Brooks, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009) and initiating and evaluating programs (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Schools, as organizations, are guided by policy. Policy establishes reasons, procedures, and expectations for personnel. School policies direct the actions; school policies are the intended method to be utilized in the school organization.

In the associated literature, it can be difficult to separate the areas of school policy and practice because at times they are interwoven. In some cases, practice is the school policy in action. The following are found to be important components of school policy to engage low-income and minority parents:
• school commitments are reflected in vision, mission, school structure, policies and practices (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 2009; Swap 1993)

• open, two-way communication to include home-school communication tools and surveying and asking parents views (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Swap, 1993; Leithwood, 2009; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Moles, 1993)

• education for parents to include training parents for engagement and skill development, to understand the schooling process, to understand the subtle aspects of parental influence on student achievement and to enhance learning at home (Brooks, 2009; DiCamillo, 2001; Jeynes, 2010b; Leithwood, 2009; Mapp, et al., 2010; Moles, 1993; Sanders, 2009; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009)

• evaluation of parental engagement practice and progress (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; DiCamillo, 2001; Swap, 1993)

• existence of a school governance team for family-school-community partnerships with representation of all populations served (Davies, 2001; DiCamillo, 2001; Leithwood, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009)

• on-going professional development of school personnel for effective parental engagement (DiCamillo, 2001; Jeynes, 2010b; Leithwood, 2009; Moles, 1993; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Swap, 1993)
**Principal and/or School Commitments and Beliefs.** Commitments and beliefs are the ideas, actions, goals, etc to which one is committed to and that guide decisions and actions. Findings related commitments and beliefs are embedded in the areas of principal leadership and power. Principals must “understand their power, the source(s) of their power, differences in power, and the most constructive ways to use their power to move partnerships forward and advance the quality of education for all children” (Sanders & Shelton, p. 33). Other issues of power and empowerment are discussed in literature related to parental involvement (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Moles, 1993; Hiatt-Michael, 2010). A principal has the power to change school policy and practice.

Sanders and Shelton (2009) assert that principals affect the schools’ purpose, goals, structure, social networks, people in the school and organizational culture. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) uses the term “recultured schools” describes the change needed in schools to engage low-income and minority parents and that the responsibility for “reculturing schools” rests with the principal. These areas identified by Sanders and Sheldon (2009) to “reculture” schools are actions to be taken by principals to address and minimize barriers, open up communication, and build relationships.

A longitudinal study by Sheldon and Van Voorhis (2004) explored the importance of the principal to the development of programs of school, family, and community partnerships. In this study, Van Voorhis and Sheldon found “a significant and positive effect of principal support on partnerships program quality” and that “principals hold the key to initiating programs and processes” (p. 66). Principals are the leader of the school.

From the literature, principal and/or school commitments and beliefs related to engaging low income and minority parents are found in the following areas:
• commitments to academic success (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002);

• commitments to family and community engagement (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Swap, 1993; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 2009); and

• commitments to social justice and reduction of barriers (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Leithwood, 2009; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Christenson, 2004)

• commitment to welcoming school climate (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Jeynes 2010)

The above areas of commitments are found in the schools engaging low-income and minority parents or in recommendations for schools to engage low-income and minority parents.

**Practice.** Practice describes the behaviors and actions of the school personnel to include the principal in the school. Practice in this context is a noun and means “the continuous exercise of a profession” (www.merriam-webster.com) or actions taken by principals and school personnel. Practice includes all behaviors and actions that principals, teachers, and other school personnel exhibit daily. In addition to the direct principal behaviors and actions found in literature, principals’ behaviors and actions school and principal behaviors and actions are influenced by the aforementioned commitments and beliefs.
From the literature, principal and/or school practice related to engaging low income and minority parents are found in the following areas:

- open, two-way communication to include home-school communication tools and surveying and asking parents views (Brooks, 2009; Scanlan, 2010; Mapp et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Swap, 1993; Leithwood, 2009; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Moles, 1993)
- adopting proactive strategies that address issues that impede education (Brooks, 2009)
- strong relationships with parents (Scanlan, 2010)
- deep commitment to the dignity of each individual child and a respect for the caregivers in their lives (Scanlan, 2010)

Other information related to school practice is found in the previous policy section.

The policies in action become the practice or the performative routines.

**Summary.** For this study, school policy is viewed as what guides the school's actions, commitments are viewed as why principals engage low income and minority parents, and practice is viewed as how schools actually engage low-income and minority parents. School commitments, policy, and practice all influence the school's culture.

**Case Studies: Principal Leadership to Engage Parents**

A few case studies focus on principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents linking school practices, especially school leadership, to engage low-income and
minority parents. These case studies look at urban elementary schools (two public and one private) and provide a context in which to view leadership for parental partnerships and engagement.

These case studies looked at elementary schools known for innovative and effective strategies to engage parents. The case studies found that the principal is essential in the facilitation of effective family-school-community partnerships. “This case study clearly illustrates that school leaders can make significant improvements in minority urban children’s education and in their communities by adopting proactive strategies that address issues that impede education” (Brooks, 2009, p. 77). Scanlan (2010) suggests evidence for strong relationships with parents can be found by the personal attention the principal models towards parents, strong teacher-family communication networks, and systems that reduce barriers to families. As previously discussed, these actions are the subtle actions discussed by Jeynes (2007, 2009) and the types of actions advocated for in relational views of parental involvement approaches.

These case studies assert communication and dispositions of school personnel member effect the overall engagement of low-income and minority parents. One school displays a “deep commitment to the dignity of each individual child and a respect for the caregivers in their lives” (Scanlan, p. 330). Principals in these case studies give personal attention to parents. The principal in one building conducts an entry interview with each family that lasts approximately twenty minutes (Scanlan, 2010). During this interview, the principal intentionally seeks to learn about the family history, jobs, background, and relationships. This interview begins to build relationship and makes the principal accessible to parents. Observations of the principal supported the strong principal
relationships with parents and found that the principal spends a considerable amount of time with parents in both formal and informal interactions (Scanlan, 2010). The relationship with parents is given priority and takes precedence.

These case studies found that principals addressed issues related to social and cultural barriers. Brooks (2009, p. 78) argues “Principals need to exhibit sensitivity to the uniqueness of their schools’ constituents and to reach beyond just the immediate community through cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, awareness, knowledge, and skills.”

In one school, the teachers work to develop strong bonds with the families through proactive, positive focused communication and systematically reducing barriers to caregiver participation (Scanlan, 2010). Scanlan (2010) asserts, “The efforts of the educational leaders ... to create spaces that valued diverse forms of social and cultural capital can be interpreted as tactical and as value-laden” (p. 325). The entire staff helps to create a space that values diverse forms of social and cultural capital.

**Social and Cultural Barriers to Parental Involvement**

As mentioned previously, social and cultural barriers impact the level and degree of low-income and minority parental involvement. Studying low-income and minority parental involvement includes studying the context in which parents are situated. Central to understanding low-income and minority populations are issues related to social and cultural capital. Literature related to low-income and minority parental involvement targets the ways in which social and cultural capital as well as associated barriers influence parent access to involvement in the school setting (Christenson, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; M. Lawson, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rodriguez-Brown, 2009; Waanders, Mendez,
& Downer, 2007). The issues of social and cultural capital look at the societal structures of power and access. The barriers preventing low-income and minority parents are often associated with issues of social and cultural capital. The level and degree of principal understanding and willingness to take initiative related to social and cultural barriers influences the principal’s leadership and practice.

In the research related to social and cultural capital, many academics draw from the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Coleman (1988). A study conducted by Lee and Bowen (2006) looked at the relationship between social background and types of parental involvement. The following excerpt captures the power of social and cultural capital in schools.

In relation to the parent involvement meso-system, cultural capital is the advantage gained by middle-class, educated European American parents from knowing, preferring, and experiencing a lifestyle congruent with the culture that is dominant in most American schools. Advantage accrues from enacting the types of involvement most valued by the school or most strongly associated with achievement. Advantage also accrues from having family and work situations that permit involvement at the school at the times and in the ways most valued by the school. (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 198)

Social and cultural capital frames the advantages of some groups over others based on issues such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Whiteness, or white privilege, is central to these discussions as expressed by Lareau and Horvat (1999).

In the case of parental involvement in white dominant schooling, being white is an advantage. Whiteness represents a largely hidden cultural resource that facilitates
white parents’ compliance with the standard of deferential and positive parental involvement in school. (Lareau & Horvat, p. 49)

The barriers to parental involvement can be found at multiple levels from the individual level to the societal level. In the literature, the barriers are classified as structural or psychological (Christenson, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Moles, 1993). Structural and psychological barriers can be found in the family, in the educators, and in the family-school relationship with structural barriers being more about access and psychological barriers about interpersonal issues such as attitudes and dispositions (Christenson, 2004). Examples of structural barriers for families are lack of information and knowledge about resources, time constraints for communication, limited English, child care needs, and transportation (Christenson, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Moles, 1993). Examples of structural barriers for educators are lack of funding, lack of programming and training on how to engage parents, limited knowledge of data-based approaches to engaging parents, time constraints for communication and relationship building, limited understanding of constraints faced by families (Christenson, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Moles, 1993). For both groups, psychological barriers are about feelings of inadequacy, issues of distrust and doubt, resistance towards engaging with the other, blaming and labeling, and socio-cultural issues (Christenson, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Moles, 1993).

Disadvantaged parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation, and distrust. They may also be
victims of cultural barriers reflecting differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definitions of appropriate roles. (Moles, 1993, p. 36)

Specific school barriers to parental involvement found by Moles (1993) suggests an absence of training provided for teachers on effective parental involvement interactions at the collegiate and professional level; a lack of coordination between school counselors, administrators, and teachers regarding specific information about students; reluctance of teachers to want training targeted at effect parental interaction and involvement; and school programs not allowing for personal interactions. These barriers are both in school structure and people’s attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions. Structures can be changed, but dispositions require training and dialog. The use of social and cultural capital theories also helps schools understand the behaviors and practice of American teachers whom are eighty-five percent white and forty-two percent over the age of fifty (Feistritzer, 2005). Since the teaching population is approximately eighty-five percent white, discussion of social and cultural capital and barriers to participation would seem to be important topics for teacher training and/or staff development.

The degree and level of understanding a principal possesses in relation to social and cultural barriers influences and informs the principals’ commitments/beliefs, policies, and practice. Because of the focus of the study being low-income and minority parent involvement with schools, socio-cultural barriers inform this study’s questions and data analysis.

**Summary**

Parental Involvement is a large area of study. This literature review presents the areas of study and research that inform this study's purpose of understanding the
influences affecting sensemaking and leadership actions of Title I elementary principals who are committed to engaging low-income and minority parents. From the literature, I developed the concept or term of *relational views of parental involvement* to use as a lens for this study. In addition to the areas of parental involvement and principal leadership, the literature related to socio-cultural barriers to parental involvement provides the context from which low-income and minority parents come. This literature section of parental involvement situates this study in the context of principal leadership in title one elementary public schools. The following literature section on sensemaking reviews the use of sensemaking as theory and process to support the design and methodology of this study.

**Section Two Literature Review:**

**Sensemaking Theory**

This study used sensemaking theory as a way to study the influences and actions related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. As earlier stated, this study researched the influences affecting principal sensemaking and leadership of Title I elementary principals who are committed to engaging low-income and minority parents and to fill an existing void in the literature.

As previously defined, the distinct yet complimentary theories of sensemaking capture the process and evolution of people making sense out of contradictions in their lives when the state of what is perceived to be is different from the state of what is expected to be or there is no obvious way to engage in the world (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The conflict between the two states requires the individual to negotiate, or make sense of the incongruence and requires the individual to engage in the process of sensemaking. This moment of incongruence is described in the literature as gaps in reality (Dervin, 1983), identifying a problem (Zhang, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2008); a growing sense of
doubt (Klein, 2006), and problematic situations (Weick, 1995). This study highlights and examines these gaps or growing senses of doubt experienced by Title I elementary principals in efforts to engage low-income and minority parents with schools.

Studies exist in literature focused on both individual and collective sensemaking, but the study of individual sensemaking led to the development of theories, frameworks and methodology. Sensemaking theories, and frameworks are found in various disciplines such as communications (Dervin, 1983), organizational learning (Weick, 1995), intelligence systems learning (Pirolli & Card, 2005; Klein, Moon, & Hoffman, 2006), and cognition and learning (Zhang, et al., 2008). Each of these authors developed charts and illustrations to describe the process of sensemaking.

The giants in sensemaking research and theory are Brenda Dervin and Karl Weick. In the field of information management, Dervin (Dervin, 1983, 1991, 1994; Dervin, 2003a, 2003b; Dervin, 2010; Dervin & Frenette, 2001) developed a theory and methodology termed “Sense-Making”. In organizational learning, Weick (1993, 1995, 2005) developed a theory he termed “sensemaking”. Weick (1995) focuses on theory and conceptual views of sensemaking, whereas Dervin’s (1983) most recent work is described as a metatheory that is “a set of assumptions, a theoretic perspective, a methodological approach, a set of research methods, and a set of communication practice” (2003, p. 301). Dervin’s work is a disposition and highly philosophical in nature, whereas Weick’s theory is more descriptive of the process of sensemaking.

The more recent frameworks of sensemaking evolved from the initial work of Dervin (1983) and Weick (1995). In 2005, Weick worked with Sutcliffe and Obstfeld to develop central features of sensemaking “by highlighting its distinctive features
descriptively” (p. 410) in efforts to further guide research and practice. Pirolli and Card (2005) created a model of sensemaking to describe the process of transformation of information into knowledge. Klein (2006) developed a data/frame model of sensemaking based on the idea that when people try to make sense of an event, they start from an existing perspective or frame of reference such as stories, maps diagrams, etc. and elaborate or reframe the initial frame. Zhang et al. (2008) extended existing sense-making models to include theories of cognition and learning with the aims “to offer a more complete picture of the cognitive processes of sense-making, including the underlying cognitive mechanisms and different types of conceptual changes so that we can link observations to theory” (p. 1). The model presented by Zhang et al. (2008) is the only model that incorporates the cognitive mechanisms of sense-making as both inductive (data-driven, bottom-up) and structure-driven (logic-driven, top-down).

A recent review of literature by Paul (2010), asserts that three salient characteristics of sensemaking are found in the multiple disciplines using the term sensemaking. The common characteristics are that 1) “sensemaking is about meaning generation and understanding”; 2) “sensemaking is an important aspect of information seeking tasks” and 3) “most of the research in sensemaking has been at the individual level” (Paul, 2010, p.14-15). These sensemaking approaches help to illustrate various elements related to the process of sensemaking as a phenomenon.

**Brenda Dervin: Sense-Making**

The writings of Dervin help to situate the reader in the essence and dispositions of Sense-Making as a way of being a researcher. One of Dervin’s most fundamental assumptions focuses on “the locus of communicative essence" also described as “in-the-
head as well as physical acts of gap-bridging (making ideas, using strategies, connecting sources, choosing words, etc.)” (2003, p67) and individuals arrive at different understandings of reality based on different moments in time and space. Dervin’s (1998) initial goal was to study the “well documented gap between how administrators/experts describe users and publics and the realities of what users and publics think and do, particularly when the going gets tough” (p. 39). From this perspective, Sense-Making is seen as bridging the discontinuities we find in our everyday lives.

Sense-Making rests on the discontinuity premise. It assumes that, given discontinuities in natural reality and in human observations of reality, the useful research focus is how humans make sense of discontinuity. The core construct of Sense-Making is the ideas of the gap – how people define and bridge gaps in their every day lives. (Dervin, 2003, p. 223)

Sense-making is situated in the divide, in the in-between of varying conditions, and posits reality as partly ordered, partly chaotic, and partly evolving – reality is in the gap, the in-between and is “subject to multiple interpretations, due to changed in reality across space, changes across time, differences in how human see reality arising from their different anchoring in time-space; and differences in how humans construct interpretive bridges over a gappy reality” (Dervin, 2003b, p. 140). In this scope of this study, Sense-Making theory can explain what is bridging Title I elementary principals gap in reality of “what's going on?” and “what do I do next?” regarding the engagement of low-income and minority parents.

**Karl Weick: Sensemaking**

As part of his work in organizational management, Karl Weick developed sensemaking theory. This theory develops the process of sensemaking in organizational
communication and learning. Each individual person negotiates the back and forth of making sense in the organization as related to self and other people.

Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances. (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obst, 2005, p.409)

Sensemaking, as theorized by Weick (Weick, 1993, 1995, 2010; Weick, et al., 2005) is a sequence or process in which individuals engage in communication to create a shared understanding of what is plausible enough to move forward with action. In the most-simple terms, Weick (1995) states the concept of sensemaking means the making of sense. Weick (1995) describes sensemaking as being “tested to the extreme when people encounter an event whose occurrence is so implausible that they hesitate to report it for fear they will not be believed ” (p. 1). The properties Weick (1995) utilizes distinguish sensemaking as a separate process from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation, and attribution.

Seven specific properties are utilized by Weick (1995) to distinguish sensemaking as a separate process from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation, and attribution. The seven properties are used as a guideline for inquiry into sensemaking related to what it is, how it works, and where it can fail (Weick, 1995).

The seven properties frame the process of sensemaking:

1) grounded in identity construction;
2) retrospective;
3) enactive of sensible environments;
4) social;
5) ongoing;
6) focused on and extracted by cues; and
7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995).

These seven characteristics are found in sensemaking literature and Weick (1995) argues the characteristics form a crude sequence of sensemaking because feedback loops are not present.

To situate the identity, Weick (1995) uses the question “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (p. 18). Sensemaking begins with the individual trying to make sense; the individual’s identity is “constructed out of the process of interaction” (Weick, 1995, p. 20) with a change in the identity of self as changes in interactions occur. The issue of identity is provided here to explain Weick’s characteristic, but the larger issue of identity construction is not needed to inform this study. Individuals negotiate their identity related to other individuals and sensemaking is influenced by individual identity.

Sensemaking is retrospective; this concept of retrospection comes from Schutz’s (1967) analysis of “meaningful lived experience.” “The key word in this phrase, lived, is state in the past tense to capture the reality that people can know what they are doing only after they have done it” (Weick, 1995, p. 24). Sensemaking requires individuals to look back at events, what has already happened, to give it meaning and make sense of it. Individuals operate within multiple settings; therefore, when possible meanings need to be synthesized, a problem exists that there are too many meanings. “The problem faced by the sensemaker is one of equivocality, not one of uncertainty. The problem is confusion, not ignorance” (Weick, 1995, p. 27). In the case of equivocality, Weick (1995) asserts that people do not need more information, but individuals need values, priorities, and clarity to help them decide what matters.
The characteristic of sensemaking being enactive of sensible environments asserts that people are enacting in their environment and produce part of the environment they face. “They act, and in doing so create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face” (Weick, 1995, p. 31). Additionally, sensemaking is a social process; “Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others. Even monologues and one-way communication presume an audience” (Weick, 1995, p. 40). The process of sensemaking is ongoing, neither starting nor stopping.

People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it...To understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the ways in which people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments. (Weick, 1995, p. 43)

Sensemaking is everywhere yet the process of sensemaking is illusive and often one only knows sensemaking has happened because of a resulting product. A sixth characteristic is that sensemaking is focused on and extracted by cues (Weick, 1995). To understand sensemaking, Weick (1995) suggests that an examination is needed of “how people deal with prolonged puzzles that defy sensemaking, puzzles such as paradoxes, dilemmas, and inconceivable events” and “ways people notice, extract cues, and embellish that which they extract” (p. 49). Extracted cues are “simple, familiar structures” that help people develop a greater sense of what is happening.

Lastly, sensemaking is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) argues that the strength in sensemaking resides in "the fact that it does not rely on accuracy" and that “sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality” (p. 57). Plausibility is the other basic concept along with identity that differentiate sensemaking from basic cognitive
psychology (Gilliland & Day, 1999). Situations and problems have multiple meanings and significance depending on the individual perspective; therefore, attempting to get an accurate perception is extremely difficult.

Sensemaking is not about getting “the right” answer. Weick (1995) states, “Sensemaking is about accounts that are socially acceptable and credible” (p. 61). Sensemaking does not focus on accuracy, but focuses on if the outcome or product is plausible.

In 2005, Weick worked with other scholars and posited eight theoretical features to further explain the process of sensemaking in practice. These eight theoretical features are situated within Weick’s original characteristics for the process of sensemaking, but provide greater structure to frame the theoretical process of sensemaking in practice. The following theoretical features of sensemaking exist in practice:

1) sensemaking organizes flux;
2) sensemaking starts with noticing and bracketing;
3) sensemaking is about labeling;
4) sensemaking is retrospective;
5) sensemaking is about presumption;
6) sensemaking is social and systemic;
7) sensemaking is about action; and
8) sensemaking is about organizing through communication (Weick, et al., 2005).

Some of these characteristics are similar to and/or are repetitions of the Weick’s (1995) initial work, but are presented separately from the original seven distinct characteristics due to these being theoretical features to explain sensemaking in practice, such as the context of principal practice in this study.

In practice, sensemaking organizes flux or the general flow of activity surrounding
an individual; “sensemaking starts with chaos” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 411). As sensemaking begins to organize flux, individuals are noticing and bracketing cues from the setting/events and begin to interpret something that has already occurred. The individual’s noticing and bracketing “is guided by mental models she has acquired during her work, training, and life experiences. Those mental models may help her recognize and guide a response” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 411). The noticing and bracketing of sensemaking leads the individual to labeling the cues.

Labeling and categorizing helps the sense-maker to “stabilize the streaming of experience” and that “events are bracketed and labeled in ways that predispose people to find common ground” (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 411). This labeling is retrospective, follows after the bracketing, and “names a completed act” (Weick et al, 2005, p. 412). Labeling is connected to presumption. “To make sense is to connect the abstract with the concrete” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). In moving from the abstract to the concrete, individuals test hunches and update their presumptive understandings.

Sensemaking as previously discussed is social, but it is also systemic. Sense-makers interact with others in systems with unique organization, structure, and knowledge. Part of the process of sensemaking is to first question what is going on and then respond with questioning what should be done about it; sensemaking is about action.

Nurses (and physicians), like everyone else, make sense by acting thinkingly, which means that they simultaneously interpret their knowledge with trusted frameworks, yet mistrust those very same frameworks by testing new frameworks and new interpretations...There are truths of the moment that change, develop, and take shape through time. It is these changes through time that progressively reveal that a seemingly correct action “back then” is becoming an incorrect action “now” (Weick et. al; 2005, p. 413)
Central to sensemaking is organizing through communication. Communication is an "ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them" (Weick et. al, 2005, p. 413). As we communicate about what we think or did, changes happen as a result of sensemaking.

**Zhang’s Iterative Sense-making Model**

The *Iterative Sense-making Model* developed by Zhang (2010) provides “a framework for analyzing and describing individual sensemaking focusing on the changes to the conceptual space and the cognitive mechanisms used in achieving these changes” (p. 261). In this model, Zhang (2010) argues the sensemaking process as follows:

The model proposed in this thesis views the sensemaking process as composed of several “search-sensemaking” iterations. In each iteration, the sense-maker goes through some search activities (exploratory and focused search for data or structure) followed by some sensemaking activities including gap identification, building structure, instantiating structure and creating products activities. (p. 254)

In most cases, Zhang et. al (2008) found the overall sense-making process followed four stages: 1) task analysis; 2) exploratory stage; 3) focused stage; and 4) updates of knowledge representation with variations in length, number of loops involved, and focus at each stage. In the exploratory stage, the initial identified gap is a “loose notion of lack of knowledge on some topic or problem” (Zhang, 2008, p. 10) followed by continued searching or sense-making leading to more identified specific data gaps or structural gaps. For structural gaps, the sense-makers search for new structures to use, use previously known structures, or builds their own structure. For data gaps, the sense-maker focuses the search to find pieces of data to fit into the previously built structure; this search to find
data to fit the structure is called *instantiating representations* or *instantiating structure* (Zhang, 2008, p. 5). From data gaps and structural gaps, knowledge can be updated through accretion (instantiating the structure); tuning (adapting the structure); or re-structuring (creating a new structure) (Zhang, 2008). The updated knowledge loops back to inform task or problem, the initial knowledge and structures to devise solutions, decisions, or task completion. If gaps are again identified, the process of sensemaking continues to loop through the iterative sense-making model. See the diagram that follows.

The work of Zhang (2010) provides an approach to sense-making that includes cognitive mechanisms to explain the “knowledge schema of concepts and relationships and to detect anomalies in knowledge” (p. 259) as well as provide a comprehensive structure to explain the various stages and processes involved in sensemaking.

The existence of prior knowledge is important to the process of sensemaking and the types of gaps that an individual identifies as data or structural gaps; prior knowledge and relationships to prior knowledge contribute to learning (Chi, 2007; Rumelhart, 1981; Zhang, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2008). In the process of sensemaking, it is the information that is in conflict with prior knowledge that poses the most challenge to sense-makers; “they ended up with acceptance, disregard, partial acceptance of the new evidence, or total confusion” (Zhang, 2010, p. 256). This concept is similar to Dervin’s (1983) explanation of the gap and Weick’s (1995) description of the perceived states and existing states being in conflict.

This study applied Weick’s (1995, 2005), Dervin’s (1983) and Zhang’s (2010) frameworks of sensemaking to participant interview questions and to the analysis of the data collected from the participants. Weick’s (1995, 2005) framework predominates in the
data analysis because it is the most established and utilized framework in research and practice.

**Summary**

The two major literature areas of parental involvement and sensemaking frame this study in the context of title-one elementary school principal leadership. This literature review targeted the phenomenon of parental involvement, principal leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in schools, and sensemaking theory. The literature review supports the purpose, significance, and design of this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As required by qualitative research traditions, this chapter details the research methods, study design, strategies of data analysis, population of interest, as well as researcher positioning and the study’s trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As previously stated, for this heuristic phenomenological qualitative study, a social constructivist worldview and postmodern perspective is applied. This heuristic phenomenological study primarily focuses on Title I elementary principals’ influences, commitments and sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents with a secondary focus on the phenomenon of low-income and minority parental involvement.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to research the influences affecting principal sensemaking and leadership of Title I elementary principals who are committed to engaging low-income and minority parents. Learning more about elementary principal sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents provides frames of reference regarding explicit sensemaking in efforts to engage low-income and minority parents. The principals’ sensemaking is presented as their “stories” or narratives and capture the principal’s process to make sense. In addition, the study explored principals’ and schools’ commitments, policy, and practice to engage low-income and minority parents as well as examine low-income and minority parent responses related to parental involvement.
The following two questions frame the broad areas of my inquiry.

(1) *What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?*

(2) *What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents in their schools; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?*

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is framed by low-income, minority parental involvement approaches, sensemaking theory and principal actions as applied to Title I elementary principal leadership. A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, beliefs, and theories to support and inform the design of your study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A conceptual framework, as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studies - the key factors, concepts, or variables - and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). The conceptual framework of this study, in graphic form, is found in *Appendix D*. Maxwell (2005) asserts a conceptual framework is “a tentative theory of the phenomena” (p. 33) and “is something that is constructed, not found” as well as “incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that you build, not something that exists ready-made” (p. 35). The conceptual framework of this study incorporates the literature regarding inputs influencing principal decisions and sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents, overviews of the sensemaking approaches framing this study, and possible outputs or actions of principal sensemaking.

The conceptual framework includes research related to: a) parental involvement; b)
sensemaking theory; c) influences related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents; d) commitments, policies, and practice to engage low-income and minority families; and d) socio-cultural barriers frame this study. From these different bodies of literature, I created a conceptual framework guide this study. This conceptual framework is figure 3.1 on the following page.

Pulling from the reviewed literature found in chapter two, the conceptual framework describes the inputs (knowledge, experiences, beliefs, expectations, realities) that influence principals. These inputs are utilized to varying degrees as principals make sense out of the inputs and make decisions regarding potential actions. The spiral of the sensemaking indicates that the inputs work to inform each other and/or guide the principal to bridge gaps or solve problems related to engaging low-income and minority parents. The out puts are the potential results or actions from principal sensemaking to effectively engage parents. A discussion of the literature supporting this conceptual framework is found following this graphic.
Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework illustrates the theory and process of sensemaking in the context of principal practice to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
**Parental Involvement.** Frameworks associated with parental involvement explain parental involvement through theories, models, dimensions, and other types of frameworks to illustrate the phenomenon of parental involvement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1995b; Green, et al., 2007; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001; Walker, et al., 2005; Weiss, et al., 2010). Collectively, these varying frameworks provide structures to the phenomenon of parental involvement to inform policy and practice help to frame this study. The frameworks associated with parental involvement are utilized to understand principals’ perceptions and meanings associated with parental involvement.

**Sensemaking.** This study adopted the work of Weick (1995; Weick et al., 2005), Dervin (1983), and the recent work of Zhang et al. (2008) to 1) study how Title I elementary principals negotiate the process of sensemaking; 2) to guide the qualitative methods used to collect data; 3) to inform the questions asked of the participants; and 4) to analyze the data.

Sensemaking approaches provide a method from which to study the cognitive mechanisms involved in principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents. More specifically, the use of sensemaking approaches enabled principal participants to reflect on and isolate influences, problems, initiatives, and effects related to personal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents. A vast amount of information barrages principals related to student academics, parental involvement, low-income and minority families, as well as volumes related to principal leadership; however, absent from the barrage is information specifically designed to help principals figure out how to
navigate and negotiate engaging low-income and minority parents in two-way communication about school academics and school activities with a resulting effect of increased student success. Many principals have the desire and maybe even the commitments to engage low-income and minority parents, but the number of principals whom have figured out how to do it well are somewhat scarce. Little information or guidance is available for principals whom have the commitments, want to take action and successfully engage low-income and minority parents. Principals whom have done it well and even those whom have tried by achieved minimal success have learned and gained insight to further direct their efforts. These principals have identified gaps in understanding, problems, solutions, influences and impacts that could guide other principals’ sensemaking and actions to engage low-income and minority parents.

Often individuals whom are really strong in a specific area are considered to be “gifted” or have an innate “knowing” that is unique and special to that individual. It may be that those individuals have experienced and engaged in sensemaking for longer, more in-depth, or with more focus and attention to the problem than other individuals; therefore, these individuals are operating at a different level of “knowing” based on extended efforts to understand the riddle and bridge the gap to get to a resolution or solution. A sensemaking approach is the best way in which to elevate the unobservable cognitive mechanisms related to this “knowing” to a higher level of consciousness in order to identify and articulate principal narratives to include influences and actions. Sensemaking is not a linear process; sensemaking is interwoven and tangled in our thinking. Sensemaking models enabled this study to unlock principal participants lived experiences and construct cognitive maps and narratives to describe their paths to engage low-income and minority
parents. These paths are covered in commitments and beliefs, actions and supports, barriers and sabotage, success and failures, and many hours of questioning and uncertainty as the principal worked to make sense of the why, what, and how of engaging low-income and minority parents.

By using a sensemaking theory frame applied to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents, this study seeks to make the intangible, unobservable process of sensemaking tangible and observable for the purpose of study and to guide other principals’ thinking and actions related to engaging low-income and minority parents. Sensemaking theory and methodology informed all aspects of this study.

**Overview of Methodology**

For this heuristic phenomenological qualitative study, a social constructivist worldview and postmodern perspectives are applied. Qualitative research studies examine and develop theories focused on the role of meaning and interpretations; “Qualitative research engages with the complexity of analyzing human action in terms of meanings” (Ezzy, p. 29, 2002). Qualitative research is naturally occurring, grounded in a local context, focused on a case, rich and holistic, collected over a sustained period, and centered on meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Other characteristics of qualitative research procedures include as emergent design in a natural setting with the researcher as the key instrument focused on “learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” (Creswell, 2009, p.175). Additionally, qualitative research includes multiple data sources, inductive data analysis, theoretical orientations, and is a form of interpretive inquiry (Creswell, 2009). See Appendices N, O, P, Q, and R for IRB-1 documents and approval.
The core features of most qualitative studies, as asserted by Bogdan and Biklin (2003), establish a degree of naturalistic context, use descriptive data, focus on process, use inductive data analysis and seek meaning. Qualitative data placed an emphasis on “lived experiences” and is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process, and structures of their lives” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This research study collected qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews, observations, concept map documents, and school related documents.

**Phenomenological Study.** A phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). As a phenomenologist, I focused on describing principal participants’ lived experiences of sensemaking to engaging low-income and minority parents with the basic purpose “to reduce individual experiences” and develop “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). I identified themes in the stories and narratives of principals’ commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents.

**Heuristic Research.** I am able to use a heuristic research approach because of my personal work as an administrator in Title I buildings in two different states. This requirement, as found in Moustakas (1990) work, states “In heuristic research, the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated...the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in vital, intense, and full way” (p. 14). My personal experience and struggles as an elementary school principal to engage low-income and minority parents strengthen my position in this study.

Heuristic research presented by Moustakas (1990) involves six phases of research
that includes the seven concepts of identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and the internal frame of reference. These concepts guide the heuristic researcher through the six phases of research. I identified with the focus of inquiry when I immerses myself in the question, connected with it, and developed a deeper understanding of the question. Developed a deeper understanding through open-ended investigation, self-directed learning, and active engagement in the research (Moustakas, 1990). This concept requires direct personal experience with the phenomenon to be able to identify with it and the experiences of others.

I then entered into self-dialogue with the phenomenon to recognize connection and experiences with the question. The concept of tacit knowing compelled me to embrace my ways of knowing that are not explicit. Explicit knowledge is a dimension of knowledge that is formalized and codified and refers to “know what” or “know that” and tacit knowledge refers to “know how” which is inarticulate, intuitive knowledge that is largely experienced based (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Polanyi, 1962; Ryle, 1949). Tacit knowing is “the things we know but cannot tell” (Polanyi, 1962, p. 601)

Related to tacit knowing, the heuristic researcher engages in the concepts of intuition, indwelling, and focusing. Intuition is a feature of searching for knowledge that allows the researcher to include perceptions and understandings as part of knowledge. The concept of indwelling is “the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality of theme of human experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). The turning inward compels the researcher to be as intimate as possible with the human experience of the phenomenon. The next concept of focusing compels the researcher to recognize elements of the experience that were initially
not a part of her consciousness (Moustakas, 1990). The concept of focusing is learning outside of self through the experiences of others.

The final concept of heuristic research is internal frame of reference. This concept requires the researcher to respect and honor the individuals’ internal frames of reference related to the question in order to safeguard the individuals experiences, perceptions, feelings, etc. “To know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of any human experience, one depends on the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26). As researcher, I must push myself to understand the experience from the perspective of the other.

The seven concepts and six phases of heuristic research, as presented by Moustakas (1990) guided this study and the basic research design. The six phases of a heuristic research design are: 1) initial engagement; 2) immersion into the topic and question; 3) incubation; 4) illumination; 5) explication; and 6) culmination of research in a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher explains in the data collection section how she moved through the six phases of heuristic research during the design and implementation of this research study.

The first phase of heuristic research is initial engagement. In this beginning phase, the researcher is to “discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). The researcher engages in self-critique, self-dialogue and self-reflection and explores their tacit knowledge in the process of developing the research question.

The second phase of heuristic research is immersion. In this phase, the researcher
immerses into the topic and question in order to situate oneself as part of the study. In this phase Moustakas (1990) asserts the researcher must live the question and engage in “spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues and hunches, and drawing form the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension” (p. 28). Immersion requires the researcher be intimate with the research and question and work from this position.

The third phase of heuristic research is incubation. During this phase, the researcher halts the immersion phase and intentionally detaches from the question. “The period of incubation allows the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

The fourth phase of heuristic research is illumination. Illumination requires the researcher to embrace and illuminate tacit knowledge and intuition as part of the research process.

This phase requires a certain level of reflection but still allows for mysterious workings of the tacit knowledge and in that foster the new awareness, modification of the existing understanding, a new discovery of an experience that was not directly present in the researcher's consciousness” (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010, p. 1578)

The researcher utilizes the concepts of tacit knowing and intuition in the illumination phase.

The fifth phase of heuristic research is explication. During this phase, the researcher engages in deep examination of themes, findings, and other qualities resulting from the illumination phase. During explication, a picture of the phenomenon starts forming as the
researcher engages in *indwelling, focusing, and internal frame of reference* (Moustakas, 1990) and the uniqueness of the experiences becomes apparent.

The sixth and final stage of heuristic research is *creative synthesis*. In this final stage, the researcher integrates the findings, themes, data, and qualities developed in the *explication* phase. *Creative synthesis* utilizes tacit and intuitive understanding so that a “comprehensive expression of the essence of the phenomenon investigated is realized” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). The form the creative synthesis takes is not significant, just that the creative synthesis results in the phenomenon being realized.

**Social Constructivist and Postmodern Worldview.** This study embodies a social constructivist worldview where individuals “seek understanding of the world in which they live and work”, “develop subjective meanings of their experiences”, and “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Using a social constructivist worldview, the researcher understands subjective meanings are “negotiated socially and historically” that the meanings are “formed through interactions with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Similarly, the basic concept in postmodernism is that “knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). Title I elementary principals construct, negotiate, and reconstruct during sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents as mediated by their lived experiences and social and historical influences; therefore, utilizing postmodern and constructivist perspectives is appropriate for this heuristic phenomenological study.

**Summary.** The qualitative features found in qualitative research studies and
heuristic inquiry are evident in this study of Title I elementary principals’ sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents. This study was situated in the natural, real-world context of schools and low-income and minority families. The researcher, as self, is a key instrument focused on learning the meaning that principal participants hold about sensemaking and engaging low-income and minority families as well as the meaning that parent participants hold about parental involvement. This study attends to both the negotiated process and theoretical features of sensemaking. This study collected descriptive data in the form of semi-structured interviews, observation notes, concept maps, and school related documents. The data was analyzed by studying the words and descriptions of the participants to capture ideas and gain an understanding of their “lived experiences”.

Researcher Positioning

My feminist view of the world includes the influence of my white, middle class, conservative, Christian upbringing. I grew up in a central Illinois town with a population of forty thousand to include a twenty percent minority population. I grew up with some racial and ethnic diversity, but to a limited degree. I left this environment after college to begin a teaching career in a central Texas community with a population of one hundred thousand. This school district serviced this community as well as a large military instillation. The majority of the students were Black and Hispanic, with sixty percent mobility and over sixty percent low-income. My world of upbringing did not prepare me to understand the world of many of my students and their families.

I clearly remember my thoughts as a novice educator and the role I expected the parents of my students to take in their child’s education. My expectations of these parents
paralleled the role my parents took in my education. As a first year teacher in a district with over sixty percent minority; sixty percent low income; and sixty percent military children; I began to realize the biases I held and the faulty assumptions I made about what "good parents" do to help their children succeed in school. I realized I lacked certain cultural sensitivities. This was the start of my journey to learn and embrace cultural sensitivities and to use “empathetic imagination” related to the lives and experiences of my students and their families.

In the third year of my teaching, I realized the impact and importance of the relationship teachers have with students and the power of positive relationships. I worked in this community nine years in Title I schools. Six years I worked as a secondary teacher and three years as an elementary assistant principal. During these nine years, I earned a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction and an administrative certificate. I continued to work to understand cultural differences and the impact of relationships related to student success.

Twenty years from the start of the researcher’s teaching career, I am still guided by my belief in the importance of cultural sensitivities and the power of relationships. After working in Texas, I returned to my hometown and taught high school for two years, followed by five years at a university as a director of student teaching. I then spent one year as interim elementary principal in a Title I elementary school. Additionally, I became a student in a doctoral program in Educational Organization and Leadership.

My hometown demographics changed during the nine years of my absence. The year I was interim principal I worked in a Title I elementary school that was sixty percent low income and forty percent Black. It was in this position that I became concerned with the
limited number of low-income and/or minority parents engaged in the school process. I began to look at school practices and ways to engage low-income and/or minority parents in communication and relationships with school personnel. During this time, I developed the desire to understand the phenomenon of low-income and/or minority parental involvement. My efforts to engage low-income and minority parents resulted in some success, but there was no real change in the culture or climate of the school related to engaging low-income and minority parents.

During my studies and experience as a full time graduate student, I continue to seek opportunities to develop cultural sensitivities, address issues of equity and access, and study the impact of relationships on student success. Currently, I am a project manager for a research grant studying peer relationships, bullying, and classroom ecologies.

Today, I clearly remember the young twenty-two year old teacher that began teaching twenty years ago. There was so much I did not understand. I have strived to understand the influences created by being a white, middle class, conservative, female in our society.

My doctoral studies exposed me to critical theories and perspectives that compelled me to challenge myself on a deeper level and begin to internalize the ways in which certain populations are marginalized and silenced. Today, I challenge my own place in the world and ask myself tough questions about cultural sensitivities and social justice, as well as the availability of equity and access of educational and employment opportunities for public school students and their parents.

Beyond my desire to gain cultural sensitivities and be a champion for social justice, as an educational leader, I ascribe to democratic leadership practice. I believe democratic
leadership is a way of creating a space for school stakeholders to have ownership and
voice, to engage in dialogue and express agreement and/or disagreement in the aggressive
pursuit of what is in the best interest of our students. I believe democratic leadership
practices lead to equity and access. My commitments to democratic leadership practices
and the desire for all children and their parents to have voice, equity, and access in the
school setting is what creates the passions fueling this research study.

**Research Methods**

This is a qualitative heuristic phenomenological study utilizing sensemaking
approaches and qualitative research methods for data collection and data analysis. This
study utilized various qualitative research strategies to select participants for the study, to
record the data, and to present findings.

**Participant Selection and Data Collection Procedures.** This study has principal
and parent participants. The primary focus is on principal participants, with a secondary
focus on parent participants.

Both the principal and parent participants engaged in semi-structured interviews.
The semi-structured interview was face-to-face and “involve unstructured and generally
open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions
from the participants’” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The three principal participants engaged in
the three interviews during a six-month period.

Principal participants selected for this study participated in cognitive mapping of
factors influencing principal commitments and leadership and three semi-structured
interviews. Principals created cognitive maps to examine factors influencing their
commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents related to
personal experiences, academic experiences, and professional experiences. This approach focuses the respondent on the situation and the gap related to sensemaking as well as informs principal participants creation of concept maps of sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents. The interviews with the principal participants were audio recorded and transcribed.

The principal participants created cognitive maps to explain factors associated with prioritizing low-income and/or minority parent involvement. The development of concept mapping initially came from Joseph Novak (Novak & Cañas, 2008; Novak & Gowin, 1984) as a method to understand how student learned science and later as a tool for teaching science. Similar to concept mapping, a conceptual framework method is found in the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) and an integrative diagram is found in the work of Anselm Strauss (1987). A concept map is “a picture of what you think is going on with the phenomenon you’re studying” and consists of “concepts and the relationships among them” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 37). Different types of concept mapping are found in literature.

One type of concept mapping is variance maps (Maxwell, 1996). Variance maps were used for principal to identify what influences their commitments, sensemaking, and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents. Variance maps “usually deal with abstract, general concepts and is essentially timeless; it depicts how some factor properties of things (conceptualizing as variable) influence others” (Maxwell, p. 43). See Appendix H for concept map documents for principal participants.

The conceptual framework found in Appendix D guided the questions asked of the principal participants. See Appendices F, G, and I for questions for principals, see Appendix J for principal follow-up questions and Appendix E for principal participant informed
consent.

The following sections describe participant selection by the participant type – principal participants and parent participants. Principal participant selection and data collection is described followed by parent participant selection and data collection.

**Principal Participant Selection.** To obtain principal participants, I recruited a purposeful sample of one to three Title I elementary school principals. To obtain principals, the school research form was sent to the specified districts in section eight of the IRB-1. In addition, a letter/email about the study and participant criteria was sent to elementary Title I principals in the specified large-urban and small-urban districts in Illinois and Indiana who have been principals at least three years in their respective buildings. The letter/email asked interested principals to contact me via e-mail or phone. The principals who expressed interest and meet the established criteria were considered for participation. Qualified principals selected from the pool of interested candidates were asked to conduct three interviews and create a concept map. I met principal participants at a secure interview site of his or her choice. I asked participants to engage in a follow-up interview and/or focus group to gather more specific data. I provided principal participants with a small gift costing less than fifteen dollars as a token of appreciation and I sent a letter to the principal thanking him/her for participation in this study. See Appendix Q for school research form used for principal recruitment.

For principal participants, I did not target any specific gender or racial group for this study. I selected three principals from three different districts who meet the established criteria. I did not interview any special or vulnerable groups of people for the principal interviews.
The requirements for participation was that the Title-One elementary school principals 1) have led in their perspective elementary school for at least three years 2) have expressed a commitment to and/or belief in the importance of schools working to engaging low-income and minority parents; and 3) are willing to detail through interviews and concept mapping the factors influencing their commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents.

Screening was determined based on the criteria of being a Title I elementary school and the principal meeting the criteria established. I only contacted principals who indicated an interest via email or phone call.

*Data Collection Procedures: Principal Participants.* Principal participants in the study were interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview protocol at their respective schools. The first interview took approximately forty-five minutes and was conducted in person for Ms. Dunlop and Ms. Stream. Mr. Adams first interview was conducted over the phone. The questions during the first interview were questions about the principals' broader experiences, commitments, and leadership related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process.

The second interview was approximately ninety minutes long and asked more in depth questions related to factors influencing principal leadership and principal perceptions of parental involvement. Between the second and third interviews the principal created concept maps identifying factors influencing their commitments and leadership for low-income and minority parent involvement.

I asked principals to reflect on their experiences and influencing factors related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents through concept mapping.
I sent principals instructions for the concept mapping activity in which principals were to identify factors from their personal experiences, academic experiences, and professional experiences that influence their current commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

The third interview was approximately sixty-minutes and each principal participant answered interview questions related to their practice and the concept mapping activity. Though I sent principals templates to document their experiences, the principals utilized the templates to organize their thoughts and did not return completed concept map templates. During the third interview, it was evident that each principal had thought through the questions, with two principals utilizing hand-written notes. The intent of the concept mapping activity was to help principals further think about and organize their influences, which each principal had done prior to the third interview.

I digitally recorded and transcribed all interviews and sent principal participants’ transcripts to ask if they there were any parts of the transcript in which they wanted to make changes, additions, or deletions. Each principal acknowledged receipt of the transcripts and one principal asked for clarification to be made in one area because she had provided the wrong information related to a program. I made the requested changes.

Once I analyzed the data and documented the emerging themes from the principal participants, I met a fourth time with principals to share the emerging themes. During these meetings, I presented the findings and asked principals for comments. Principals responded to the findings related to their personal understandings and experiences.
The initial proposal had the possibility of a semi-structured focus group semi-structured interview. I did not conduct a focus group due to time and travel constraints for the three principal participants.

**Parent Participant Selection.** To obtain parent participants, I discussed the recruiting of parents with principal. In all three schools, the principal stated I could identify parents by attending school events, distributing a recruitment letter about the study and seek active consent for participation from approximately five to seven parents from each school. The initial proposal sought only third and fourth grade parents, but I changed this limitation after the parent protocol was further developed. I decided to include parents of all grade levels if the parent expressed an interest in the study and met the criteria of being low-income and/or minority.

In one building, I attended the fall open house, parent-teacher conferences, and a holiday musical performance. In this building, I received interest from eleven parents with six of those parents being interviewed for the study. The principal participant in this building was the first to agree to participation during the summer before school started; therefore, I had more opportunity to attend school events to recruit parents.

In the second building, the principal participant agreed to participate in this study three weeks after school started. The principal suggested I work with the parent liaison to identify parents due to the distance the researcher lives from this building with a two-hour one-way commute. I was unaware this building had a parent liaison until after the study began and the principal mentioned this in the first interview. I attended the fall parent-teacher conference day and spoke to the parent liaison about her position and willingness to help identify parents. The parent liaison identified parents for me to recruit for the
interviews and provided a translator for the Hispanic parents. In this second building, four parents were recruited and interviewed.

In the third building, the principal participant was the final principal to agree to be a part of the study two months into the start of the school year. I attended the fall Halloween event focused on reading. In this building, I received interest from six parents and three of these parents were interviewed. The parents in the second building were harder to identify because in the fall there were not many events within the timeframe of data collection to attend to recruit parents. All parent interviews were conducted in person.

If interested in participation, the parents were asked to provide their contact information and return the letter to me. If a parents expressing interest granted an interview, I met him or her at a secure interview site of his or her choice. Of the thirteen parents who granted interviews, six were conducted at the parents’ homes, six were conducted at the schools, and one was conducted at a restaurant. Following the interview I offered each participant a ten-dollar gift card to a local store as a small display of appreciation. Selected parents were asked to conduct one semi-structured thirty-minute interview. I did not asked parents to participate in a focus group as originally planned.

For parent participants, I targeted low-income and/or minority individuals from the same schools with principal participants. In order to obtain low-income and minority parent perspectives, I must directly seek this population. This information about low-income and minority status was obtained through parents’ self-disclosing when responding to a recruitment letter seeking parent participation.

The requirements for possible participation was being a parent the schools of principal participants and self-discloser of low-income and/or minority status.
**Data Collection Procedures: Parent Participants.** Parent participants in the study were interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview protocol at their respective school, homes, or a restaurant at a time most convenient to them. I did not interview by phone. I planned on the interview taking approximately thirty to forty-five minutes each.

The semi-structured interview was face-to-face and “involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants’” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The interview was used to identify basic demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, home language spoken, social-economic standard, level of educational attainment and number of children in public schools as well as parents’ experiences, thoughts, and beliefs concerning principal and school actions to engage them in the school process. I asked parents to reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to principal or school actions to engage the parents with the school and/or school personnel. I digitally recorded and transcribed all interviews and sent parent participants’ transcripts to ask if they have anything else they would like to add. See Appendix K for parent participant recruitment letter; Appendix L for parent participant informed consent; and Appendix M for parent participant research questions.

As stated, I did not use a semi-structured focus group with the parent participants. Originally, I thought a focus group would be possible, but time, travel, work, and family constraints made it difficult to arrange a time with parents to meet as a group.

The data collected from parent interviews was used to help answer the latter part of the study’s second research question: what policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived
by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?

**Methods for Data Analysis**

Investigators in qualitative research become intimately acquainted with their data. Data analysis is on-going and reflective (Creswell, 2003). I spent time with the participants and data through the interviewing, recording, and transcription processes as well as through guidance of principals' creation of cognitive mapping. During the entire research study, I scanned for themes and rich, thick descriptions from participants. This type of study requires the qualitative researcher to analyze data to develop themes through describing and coding information (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Coding is a form of analysis used by the researcher to create “codes”, tags or labels to assign meaning to descriptive information found in a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I initially analyzed the data utilizing open coding to identify possible themes and sub-themes. I continued to analyze data and organize possible themes. Further analysis produced potential themes and sub-themes, which I used to close code the data. I used closed coding to further evolve and support the strength of the identified themes and sub-themes.

**Engaged Heuristic Research.** During this research, I engaged in the phenomenological heuristic study by following the six phases of heuristic research asserted by Moustakas: 1) initial engagement; 2) immersion; 3) incubation; 4) illumination; 5) explication; and 6) creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990).

**Initial Engagement.** When I was an administrator in two different elementary schools receiving Title I funding, I developed a strong interest and passion to understand how an administrator influences the level of low-income and/or minority parental
involvement in the school process. As an administrator, I attempted various strategies to increase the participation levels of these parents.

**Immersion.** I continued to think about the issue of low-income and minority parental involvement even though I was no longer an administrator. In the following years I told my advisor about my interest and this became the topic of inquiry for my special fields examination. As I continued to research and understand the phenomenon of low-income and/or minority parent involvement, I began to developed this research study with the focus of principal commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority populations. Once I passed the preliminary exam and began to collect data, I then became immersed and intimate with this phenomenon through my interviews with principals and parents.

**Incubation.** The phase of incubation occurred between the last principal interview and the start of writing chapter four. The duration of this incubation phase was six weeks. I set aside the data collected. I focused on my family and the holidays during this time as well as connected with individuals and hobbies that I enjoy. During this time, I was taking a break from my research and was just relieved to have made it through the data collection phase.

**Illumination.** I entered into the *illumination* phase by reading all of the transcripts and taking in all of the information obtained. During this phase, I reflected on the experiences of the participants and began to make connections between the participants’ experiences and my tacit knowing through my experiences with the phenomenon. Themes and commonalities emerged as I started open coding. I charted and illustrated open codes to discover relatedness and associations.
**Explications.** During *explication*, I continued to analyze the data and identify the themes to use for closed coding. I engaged in *indwelling, focusing,* and *internal frame of reference* as I continued to refine the themes. A holistic and complete picture of the phenomenon formed when I articulated the findings and engaged in discussion in chapters four, five, and six of this dissertation.

**Creative Synthesis.** I presented the *creative synthesis* in the form of this written dissertation.

**Standards of Validation**

The area of validity most significant in qualitative research is related to trustworthiness. The validity issue of trustworthiness includes the four concepts of confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, a political model of rigor in qualitative research, as presented by Ezzy (2002), addresses ethical issues arising both during data collection and data analysis. This political model calls on qualitative researchers to address issues related to the positionality from which the researcher speaks; the community (academic, political, and participant communities) as arbiter of the quality and value of research; expressing “others’ voice” – provide voice to those who are silenced or marginalized; have critical objectivity by having a reflective self-awareness in order to be sensitive to the voices of others; embrace sacredness – “a profound respect for the dignity, justice, and collaborative nature of the research process” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 56), and sharing the privileges with research participants.

Validation perspectives in qualitative research from a constructivist perspective look to four primary criteria for determination: credibility, transferability, dependability,
and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),
credibility is the confidence in the truth of the findings; transferability is showing that the
findings have applicability in other contexts; dependability is showing that the findings are
consistent and could be repeated; and confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent
to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not research bias,
motivation, or interest.

The techniques used in this study to establish credibility are prolonged engagement,
interviews, iterative questioning, observations, peer debriefing, and member checking. The
principal participants' engaged in three interviews with me over an average of seven
months. During the interviews, I returned to previous questions and rephrased questions
to check against prior answers and to extract additional details. I also conducted a
minimum of three observations for each participant. As I conducted the research and
analyzed data, I spoke with other administrators, graduate students, and my dissertation
director about my study. I conducted follow-up interviews with principal participants to
share the study's initial findings and emerging themes. Credibility was established based
on the actions described.

The techniques used in this study to establish transferability are through purposeful
sampling; writing the study with thick, rich descriptions; providing sufficient contextual
information about the participants and school site; and conveying the boundaries of the
study. The findings chapters describe the participants and school sites in detail to include
demographics and locations. I provide the boundaries of the study such as the number of
participants, criteria for selection, data collection methods, and duration of the study.
Transferability is established based on these actions described.
The technique used in this study to determine dependability based on establishing credibility and through the research design and its implementation; the operational detail of data gathering; and reflective appraisal of the project with an inquiry audit. I evaluated the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken in the study. Dependability is established based on these actions described.

The technique used in this study to determine confirmability is a confirmability audit and triangulation. I analyzed the findings, interpretations, and recommendations confirming that the data is coherent and supports the product. The data was triangulated through participant interviews, observations, member checking, multiple participants, and my personal experiences and qualifications as an educator and researcher.

**Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this qualitative study is the proxy of low-income and/or minority parental involvement. This limitation creates a pre-determined pool of principal participants working in a Title I elementary school because not all schools are Title I and serving low-income and minority populations. Similarly, this limitation creates a pre-determined pool of parent participants because this study seeks to interview low-income and/or minority parents. The inquiry of parent participants was utilized to get an understanding of parent perceptions about parental involvement and not to be evaluative in nature related to the principal leadership or school practices. The study’s primary focus is on principal sensemaking with a secondary focus on the policy and practice of the principals and schools to engage low-income and minority parents.

A second limitation is the participant sample size. Three principal participants and thirteen parent participants affect the degree to which findings are generalizable. A third
limitation is the duration of the study over the course of one year due to the time constraints of data collection and analysis as part of a doctoral program.

**Delimitations of the Study**

One delimitation of this study is the criteria used to select principal participants: 1) being located in Illinois and Indiana; 2) having at least three full years of experience in that building and; 3) having commitments to engage low-income and minority parents. This study is interested to examine principals who have been a part of the community and culture of the school long enough to learn and understand the building, have relationships with building stakeholders and be embedded in the culture; principals whom have commitments to and made attempts to engage low-income and minority parents; and principals in buildings within a reasonable proximity to the researcher’s residence to reduce the burden related to cost of travel and time away from family to collect data.

A second delimitation is specific selection of willing parent participants whom self-report having a low-income and/or minority status. Low-income and minority parent perspectives are the ones being sought to understand principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents; therefore, only parents self-disclosing this status were selected.

A third delimitation was intentional design of non-evaluative questions regarding parent perspectives of principal participants leadership behaviors. The study design was intentional to not compare the principal participants’ self-reported leadership behaviors to parent reported-leadership behaviors. The study questions sought to investigate parents’ attitude, beliefs, and experiences related to parental involvement in schools without having parents evaluate the specific principal participants. Parent questions were designed to ask
parents about the multiple schools and principals they have personal experiences being a parent of a child in the elementary school. It was important that principals not feel as though this study was evaluating the degree to which parents agreed with principal reported behaviors or the degree to which principals were being successful.

**Summary**

This qualitative research study was conducted with the rigor and integrity established as standard in the higher education academic community. Qualitative traditions and methods were utilized as designed and participants helped co-construct the meanings and findings associated with this study. The data was collected from principal and parent participants through interviews, concept mapping, observations and school documents.

The research ethics of beneficence, respect and justice, as stressed in The Belmont Report (The Belmont Report, 1979), was upheld to the highest degree in this research study. See Appendices N, O, and P for the full IRB-1. In addition to established research ethics, the conceptual framework guided the focus and actions of this study through data collection, data analysis, and data dissemination.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS OF SENSEMAKING

The discussion of findings for this study is presented in two separate chapters. The use of two findings chapters is the result of problems faced concerning the most logical way to present the study’s findings. One problem related to a newly developed findings framework created to organize emerging themes. The framework was developed during data analysis; therefore, the findings framework was not introduced or explained in chapter three, as is customary. It proved to be difficult and confusing to discuss a newly developed framework and emerging themes in the same chapter.

A second problem faced related to the duality of the study’s research questions focusing on principal practice and principal sensemaking. It proved difficult to incorporate an analysis of the process of sensemaking within the study’s emerging themes.

For the two reasons stated above, I resolved the problem by separating the findings into two chapters. Chapter four introduces the study participants; the newly developed framework; and the process of sensemaking applied to principal practice. Chapter five represents a more traditional findings chapter in that it presents and discusses the emerging themes from data analysis.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to research factors influencing commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions of Title I elementary principals’ to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The study’s general objectives were 1) to examine two to three Title I elementary principals’ influences, commitment, sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process; 2) to
examine low-income and minority parents views related to school actions and parental involvement; and 3) to make applicable recommendations to districts and principals regarding the phenomenon of principal sensemaking and principal leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

This study asserts that Title I elementary principals must make sense out of their personal experiences, academic training, professional preparation and other information related to effectively engaging low-income and/or minority parents in order to inform their practice. A proposition in this study is that principal leadership for low-income and/or minority parent engagement will influence an increase in student academic achievement for low-income and/or minority students and strengthen a life trajectory leading to future success, healthier lives, and continued education.

This study’s importance is found in the potential that findings will inform principal practice and provide a deeper understanding of the influences and sensemaking of principals who effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Research Methodology and Questions**

This study interviewed and observed three elementary principals and thirteen parents from large-urban or small-urban settings in the states of Illinois and Indiana. All three schools receive Title I funding for high percentages of students with low socio-economic status. During a six-month period, I conducted three interviews with each principal and followed-up with each principal for member checking. I also observed principals in normal school day activities; after school activities; parent-teacher conferences; and parent committee meetings. Additionally, principals engaged in a concept
mapping activity in which principals identified factors related to personal experiences, academic experiences, and professional experiences influencing their commitments to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in their practice. The concept mapping activity was in preparation for the third interview. The interview questions, concept mapping and focused observations aligned with the following two questions that frame this study.

(1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?

(2) What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents in their schools; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?

Principal Participants’ Demographics

The principals are from large-urban and small-urban settings in Illinois and Indiana. The principal in the large-urban setting is Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams is principal at an elementary school with three hundred students and twelve grade-level classrooms. The school is a kindergarten through sixth grade building in a community with a population greater than 800,000 people. The school demographics include students who are 94% low socio-economic status with 56% mobility. The student population is 48% Hispanic; 45% Black; 3% White; 3% multi-racial; and 1% Native American. Mr. Adams has been school principal for five years. He is in his late thirties and has one elementary school aged child. Mr. Adams grew up in a small, rural community with five thousand residents. Mr. Adams stated his hometown was all white and middle class. He began his education career as an elementary teacher in the same large-urban district where today he is an elementary principal.
Ms. Stream is an elementary principal in a kindergarten through fifth grade building in a small-urban setting with a population of forty-five thousand people. The school has approximately four hundred students and twenty grade-level classrooms. Ms. Stream has been principal here for four years. The school demographics include students who are seventy-five percent low socio-economic status with thirty-three percent mobility. The student population is forty-two percent Black; thirty-nine percent White; eight percent Hispanic; and ten percent multi-racial. Ms. Stream is a black female in her early forties with one adult child. Ms. Stream grew up in the same community where she is principal. She began her education career in the community as a Head Start teacher. She describes herself as growing up low-income and was first in her family to go to college.

Ms. Dunlop is the elementary principal in a kindergarten through fifth grade building with approximately three hundred students and eighteen grade-level classrooms. She has been the school principal for five years. This small-urban community consists of two cities in close proximity to each other with a combined population of one hundred twenty-five thousand people. The school demographics include students who are sixty-one percent low socio-economic status with eleven percent mobility. The student population is fifty-three percent White; twenty-eight percent Black; nine percent multi-racial, five percent Hispanic; and five percent Asian. Ms. Dunlop is a white female in her mid-fifties with two adult children. She has been a member of the community since elementary school. Prior to elementary school, Ms. Dunlop lived in Jamaica with missionary grandparents. She describes being low-income as a child when she and her mother moved to the United States and settled in her present community. For Ms. Dunlop, she worked at the telephone company for twenty years before becoming interested in education by volunteering at her
children’s school. She started in her education career as a special education teacher.

The following chart 4.1 presents information about the principal participants and their school settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Participant Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Adams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Dunlop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

k = kindergarten; low SES = low socio-economic status

Table 4.1

**Parent Participants Demographics**

The parents’ participants consist of thirteen female parents. Each parent participated in one face-to-face interview. All of these parents identified their child as receiving free and/or reduced priced lunch at school. Eight parents reported their ethnicity as Black; three parents identified as White; one parent identified as Hispanic; and one parent identified as Asian. Five of these parents were interviewed in their homes, one was interviewed at a restaurant, and seven were interviewed at school. The parent participant demographic information is found on table 4.2 on following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic.</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>F/R</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Number of children and/or grade levels</th>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th># of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Bachelors; working on masters</td>
<td>2: adult children; 1: grandson, 3rd grade</td>
<td>Preschool teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GED; some college</td>
<td>2: age 1 and 3 m.</td>
<td>At home. Previously did in-home care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>High school; Cosmetology school</td>
<td>3: ages 15, 6, and 6 m.</td>
<td>At home. Worked at a beauty shop.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>1: first grade</td>
<td>Television producer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>2: ages 16 and 10.</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>High school grad; attends community college</td>
<td>1: Kindergarten</td>
<td>Certified Nursing Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>High School; CNA certified</td>
<td>3: age 10, 4th; age 7, 2nd; age 5, Kindergarten</td>
<td>Certified Nursing Assistant at a nursing home</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Attended 3 years of college</td>
<td>7: ages 20, 18, 15, 13, 11, 6, and 22 m.</td>
<td>Environmental services, cashiering, receptionist; mostly 2nd and 3rd shift.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shea</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>1: 5th grade</td>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>4: ages 12, 10, 7, and 1</td>
<td>At home; prior employment was in accounting, taxes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>High school Beauty school</td>
<td>2: ages 5 and 19 m.</td>
<td>Works part time at promotional company and a Laundromat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>2: 2nd and 3rd grade</td>
<td>At home; worked previously at a factory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GED; Associates working on Bachelor's</td>
<td>3: ages 10, 15, and 17</td>
<td>Has worked in retail, medical records clerk, and an apartment complex</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F/R = free and/or reduced lunch status. # of schools = number of elementary schools children attended.
Principal participants are the main focus of this study. I initially focused on understanding factors expressed by principals influencing their commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process, and the policies and practices initiated to achieve increased parental involvement. I then applied the process of sensemaking to principals’ interviews to analyze principals’ sensemaking and leadership actions.

Relevant findings from parent interviews are incorporated into the discussion of principal findings. This study focuses on principals, but includes the parent perspective because they are the audience focused on by the principal participants’ commitments and leadership actions. The parents’ perspective allows for comparisons between principal and parent perceptions of the phenomenon of parental involvement related to schools.

**Data Analysis and Findings Framework**

This section explains the newly developed findings framework and the reasons it was developed. The process of data analysis included analyzing data multiple times through open and closed coding. During open coding, numerous categories emerged. Through further analysis of emerging categories, themes began to emerge. The themes were separated into three groups based on similarities related to principal practice. Upon further investigation, I found that the each of the three groups had separate and distinct philosophical underpinnings. To make sense of emerging themes, I use philosophical frames to explain and organize emerging themes. During closed coding and continued analysis, I identified and confirmed major themes and supporting sub-themes. As mentioned, emerging themes and subthemes are discussed in chapter five.
As previously stated, continued coding and data analysis created the need for an overarching framework to organize the emerging themes. In the data, principals described factors related to life experiences and knowledge; values, beliefs, ethics and feelings; and leadership practices. The need to explain the relatedness of certain emerging themes to each other compelled me to develop a framework to connect and describe the differences in the three philosophical underpinnings. I utilized the three philosophical frames of epistemology, axiology, and ontology to organize emerging themes. The three frames provide structure to understand various thoughts and experiences expressed by principals influencing their commitments and actions to engage the targeted population.

The three frames of epistemology, axiology, and ontology are separate philosophical studies in that, “Epistemology, as a technical term in philosophy, refers to how we know and the relationship between the knower and the known. It is distinguished from ontology (what exists, and the nature of reality) and axiology (values)” (Maxwell, 2011). Whereas, axiology studies the domain of values, ethics, and aesthetics (Baptiste, 2001; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Ontology studies reality, what is considered real and answers the question “what is the nature of reality?” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17). It is important to understand that “all axiological issues are necessarily connected to ontological and epistemological assumptions” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 70). The connectedness of axiology issues to ontological and epistemological assumptions suggests to study one area requires the study of all three areas. It is for this reason of connectedness that I chose to include all three philosophical frames to organize emerging themes.

It is important to note that themes emerged first. As I tried to make sense out of emerging themes, I connected the emerging themes to the broader philosophical
underpinnings of epistemology, axiology, and ontology. Further discussion of these philosophical concepts is found in the following sections. The three philosophical frames and emerging themes are discussed separately. In reality, the philosophical frames and related emerging themes exist in principals’ practice to influence and inform principals’ commitments and leadership actions.

**Epistemology**

The philosophical frame of epistemology is used in the study to organize themes related to principals’ knowledge and experiences. In philosophy, epistemology concerns itself with knowledge, what is knowledge, and how do we acquired knowledge. The following definition of epistemology is found in the Oxford Dictionary: “the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion” (2010). The study of epistemology questions the nature and scope of knowledge; how is knowledge acquired; how is knowledge created; and how we know what we know. Additionally, “epistemology is concerned with the following questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources?” (Steup, 2012). Knowledge is created through various means.

As a result of continued analysis of themes, I separated types of knowledge as explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is a dimension of knowledge that is formalized and codified. Explicit knowledge refers to “know what” or “know that” and tacit knowledge refers to “know how”. Tacit knowledge is inarticulate, intuitive knowledge that is largely experienced based (Brown & Duguid 1998, 2001; Polanyi 1966; Ryle 1949). Polanyi (1966) and Ryle (1949) both argue that explicit and tacit knowledge
are not two separate types of knowledge, but these two dimensions are interdependent and cannot be reduced to one another (Brown & Duguid, 2001). I asked principal questions related to different ways of knowing; research questions focused on what principals knew as explicit knowledge through traditional type academic learning and knowledge acquired through experiences and becoming tacit knowledge.

As previously stated, I use the frame of epistemology to organize principals’ experiences and knowledge. Oxford dictionary defines experiences as: “what has been experienced; the events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, mankind at large, either during a particular period or generally” (oxforddictionary.com, 2010). Experiences are part of principals’ tacit knowledge.

**Axiology**

This study uses the philosophical frame of axiology to organize emerging themes related to principals’ values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings. In philosophy, the concept of axiology is the broad study of value or goodness. The following definition of axiology is found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “the study of the nature, types, and criteria of values and of value judgments especially in ethics” (www.merriamwebster.com). Axiologists view moral value as only one type of value and "emphasize the extent to which it is through emotions and feelings that human beings discern values" (www.newworldencyclopedia.com). The frame of axiology includes emotions and feelings as part of values, beliefs and ethics.

The philosophical frame of axiology captures themes identified by principals related to values, beliefs, ethics and feelings. Principals were specifically asked why it is important to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process and about leadership
principles or beliefs that guide their actions. Emerging from principal responses were “reasons” to explain why they do what they do. Many of these “reasons” related to their axiology.

In the field of education administration, the term ethical framework is used to describe the beliefs and values administrators hold that influence administrative practice. “A leader’s system of values, or deeply held beliefs, is the ethical framework from which a leader develops a vision, defines and shapes the change process, and takes action to make his or her vision a reality” (Vogel, 2012, p. 1). In this study, the overarching frame of axiology captures a similar type of ethical framework for principal participants.

**Ontology**

*Ontology* is a philosophical concept focused on studying reality and being. *Ontology* studies what is considered real and answers the question “what is the nature of reality?” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17) and “what can be know about that reality?” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). *Ontology* is defined as: “1) the study of what is, or what exist; the study of entities or things; and 2) the study of what it is to be or to exist; what all the things that are have in common” (T. Lawson, 2004). The study uses *ontology* to organize what is or exists in principals’ practice.

In this study, *ontology* frames findings related to principals’ realities, what is real in their individual context, and what is the nature of these principals’ realities as they work to influence low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process. I use the frame of *ontology* to discuss principals’ realities and principal practice. The word practice in this context is means “the continuous exercise of a profession” (www.merriam-
webster.com) or actions taken by the principal. In this study, principal practice describes what principals do in their capacity as a principal.

**Ontology and Sensemaking**

Principals’ sensemaking is part of principal practice. As previously mentioned, the theory of sensemaking attempts to understand the process an individual uses to solve problems associated with a current disconnect between the reality of what is happening and what the desired state is. In this study, the theory of sensemaking is utilized to attempt to understand the process used by principals to engage low-income and/or minority students in the school process. The current reality in most elementary schools is that the percentage of low-income and/or minority parents involved in the school process is far from the desired percentage of parents being involved. Sensemaking as a theory and process works to explain “how” principal participants are making decisions and taking actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents at high degrees. The frame of ontology includes the discussion of both principal practice and sensemaking.

**Summary**

As I analyzed the data, it became apparent that the frames of epistemology (knowledge and experience) and axiology (values, beliefs, ethics, feelings) direct and influence principal ontology (sensemaking and practice). The principals’ sensemaking and practice is directly influenced by what they know and have experienced as well as what they value, believe, and feel.

**Findings Framework and Emerging Themes**

As previously stated, the philosophical frames organize the emerging themes. I developed a findings framework to illustrate the organization of the emerging themes and
supporting details within the frames of epistemology, axiology, and ontology. Principal epistemology as a frame includes findings related to ways of knowing and what is known; more specifically findings related to principals’ life experiences and knowledge. Principal axiology as a frame includes findings related to values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings. The answers to the study’s first research question are found in the emerging themes and findings related to principal epistemology and axiology.

1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low income and/or minority parent involvement in principal practice?

The answers to the study’s second research question are found in the emerging themes and findings related to ontology. As previously state, ontology is related to principals’ realities; what is real in their context; and what is the nature of these principals’ realities as they work to influence low-income and minority parental involvement in the school process. The frame of principal ontology includes findings related to leadership practices and sensemaking.

2) What policies and practice are principals initiating to engage low income and/or minority parents; and what are the resulting effects as perceived by principals and parents?

The newly developed findings framework is table 4.3 found on the following page. The contents of the findings framework emerged from the data collected from this study and answer the study's research questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frames to Organize Themes</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Axiology</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ways of Knowing</td>
<td>Values, Ethics, Beliefs</td>
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<td>Realities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principals’ Lived Experiences</td>
<td>Principals’ Ethical Framework</td>
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<td>Principals’ Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiences as Parent</td>
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<td>People who Influenced a Child Thinking</td>
<td>Meet Family and Students Needs</td>
<td>Respect for Persons</td>
<td>Social Justice</td>
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Research Questions

(1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?

(2) What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and/or minority parents?

Table 4.3
Summary

The findings framework on the previous page was developed to organize and identify philosophical underpinnings and emerging themes. The entire framework is presented in this chapter separately from the discussion of emerging themes found in chapter five. The next section frames and analyzes the process of sensemaking applied to principal participants.

The Process of Sensemaking in Principal Practice

The theory of sensemaking is part of the study’s conceptual framework. The study proposed that understanding the process of sensemaking in practice would be beneficial to other principals with similar commitments and leadership beliefs related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. I analyzed the process of sensemaking against principal participants’ collected data. The following section discusses principal sensemaking to engage the targeted population in the school process.

In this study, the theory of sensemaking provides a method to analyze the influencing factors of principal commitments and the decisions made by principals to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement. As explained in chapter two, sensemaking begins when a person identifies a problem or there is disruption in activity. Sensemaking begins when there is conflict between the perceived state and the expected state of what is occurring or there is no obvious way to proceed (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005). Initially, there is no clear bridge or solution from the situation, task, or problem and the desired state or outcome (Dervin, 1983; Dervin, 2003b; Zhang, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2008). The person begins to search for answers to successfully move through the conflict or problem and reach the desired state. The person searches existing knowledge and
experiences to identify gaps. These gaps could be in missing information or missing structures (Zhang, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2008). During the time of searching, the person continually redrafts an emerging story; extracts cues; engages with others; and takes actions to move the story toward conclusion. The person searches existing information or structures to fill the gap and determine if information or structures must to be built.

This searching process, which is sensemaking, is grounded in the person’s identity construction and their identity as perceived by others. The solution searching is social, retrospective, on-going, and loops back to inform the story. During sensemaking, the person considers past occurrences and actions, continually seeks a solution, and loops-back to fill in gaps with information or structure – this is “redrafting of the emerging story” (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005). The searching pauses when the person’s story develops a plausible solution to initiate in practice.

The principals in this study engage in sensemaking to increase the level of low-income and/or minority parents involved in the school process. Because the process of sensemaking continuously informs other parts of the process and is on-going, I am unable to know for certain when specific principal behaviors occur; however, I am able to describe actions related to different aspects of sensemaking. I present behaviors related to sensemaking by separating the different aspects of the process as a way to study principals behaviors and discuss identified behaviors. The different aspects of sensemaking discussed are: 1) starts with a problem; 2) is part of the individual’s identity 3) seeks to fill gap or find solution 4) requires enactment 5) is social and on-going 6) is retrospective; and 7) seeks a plausible solution (Weick, 1995).

**Sensemaking Starts with a Problem**
The principal participants’ problem or dilemma is the contrast between their desires to have low-income and/or minority parents engaged in the school process and the reality of the low degree of low-income and/or minority parents actually involved. To find the solution, the principals must figure out how to influence these parents to be involved.

The principal’s participants do prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement and take actions to increase the level of involvement, but principals reported limited success. These schools are not exceptions. Limited parental involvement is found in most elementary schools that receive Title I. The principals in this study are unique because they continuously work to increase the levels of involvement. The problem faced by principal participants despite their actions is that the percentage of low-income and/or minority parents involved in the school process has not substantially increased.

Sensemaking and Identity

A person’s identity is central to the process of sensemaking. When engaged in sensemaking, individuals do so from their personal perspective. Who and what a person thinks he is affects the ways he enacts and how he interprets. This in turn affects what others think he is and how others treat him. His personal perspectives and the perspectives of others affect his identity. “Stakes in sensemaking are high when issues of identity are involved. When people face an unsettling difference, that difference often translates into questions such as who are we, what are we doing, what matters, and why does it matter?” (Weick, et al., 2005). Principal sensemaking reflects the principals’ identity as self-perceived and as perceived by others.

The principal participants influence organizational culture based on their individual personal identity associated with their commitments to engage low-income and/or
minority parents in the school process. Organizational culture is a concept with multiple meanings in literature. The following definition used by Schein (1986) is highly cited in literature:

For any given group or organization that has had a substantial history, culture is patterns of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and that worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relationship to those problems. (pp. 30-31)

Similarly, Bowman and Deal (2003, p. 244) discuss culture as both a product and a process. Culture as a product “embodies accumulated wisdom from those who came before us” and as a process “is constantly renewed and re-created as newcomers learn the old ways and eventually becomes teachers themselves”. The principals in this study influence the organizational culture in ways that reflect their values, beliefs, and ethics.

The principals’ identities, as leaders of the school, influence the degree to which school personnel display the valued behaviors towards students and families. Based on individual identities, these principals influence and encourage school personnel to behave in ways congruent with principals’ values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings.

Sensemaking Searches Existing Knowledge and Identifies Gaps

Principals search for answers, solutions, or bridges to influence the current state of parent involvement to the desired state of increased involvement. Principal participants attempt to answer the first question of sensemaking, “what is going on here?” (Weick, et al., 2005). Principal participants search both explicit and tacit knowledge during the process of sensemaking.
Principal participants seek to identify what is not working, where are the gaps, and why parents are not involved at higher rates. The principals ask questions about what actions have been taken and what could be done differently. Principal participants identify gaps or barriers interfering with increased parent involvement and take different actions to try to reduce or diminish barriers.

**Sensemaking is Enactment**

Principals use enactment as they take actions to directly influence and change the current environment or situation. Principals ask themselves “what do I do next?” (Weick, et al., 2005). As a result of enactment, principals take action. Principals talk to others and enlist them to get to the desired state or solve the problem. Principals must decide if existing structures or practices are available to increase parental involvement or if new structures must be built. Principals must assess the effectiveness of current practices or plan for new ones. The principal participants describe searching for and trying different ways and behaviors to get parents involved. Enactment appears continuous for principal participants.

**Sensemaking is On-going and Social: Communication**

Communication is an essential part of sensemaking because “sensemaking takes place in interactive talk” (Weick, et al., 2005). Principals communicate with others in the school community about the problem or situation. Principal sensemaking is on-going in that it continues until the principal takes action based on the plausibility of a solution to work. All three principals report the use of newsletters and fliers to inform parents. Two of the schools have a district phone messaging system in which the principal can record a phone message that will be sent to all families in the school. One principal is able to send
phone messages, text messages, and email messages out to all parents through the district messaging system.

**Communicating with Teachers.** These principals communicate with teachers about building relationships with parents and communicating often with parents. In all three buildings, teachers are expected to send home weekly newsletters of some sort to inform parents. Mr. Adams has a teachers’ committee focused on parental involvement. All three principals report having expectations of teachers communicating with parents; principals consider communication with parents as part of the teacher’s professional responsibility that can be evaluated on annual teacher reviews. Though it is not required, many teachers keep phone logs that they use to prove parent communications.

**Communicating with Parents.** The principal participants also communicate with parents and seek parental input. Each school has a parent advisory committee that is separate from the parent-teacher organization. I attended parent advisory meetings at two of the buildings. In each meeting, three to five parents were present. The principals commented it is difficult to get parents to attend because of scheduling and family conflicts even when parents have made the commitment to be on the committee. Both meetings had agendas and the principals had prepared to discuss substantial school issues with the parents.

Mr. Adams sends a telephone message every Sunday evening to his families that he records before leaving on Friday. The message alerts parents to upcoming events as well as encourages families to check backpacks and engage with their children’s education. Some parents have commented to Mr. Adams that they look forward to the Sunday night phone message. Mr. Adams has used surveys to get parent input, but really with little success to
inform school practice. All three principals shared similar frustrations trying to get meaningful parental input. Sensemaking is social and on-going. These principals continuously engage with other professionals and parents as part of their sensemaking.

**Sensemaking is Retrospective**

Sensemaking happens when we bracket a situation or a problem to focus on, and we think back on the situation to make sense of what is puzzling about it. Principals make decisions retrospectively about what to initiate to increase parental involvement. As part of principal sensemaking, principal participants reflect on and use past experiences and what they know about their parents and students to inform current practice. Mr. Adams states that he thinks about what they have successfully tried in the past and parents’ feedback to help guide his decisions on what to do next.

*Mr. Adams: A lot of it’s just based on history and past choices. So I base what I do on just history of what’s been successful and what hasn’t been successful. So I just kind of build my new decisions based on the old ones. Something didn’t work; I’m not going to do it again. Or maybe with a different grade, or it might be tweaked. But I’m not going to do the same failing activity time after time. That’d be like not sending anything out for a PTO meeting and then wondering every month why we didn’t have good attendance at our PTO meeting. So I’m always trying new things and new ideas, but I’m also trying to build on the successful ones. If something was successful, for one reason or another, I don’t want to stop doing that either. I want to continue doing that but build on it, or add to it.*

All three principals described the use of past experiences and intuition to help guide their decisions regarding what to try to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement.

During interviews, I asked principals to describe how they evaluate effectiveness of their actions to increase the level of parental involvement. All three principals described the use of visual clues such as seeing more people; comments made by parents or students; and by their own intuition. Each principal feels the school is doing a better job than when
they started as principal, but each also feels they are still not doing a very good job.

Evaluation of effectiveness happens in retrospect and is part of sensemaking.

**Sensemaking seeks Plausibility**

Plausibility is the other basic concept along with identity that differentiate sensemaking from basic cognitive psychology (Gilliland & Day, 1999). A sensemaking perspective views accuracy as being nice, but accuracy is not necessary, “sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality” (Weick, 1995, p. 57). Sensemaking is also extracted by cues from the individual perspective, yet individual perspectives of the situation or events can vary greatly. Situations and problems have multiple meanings and significance depending on the individual perspective; therefore, attempting to get an accurate perception is extremely difficult. It is easier for individuals to make sense out of a situation or problem, and then develop and take plausible actions than it is to discuss the issue until there is agreement on an accurate action to take.

In sensemaking, the solution does not have to be something that can be proven to work. In sensemaking, the course of action or possible solution just needs to be plausible. Because of the concept of plausibility, principals are able to try ideas or take actions that are plausible to work.

**Summary**

Through analysis, I found evidence of principal sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Sensemaking is a process that continually influences and informs itself as plausible answers are sought.
The principals later reported they felt they benefitted from being asked delving questions and prompted to explain their practice. Mr. Adams made the following statements when asked to share thoughts about the areas discussed today.

Mr. Adams: I do think it’s interesting because it is so foreign and I just think like... this gets a person thinking about what you’re going to do, what you can do more, what you can do differently.

Ms. Stream made a similar comment about the hectic nature of life and feeling rushed to try to cover so much. She also commented on the need to take time to reflect on issues such as parental involvement and make it meaningful.

Ms. Stream: You know, and again, it’s that time of year, that I think that we’re all so rushed, and even in classes, you have to cover so much material, you know? And how nice would it be to say, just take twenty minutes and write. You know. And make it meaningful. About these kind of things. Or, somehow identify or try to make those experiences happen.

Ms. Dunlop’s and Mr. Adams’ statements are reflective of their practice. It is in this retrospective phase principals evaluate effectiveness of their actions as a part of the process of sensemaking. Significant themes emerged in this study, found in chapter five, because principal participants were engaged in the process of sensemaking.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explained the newly developed findings framework and analyzed the process of sensemaking in principals’ practice. The newly developed findings framework organizes the study’s findings with the philosophical underpinnings of epistemology, axiology, and ontology. Additionally, sensemaking as theory and process are effectively used to analyze principals’ sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES

As explained in chapter four, the findings of this study are discussed in two separate chapters. This chapter discusses data and findings associated with Title I elementary principals’ commitments and leadership actions to prioritize and engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The data and findings are organized and discussed in the **findings framework**.

As previously presented, the chart 4.2 in chapter four illustrates the organization of the emerging themes and supporting details within the frames of *epistemology*, *axiology*, and *ontology*. The framework organization connects the emerging themes to the study’s research questions that the emerging themes answer. The following two questions frame the study.

(1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?

(2) What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents in their schools; a) What are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) What are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?

As stated in chapter four, principal **epistemology** as a frame includes findings related to ways of knowing and what is known, more specifically in this study’s findings related to principals’ life experiences and knowledge. Principal axiology as a frame includes findings related to values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings. The study’s **first question** is answered in the findings related to principal **epistemology** and axiology: 1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low income and/or minority parent involvement in principal practice?
The study’s **second question** is answered in the findings related to principal ontology: 2) **What policies and practice are principals initiating to engage low income and/or minority parents in schools; and what are the resulting effects as perceived by principals and parents?** The frame of ontology includes findings related to principals’ realities, what is real in their context, and what is the nature of reality as they work to influence low-income and minority parental involvement in the school process. The frame of principal ontology includes leadership practices and sensemaking.

**Epistemology**

As discussed in chapter four, the philosophical study of epistemology focuses on knowledge, what is knowledge, and how do we acquire knowledge. The principals were asked seven questions related to experiences that influenced their commitments and actions related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. In addition, principals created concept maps related to personal, academic, and professional experiences that the principals utilized to answer questions during the third interview.

When answering interview questions, principals reported significant experiences from their lives as factors influencing their commitments and leadership. The frame of epistemology includes significant personal and professional experiences identified by principals related to their families, profession, academics, and influential individuals.

From the various factors and experiences principals’ reported, themes emerged from personal experiences. The strongest themes to emerge were the themes of *family experiences* associated with the lived contexts of low-income and/or minority families and *influential people*. The theme of *family experiences* emerged with a separation between childhood and adulthood experiences. All three principals reported significant family
Experiences. Influential individuals emerged as a theme related to individuals who changed principals’ thinking about the possibilities and contexts for low-income and/or minority populations. Two principals reported the influence of influential individuals as significantly impacting their commitments and leadership.

During the interviews, principals identified some factors associated with academic and professional experiences; however, these identified factors did not seem to significantly impact principals’ commitments and leadership in the area of low-income and/or minority parental involvement. The academic and professional factors reported by principals have stronger philosophical underpinnings with the themes discussed in the axiology and ontology frames, and are discussed in those frames. This chapter includes findings from academic and professional experiences even though themes did not emerge from these findings because academic and professional experiences identified by principals are significant to the overall objectives of this study.

Emerging Theme: Family Experiences

Principals shared experiences related to their personal family as having great impact on their commitments and leadership to engage the targeted population. The family experiences are from their childhood and adulthood. Childhood experiences include memories and perceptions as a child greatly impacted by family members; beliefs, values, and feelings of family members; and the family’s living condition. Adulthood experiences include memories and perceptions as an adult related to their own children; their personal beliefs, values, feelings; personal living conditions; and their work in the field of education.

Childhood Experiences from Family
This study considers childhood experiences as the experiences coming from living with your parents prior to graduating from high school. Principals reported factors coming from childhood as influencing their commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents. Two principals, Ms. Stream and Ms. Dunlop, reported childhood experiences stemming from their personal experiences with or in the context of low-income and minority families. The other principal, Mr. Adams, did not reference any childhood experiences.

Ms. Stream shared experiences about growing up in a family that greatly valued education, especially since her father grew up in the South and did not go to school past eighth grade. Ms. Stream’s parents believed in the value and significance of education; education was power that could not be taken away from you. This importance is found in a quote Ms. Stream shared given to her by her father.

Ms. Stream: *The only thing that people in the government can’t take away from you is your education. That’s the only thing. They can take your cars. They can take your house. They can take your children. They can change your name, if that’s what they want to do, but they cannot take the education that you get because it is in here. It’s in your head. An’ nobody can take that from you.*

Ms. Stream did not realize as a child that she came from a low-income family because her parents lived and acted in a way that their economic situation was not revealed to her in an overt manner. Ms. Stream had friends with less, her parents provided her with what she needed and they had a car. Ms. Stream shared that her mother had four children, she was not married, and the children had three different dads. Ms. Stream was the youngest and only girl. Her parents both earned a GED, but did not graduate high school. Ms. Stream shared these childhood experiences as significantly influencing her commitment and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents.
The second principal, Ms. Dunlop, lived as a child in conditions considered low-income. Ms. Dunlop was raised by a single mother and also lived with her grandparents who were missionaries in Jamaica.

Ms. Dunlop: *I mean, I feel very fortunate. I mean I haven’t always been middle class, you know? My mom was a single mom, and so I feel very fortunate about where I am now and what I’m doing.*

Ms. Dunlop shared that as a missionary kid in Jamaica, she went to school with non-white, under-served and poor people. Ms. Dunlop described the impact her grandfather had on her as he taught young people in Jamaica to be leaders and ministers in their communities. Ms. Dunlop lived with some of her schoolmates and realized these students were just like her.

Ms. Dunlop: *And so being in that environment, and... I was very young, but it still made me feel like that, well, you know, realize that they’re just like me, you know, we live together, we go to school together.*

Upon returning to the United States, Ms. Dunlop’s grandfather continued to work with low-income populations. Ms. Dunlop, as a white student, was a minority in the school she attended upon returning to the United States. The mid-western school’s student population had a Black majority. In this school, Ms. Dunlop felt that no one liked her and would cry about this situation. Upon reflection, Ms. Dunlop commented,

Ms. Dunlop: *I think I just have a heart for the non-majority, or people who are trying to get ahead and, you know, work hard.*

The childhood experiences shared by Ms. Dunlop influenced her commitment and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

Mr. Adams reported no childhood experiences that influenced his commitment to and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority families. Mr. Adams is a white male
who grew up with both parents in a small mid-western community with little, if any, diversity.

**Adulthood Experiences from Family**

This study considers adulthood family experiences to be experiences occurring after completion of high school. Principals reported significant experiences related to their personal experiences as being parents with school-aged children as influencing their commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Principals reported experiences associated with involvement in the school process at school and at home; student and parent interactions with teachers; and overall issues of communication with schools.

The principals’ experiences as involved parents differ; but all three acknowledge from their personal perspective as a parent that parental involvement is important and takes time. Mr. Adams, on multiple occasions, discussed his school age child as impacting his thinking about parental involvement and understanding the reality of the time commitment parents are asked to make in regards to student homework and school related activities. Mr. Adams and his wife both spend a great deal of time with their child related to homework and school activities. He acknowledged a place of privilege because both he and his wife work only one job, they are middle-class with one child, and his child performs extremely well in a school with good teachers. Even in Mr. Adams’ context, he reported feeling the pressure placed on families by schools to help their children be successful. Mr. Adams gave the following response to questions about what influences his commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents.
Mr. Adams: The importance of parental involvement became much more evident once I actually had a school aged child. And how much time it really takes even having a kindergartener and first grader, how much time it takes to sit down and actually get this work done with busy schedules, trying to have dinner, trying to go to athletic practices, family engagements. It makes it much more evident as how much of a challenge it is for us just to get these things accomplished. When someone’s working two jobs, night jobs, it puts thing in perspective of what it takes for the student to be successful, but how much of a commitment it takes from the parents. You might have wonderful parents who just aren’t home because they’re working two and three jobs or you might have students who are responsible for chores around the house, watching younger siblings, or doing the laundry, cooking dinner. So just being a parent of a school-age child has really put things in perspective for the students, what they’re capable of, and all the constraints from the student’s perspective and the parent’s perspective.

Ms. Stream’s context is different than Mr. Adams. Ms. Stream shared her experiences being a single parent living with a low-income status and working multiple jobs as impacting her ability to have the time to be involved at the expected level.

Ms. Stream: So just, the whole dynamic of just being, as a parent that came from low-income. My daughter – you know when I started, I was on public aid, and I know. I was working two jobs and going to school. So, making it to activities they had during the day, sometimes was impossible for me.

Ms. Stream: I used to feel guilty about not being able to go into the school with my daughter. And that people treated you differently when you were a parent that was involved at home and not so much in the school activities of it all. And, that teachers talked to your students differently when you couldn’t attend the functions. And it pained me to think that I couldn’t be at some of those things for my child, not that I didn’t want to.

In addition to parental involvement, these principals reported experiences related to interactions with teachers and overall communications. Ms. Dunlop and Ms. Stream each highlighted negative personal experiences interacting with their child’s teacher. Ms. Dunlop’s youngest child struggled in school both academically and socially. Ms. Dunlop interacted with teachers to help her child be more successful. Ms. Dunlop shared a story of one teacher using her daughter’s work in front of the whole class as a “non-example” of
what to do and how that interaction affected both her child and Ms. Dunlop feelings about teachers’ actions and the impact of teachers’ actions long term.

Ms. Dunlop: *I don’t know if I told you this, but my daughter at the school, my older one, you know, she was...* Her paper, the teacher held up her paper and said, “This isn’t how you write in cursive.” It goes back to what I was talking about how we have the power as teachers and educators to really impact how the child’s school, feeling about school for the rest of their life. And her...She purposely from that point would not try to write in cursive and she, we’ve talked about it not too long ago.

Ms. Stream shared an experience related to a teacher instructing her child with inaccurate information. Ms. Stream instructed her child to complete the assigned task in a different manner than the teacher instructed and then went to discuss this with the teacher. The teacher’s initial interactions with Ms. Stream were dismissive and belittling until the teacher realized Ms. Stream was a teacher.

Ms. Stream: *As the conversation continued, she found out I was a teacher. And the way that she spoke to me totally reversed. It changed. Her smart aleck attitude disappeared. Her belittling comment disappeared, because I’m a teacher. But, I still took it upon myself to report her to the principal, because it shouldn’t have mattered who I was. She should have always treated me with respect.*

Mr. Adams shared broader experiences with school interactions related to timeliness/lateness of his daughter’s school communications with parents regarding events and the high level of parent interactions and participation in the school’s Parent-Teacher Organization.

Mr. Adams: *That changed a lot once I had a daughter in elementary school. And when I go to her events, in her school there’s a lot broader range of socio-economic status...just a big range of people. I mean, you see everybody. So that’s encouraging. I mean, whatever, is it something the schools doing, the communities doing. Is it tradition? Is it just something you do? I don’t really know. Because I haven’t been overly impressed... Sometimes things are given too late or last minute, but people show up... But somehow even though I’m not as impressed with what they’re doing as some of the things we’re doing, they get the people to show up. They get the parents there.*
Summary

Principals reported significant factors related to family as influencing commitments and leadership. The reported personal experiences included experiences as a child in a family and as a parent with a child. *Family experiences* emerged as a theme related to the frame of *epistemology*.

**Emerging Theme: Influential Individuals**

The theme of influential individuals emerged during data analysis. Specific questions about influential individuals were not asked as part of the study. When responding to questions about influencing factors, two of principals identified specific individuals as factors influencing their commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents. Ms. Stream and Ms. Dunlop described specific individuals who left a profound impact on their thinking, which in turn motivated their future actions related to students, parents, and teachers.

Ms. Dunlop described her interactions with an African American, male college student who was working in the residential education setting where Ms. Dunlop was the principal. Ms. Dunlop’s experiences and interactions with this young male and his personal story shaped how Ms. Dunlop engages with struggling families.

Ms. Dunlop: *He was in his early twenties, graduated from the U of I. Very much a... kind of a gang-banger. He’d been part of the gang in Chicago, and his brother had been shot in a drive-by. ...but... his story was just his mom, his single mom, really had to fight for everything to get for the kids. And then they ended up being in gangs, and he was able to break out of it, and he was really good with the kids that [the residential school] had...But... just the way he would tell me about, you know, things that had happened in the city and growing up in the city and not having a lot of money, and being in poor schools, and not having resources. Again, I remember that. You know? And so then when I think about it, I want to give those parents opportunities. I want them to know how to help their kids. And have them come in so they know what we’re talking about. Somebody did that for his mom. You know?*
Ms. Dunlop’s perspective changed because she valued this young man and his story. Ms. Dunlop is influenced by this relationship and it continues to affect her practice today.

Ms. Stream described two separate individuals as influencing her. The first individual was a high school counselor who took the time to encourage Ms. Stream to attend college and worked with her on scholarships and applications. No one in Ms. Stream’s family had gone to college.

Ms. Stream: There are grants, there are scholarships... you know. But if you’re low-income, your mother’s mother, your mother, you know, no one has ever been to college, and they don’t know how to go about getting scholarships. They have no clue how to do that. They don’t know how to fill out the FAFSA papers. They don’t know how to do that. I didn’t know how to do it. I luckily had a counselor in high school – and she wasn’t my assigned counselor – that said, “Okay, look. You’re too smart. You’re going to school.” And she sat me down, and she filled out my FASFA papers. But I’d never been there. Never. I would have never known how to do it. Never knew anything... she made me do scholarships. It was just that one person who cared just enough to make sure that I went to somebody’s college.

Ms. Stream also described an instructor in college who became an advocate for her as a student and her journey to becoming a teacher. Ms. Stream became tearful as she spoke of this instructor’s support and encouragement. The instructor was someone who believed in Ms. Stream and her potential.

Ms. Stream: There was a professor at [community college]...I was working at Head Start at the time – and she said, “This is a stepping stone for you.” And I said, “No, I like doing what I’m doing!” and she said, “This is a stepping stone for you, and use it as that.” And so, she – not knowing – encouraged me to go to [a university]. I didn’t know how I was paying for books. I didn’t know how, you know, those things were going to happen, but it all came through. She helped me with that. When it came to internship, I was nervous. When it was time for my internship, you know, you don’t get paid. And I’m like, “How am I going to do this for four or five months and still raise my child?” How do you do that without getting a paycheck, without having an income? So I was reduced to one job, because I couldn’t do both while I’m doing the student teaching. Mrs. Shaffer stuck cards in my mailbox, she said, “I bless you that you might bless others.” She would have two hundred dollars in there. She would put those in my mailbox. Because she knew I struggled. But she’s seen something in me. And sometimes it just takes that one person.
Ms. Stream reported she thinks about how Ms. Shaffer influenced her and it compels her to want to do the same for other parents. Influential individuals emerged as a theme related to the epistemology frame.

Summary

The frame of epistemology discussed the most significant factors reported by principals related to experiences and knowledge in the areas family experiences and influential individuals as being factors influencing commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The next section discusses professional and academic experiences.

Professional and Academic Experiences

As previously stated, professional and academic experiences did not directly produce emerging themes. The principals identified some professional and academic factors; however these factors have stronger associations with the philosophical underpinnings of axiology and ontology than with epistemology. This section discusses the academic and professional experiences because the reported experiences are significant to the overall objectives of this study.

Profession Related Experiences

All three principals reported experiences related to work and professional life that influenced their commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The reported experiences related to meeting low-income students’ academic, behavioral, or social needs. These needs were met by providing education, supports or interventions to students, parents and/or teachers.
Each principal reported multiple experiences of personal contact with parents and home visits to address students' academic, behavioral or social needs not being met. These experiences helped the principals understand the students' real world and daily living contexts of low-income families and students; and better enabled the principals to provide supports and interventions to help students by addressing family needs. In some cases, meeting students’ needs meant educating the parents; connecting parents to social services; or providing some basic immediate needs such as food, clothing, or transportation. Further findings related to principals’ beliefs and actions to meet students’ needs are found in this chapter in the axiology frame.

Ms. Dunlop shared an experience when she was a student teacher and a family had been reported to the Department of Child and Family Services because of suspected child abuse. The parent was very upset at the thought of losing his child because he had disciplined her too harshly. Ms. Dunlop shared the conversation she witnessed between the cooperating teacher and the father.

Ms. Dunlop: And his conversation that he had with my cooperating teacher was phenomenal because it became very much aware to me that no matter what the circumstances were or how much money you make or any of that kind of thing, all parents want the best for their kids. And we may choose to interact with them [children] differently, provide consequences, that kind of thing differently.

Prior to working as a public school principal, Ms. Dunlop worked as the director of a residential type school with students placed there because of behavioral and/or psychological issues. Many of the students were placed in state care, so there was little interaction with the students’ families. After coming to the public school setting and seeing the families struggling and in poverty, Ms. Dunlop realized, “*its not just the child, it’s the whole family that needs the support.*” She also shared a story of working with a mother with
three students who were struggling in school. In this family there was domestic violence; the family briefly lived in a shelter; and the mother was twenty-seven with six children.

When discussing this family, Ms. Dunlop wondered out loud why some people seem to not get a break.

Ms. Dunlop: *People get themselves in some really hard deep holes and it just seems like, despite all we talk about, community agencies and people that can help, it’s a hole that I don’t know I could get out if I was I in it.*

Another principal, Mr. Adams, shared experiences related to home visits and driving through students’ neighborhoods as influencing his commitments and leadership. Mr. Adams reports driving the neighborhood as he leaves work in the evening to see the students’ world; to see who is hanging around together; and to better understand the students’ lives.

Mr. Adams: *But when you do those home visits, sometimes that really puts it in perspective. I did one day before last, and you would swear that the house was vacant: trash, no blinds, no nothing, no furniture, so it’s hard. You wonder how they can make it to school every day.*

The third principal, Ms. Stream, reported similar work experiences associated with understanding students’ lives as influencing her commitments and leadership. Ms. Stream started as a Head Start teacher and making home visits was required of her.

Ms. Stream: *Upon doing home visits for Head Start, it opened my eyes to what kids actually go through and what their home life is like. And these were all low income families...and of all races, and it wasn’t just African American kids, there were Hispanic kids in poverty, there were Caucasian students in poverty.*

Another experience Ms. Stream shared related to a simulation of poverty presented as part of professional development through the Community Action Agency. This simulation placed participants in contexts of low-income families trying to make ends meet. The simulation dictated to participants the number of family members, bills to be
paid, method of transportation, etc. Ms. Stream stated, “That simulation was probably the biggest eye-opener... I never had to ride the city bus ever – Never!” This simulation is another example of how experiencing the real lived experiences and contexts of students’ lives influences principals’ commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority families in the school process.

All three principals shared stories related to observing first hand lived experiences and daily contexts of students’ lives. These three principals expressed it is important to understand the students’, their families, and their worlds as much as possible to serve the child.

**Academic/Educational Experiences**

Academic and educational experiences post high school such as undergraduate and graduate studies were reported to not have a significance effect related to influencing the principals’ commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents. Ms. Stream reported a few courses changed her understanding about school issues from the parent’s perspective. Mr. Adams reported remembering an activity in a practicum course that influenced his thinking related to parental involvement.

Ms. Stream discussed a special education course, school law course, and statistics course as impacting her thinking from the parents’ perspective. She attributes these courses with influencing the way she interacted and related to parents because of how she reflected on information being taught and applied it to her practice.

Ms. Stream: *It was a Community College course. And it changed the way I looked at Special Ed. Parents....To think about the struggles that their parents have to endure. The doctors’ appointments, the diagnosis, the misdiagnosis. All of those things help to shape...And just to know that sometimes that they don’t even know all their rights. It made a difference in how I talk to a parent of a Special Ed child.*
Ms. Stream: [The professor] taught school law in a way that it opened your eyes to some misjustices. To where she didn’t always teach it from the educator point of view. To where she looked at cases from a parental point of view and why the parents were so angry with the school system.

Ms. Stream: There was a class...it was where we looked at norm-based testing. And this was graduate work. And so when parents come in and they say, “My kid is not meeting or exceeding expectations,” you have to tell them that they have a well-rounded student, because that matters, too... So I look at that differently. And I talk to parents about it differently, and try to get my teachers to try to see it differently.

Another principal, Mr. Adams, vaguely remembers an activity in a teacher education science practicum where he was assigned to design a “meet, greet, make and take”.

Mr. Adams: Thinking back, the only thing I could come up with on the form [concept mapping] was, we did, in one of my practicums, we did assigned meet, greet, make and take. Where the parents would come in with their children, they would work on a science experiment and they would be able to take something home. And I remember, whether it was one of the teachers or someone, was talking about how that was good – that parents wanted to be able to take something home with them...And there might have been more, but thinking back that was the only thing that really stuck out of any importance.

Ms. Dunlop was unable to come up with any influences related to her academics or educational coursework, but reported that people made a difference along the way, but not the coursework.

Ms. Dunlop: Nothing that really stands out. Um...you know I've had people that I worked with, but not in college. But people that I’ve worked with that have encouraged me, but not so much any coursework.

Each principal participant mentioned being surprised that they could not come up with more examples from academic coursework or other sources of explicit knowledge. These principals were traditionally trained and learned about effective leading, teaching, and learning through national certified teacher and administrator preparation programs.
Summary Epistemology

The frame of epistemology presented the emerging themes related to principals’ knowledge and experiences that influence principals’ commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The significant factors identified by principals came from personal knowledge and experiences. The emerging themes of family and influential individuals were discussed in the epistemology frame. The epistemology section discussed other identified academic work and professional factors because of significance of these factors to the overall study’s objectives.

Axiology

Axiology is the study of beliefs, values, ethics, and feelings. The philosophical frame of axiology captures factors associated with principals’ beliefs, values, ethics and feelings. Interview questions related to this frame focused on the importance of engaging low-income and minority parents and the leadership beliefs guiding principals’ actions. The findings associated with axiology are discussed in the emerging themes of altruism, ownership, and influence.

Emerging Theme: Altruism

Altruism is a strong theme interwoven in all aspects of these principals’ commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The three principals consistently seek what is in the best interest of others’ welfare; these principals seek was in the best interest and welfare of their students. These principals know research has established that students do better socially and academically when parents are involved in the school process. For this reason, the principals are committed to getting parents involved, especially the parents of students who struggle.
Altruism is defined as "principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others" (www.dictionary.com) and “the unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (www.merriam-webster.com). For these principals, caring about students’ welfare equates to taking care of needs. The following quotes illustrate principal participants’ altruistic behaviors.

Ms. Stream: *I just believe... It is my belief that when a kid comes to school, and they don’t have the basic needs met, that the last thing when they go home at night is to do homework, you know that’s just not, you know, it’s not logical. It’s not logical for us to think... you know the basic human... Even a dog! If they don’t have their basic needs met, they’re not going to sit and roll over and they’re not going to do those things because their basic needs aren’t met. So why isn’t the same for the kids that we serve? They need to have those needs met. (pause) Whose job is that?*

Ms. Stream: *I surely do appreciate you doing this for me.” But what she didn’t know was: I wasn’t doing it for her! You know what I’m saying? I’m doing it for the greater... you know? For everybody! Because, I get that one, and they’ll go, “Eliza really helped me, and I passed!” And somebody else might call. You know? So I’m really doing it for the greater... the greater good of it all.*

Ms. Dunlop: *And so, I believe that everybody needs a chance and an opportunity, and I really try to go out of my way if I’m aware of it, to try to help.*

Mr. Adams: *I mean just as a person you want everyone to have a good life, and when I have these kids, I mean, I see these students more than I see my own family. So, I mean, there’s a personal connection. You want them to be happy, you want them to be prepared and, I mean, you want them to be successful in life.*

These principals report taking care of student and family needs related to food, shelter, transportation, clothing, supplies, social services, community resources, employment, and medical/dental care, and finances. These principals believe that the basic needs must first be met before learning can happen or learning even matters to students.

In the theme of *altruism*, additional subthemes emerged. The following subthemes are discussed: *meeting needs; respect for persons; and social justice.* The emerging
subthemes are specific beliefs and actions the principals display because they are altruistic and seek what is in the best interest of others.

**Meeting Needs**

Maslow’s hierarchy (Maslow, 1954) of needs distinguishes between different levels of needs. The initial level of needs are physiological and safety needs. The middle level of needs, are of belonging and self-esteem. Self-actualization is at the top of Maslow’s hierarchy. Maslow asserts that all needs leading to the place of self-actualization are essential needs for survival. Principal participants believe the “essential needs” for survival must be met for children to learn and reach their maximum learning potentials. These principals care beyond the “essential needs” and reported examples of meeting physiological, belonging, and esteem needs of their students and/or families.

Ms. Stream: *I truly believe you have to help the family before you can help kids. I think that that structure and that a parent knows what it is to... what students need before they come to school.*

Ms. Dunlop: *And I think after leaving [residential school] and coming here and being in a public school and seeing the poverty and family struggling, and not having food even... made me want to bring them in, because it's not just the child, it's the whole family that needs the support.*

The principal participants and schools work to help families meet many basic needs. When I was observing in buildings around Thanksgiving and Christmas, I noticed many food items in boxes in the office and teacher work areas. I inquired at two of the schools about the food. In both schools, the staff and students bring in perishable and non-perishable supplies to create meals for families who cannot afford them.

In Ms. Stream’s building, she uses money made from teacher vending machines to pay for the perishables. The non-perishables are assigned to different grade level students, to bring, if possible. In Mr. Adams building, the same type of activity happens, but Mr.
Adams also seeks help from community agencies. When inquired in Ms. Dunlop’s building, they also provide large meals for families at holiday times.

In all three of the principal participants’ schools, grade level teachers purchase Christmas gifts for children and families in need. Mr. Adams connected a school family with the neighboring church who wanted to help a family during the holidays. Mr. Adams was already planning on trying to help this family for the holidays and the family had indicated they would like to have a kitchen table. Mr. Adams passed the request and the name of the family to the church. This church provided the family with food, clothing, a washing machine, and a used car. The church did not give the family a table, so a teacher in Mr. Adam’s school donated a kitchen table to the family.

All three principals discussed the methods they use to help families with food and clothing. Mr. Adams asked parents to donate the school uniform clothing that children outgrow to the school so other families can benefit. In Ms. Stream’s building, staff members often purchase tennis shoes for kids to have at school and parents donate clothing. Ms. Dunlop shared that she personally spends her own money to buy clothes for kids and the school has some money for clothing.

School supplies are also available for families at all three schools. During parent-teacher conferences at Mr. Adam’s school, free school supplies were sitting out on the table for students and families to take. These three principals lead schools that work to meet the basic needs of their students. In addition, these schools work to satisfy needs beyond just survival.
Support and Education of Parents. Educating and coaching parents is a significant finding related to meeting needs. These principals discussed ways in which they educate parents on issues such as parenting tips, education, finances, and employment.

Parenting support and education. The following quotes are examples of principal participants working to meet parent needs.

Ms. Dunlop: I had a parent today, she’s actually an adoptive parent. She’s older. She has a kindergartener who has special needs. And she is struggling. This child has a lot of power and she’s at a loss about how to handle her. And so we were able to bring the team together, we gave her – it’s really parenting tips.

Ms. Stream: And I think education comes in a lot of different ways. Educating them on parental skills. On discipline skills. Cause some of them, they don’t know either. So it’s just educating on different levels, and I think I do that on a daily basis. I don’t think I ever stop doing that – telling parents what their rights are. Informing them, keeping them abreast of how things work. ‘Cause sometimes, they just, you know? They say just ignorance of the law is no excuse, but some people are ignorant of the law, you know? They don’t know that. They’ve never had to be in that situation before. So. That’s part of it.

Ms. Stream: There are parents that come in... For example, over the summer, I had a girl who I talked to about going to school. She finished her bachelor’s degree, but is struggling to pass exams. So I told her, I said, “If you call me, then I will tutor you.” So she’s been coming in and we’ve been – the math part just give her headaches. So she’s been coming in and we’ve been going over math problems.

Finances and employment. The following quotes are examples of principal participants working to meet parents’ needs related to finances and employment.

Ms. Stream: And I try to go beyond just what’s here at school. So, if I have a parent who’s saying, “you know, I want to go to school. I just don’t know how.” I help them find a way. You know, I help them find jobs. You know. “Miss Stream, I’m lookin’ for a job. I just don’t know...” You know, I help them find jobs. So I go beyond just their kid at school.

Ms. Stream: In order to help my students grow and mature and be the good citizen that I want them to be, I have to help some parents be good citizens. I have to help the parents get some stable income.

Ms. Dunlop: Right. And there’s another parent who’s come in and I put her on the
So that she can apply online, you know. So again, it’s what they need.

Ms. Dunlop: So, truthfully, last week, I had a parent who I knew was looking for work and I happened to see a sign in a store, and so I was talking to her about her son, and I said, Oh, by the way, do you know so-and-so’s hiring, and she didn’t not know, but she was going to go apply.

Mr. Adams: And we’re trying to give them more things that they need. Like, we have a computer lab now, so we’re going to have parents — our liaison is working on a workshop where they can work on their resumes or do job searches. I mean, we’re trying to do things just to help the families and communities. It’s just one more way to get them in the building, which will have somewhat of an impact on students, just if there’s communication and relationships being built.

The principal participants and their schools work in many ways to meet the needs of students and families. The principals described ways the school helps families with food, shelter, transportation, clothing, school supplies, health and wellness, finances, employment, and education. The principal participants believe you must meet needs of students and families in order for students to be as successful as possible in school.

Respect for Persons

These principals display in words and actions a strong respect for persons. The concept of respects for persons is found in research ethics, moral philosophy and political philosophy. Respect for persons in moral and political philosophy means “a kind of respect that all people are owed morally just because they are persons, regardless of social position, individual characteristics or achievements, or moral merit” (Dillon, 2010). Respect for persons is also a concept found in Kantian moral philosophy asserting, “Respect is due to every rational being, and so must be distinguished from liking, or admiration, or even esteem. It is best understood through what it forbids, which is treating a person as a mere means to an end of one’s own: ignoring their personhood or their humanity” (Blackburn,
Respect for persons requires one to take individuals seriously and see them as a person with relationship to others and not just as an object.

In the area of research ethics, respect for persons as found in the Belmont Report (The Belmont Report, 1979, p. 415) “incorporates at least two ethical convictions: first, that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and second, that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.” Principal participants display respect for persons in their behaviors and beliefs due to their strong sense of altruism and desire to do what is in the best welfare for others. The principal participants display respect for persons because the principals believe it is in the person’s best interest to be treated with respect. The concept of respects for persons captures core beliefs and values expressed by principals in the areas of a person’s value and worth; feelings and emotions; and experiences and perspectives.

Value and Worth. The subtheme of value and worth captures principals’ beliefs that individuals have an inherent value and worth that is to be acknowledged. Recognizing this inherent value and worth is respect for persons. Principals acknowledge and let individuals know they are important and that they have value and worth in the community because the principals want what is in the best interest of their students’ and families’ welfare.

Ms. Steam: Because it doesn’t matter who you are, you deserve respect. These are your children and you care about them.

Mr. Adams: I talk to parents daily, but a lot of my time is walking the halls, working with students. So it’s not a big chunk of my time, but it’s always something I do. If it’s just being outside, and if I see a parent I don’t recognize, I “can I help you, how are you, [who's] your student, what can I do, nice to have you here. “ Just, I mean, it’s a thirty minute conversation, but you’re making an effort to go speak to this person.

Ms. Dunlop: Parents are the experts. The know their kids better than anybody else, and we respectfully should go to them and find out what they know that’s going to help us provide the education that their child deserves.
Feelings and Emotions. The principals believe feelings and emotions are important and it matters how students and parents feel. The principals want students and parents to have positive feelings. Since feeling and emotions matter, the principals intentionally work in ways to influence positive feelings and emotions.

Ms. Stream: Well, the first thing that I noticed that we had to do is get parents to feel comfortable to even come into an educational setting...And so the home visits not only serviced us to make contact with those parents and allow them to feel comfortable to come into a room with somebody that's been to their house. So that made it a little more comfortable for them to come in, and then when we share the academics with them, it's a lot easier, and then when they come in and see it in action, they're less leery at home to try to work with their kid, because they learned some stuff while they're in there.

Ms. Stream: I want them to feel safe. And I want them to feel like they can talk to me about anything. I want that [pause] which is why I became a principal. I was too nosy as a teacher. I'm going to be honest. I wanted to know what was happening with every kid. Every kid! I was too nosy! Way too nosy! I knew I had to be an administrator. I touch more of them this way – although I do miss teaching.

Mr. Adams: Every student can be successful. Not every student is going to excel at the same thing, and not every student is going to be successful in the same way, but every student can and needs to feel some type of success.

Mr. Adams: I try to make sure that everyone feels welcome. I mean, I used to work more in the business atmosphere, so I treat it as a business. They're my customer, so you greet them with a smile; you do whatever you can to make your customers happy.

Ms. Dunlop: And that really hurts me when parents would call and say, “My child doesn’t like to come to school,” or, “doesn’t want to come to school.” And then you have to think, “Okay, what’s going on? What can we do differently and look at each child individually? Because that’s the most important thing.

Ms. Dunlop: And I think it’s... I can’t voice it strongly enough about how I feel about parents – all parents – being comfortable to walk into this office and say, “I want to talk to you.” You know? Or, “Could you help me with...” You know? I think that would be so powerful. I would feel so good if parents would say, “I can talk to her anytime.” Because that’s what I want them to do.
Caring about parents’ and students’ feelings is one of multiple ways principals send a message that individuals are respected. The parent interviews confirm that how parents feel matters to their levels of involvement.

**Parent Perceptions of Meeting Principal Participants.** Parent participants were asked if they had met any of the school principals, under what circumstances, and how they felt during that meeting. Other interview questions asked parents if they feel welcomed or unwelcomed in any of the elementary schools in which they have experience as a parent. The parent responses about feeling welcomed or unwelcomed are presented in the *ontology* frame related to principal practice in tables 5.9 and 5.10.

During parent interview, parents were instructed to respond to interview questions based on any of the elementary schools in which they have experiences as a parent. The following table 5.1 illustrates the parent responses to meeting the principal participant and their feelings. Only the comments about the principal participants are included.

The parents all reported ways they feel or general impressions of the principal participants. Two of the thirteen parents report a degree of dissatisfaction related to principal interactions and their child’s special needs. All of these parents reported feeling welcome in the principal participants school, even the two parents who report dissatisfaction.

The majority of the parents’ impressions are positive related to meeting and talking with principal participants. The parents commented on principals’ behaviors such as being friendly, relatable, polite, smiling, welcoming, good listener, “has a great spirit”, and “is a beam of light”. Parents also commented on principals greeting parents and students daily; spending times with students; knowing the children; attentive to students’ needs; and the
high level of principal involvement with students. Angie commented that the principal inspires her to be more active in school activities.

In the emerging theme of respect for persons, the data shows that principals care about parents’ feelings and emotions. The parent responses indicate that the principal participants are interacting with parents in ways that impact parents’ feelings and emotions in a positive manner.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Parents' Perceptions of Meeting with Principal Participant*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>Did you personally meet and talk to any of the building principals? If so, explain under what circumstances and how you felt at this time. (*only comments about principal participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandie</td>
<td>Yes; Met current principal at Open House. Seems like a “really nice person.” Feels principal is attentive to students' needs. Believes they will have a good relationship. Principal seems like a “beam of light.” Inspires her to be more active in school activities, PTA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Yes; Current school, when son got into trouble she was contacted. Principal explained what happened and asked her what she’d like done. Principal did not make her feel bad. Likes principal; sees that the principal spends time with the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Has met principal and is greeted every day by the principal, but hasn't had a reason to personally talk with the principal. Feels principal is very caring about kids, very involved. Says principal knows all the kids and what’s going on with them. Very friendly. Recalls an instance where principal invited her to join her daughter for breakfast.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>Yes; Current building: has met with principal several times regarding daughter w/special needs. Feels like she can talk to principal but expressed frustration with the slow process of establishing an IEP. Notes that she has a good relationship with principal, but feelings are negative currently because her daughter's case isn't being handled as well as she’d like.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Yes; Usually to introduce herself. Feels affectionate towards all elementary principals she's encountered. They hug when they meet. Feels that the principals feel a closeness to her because she's an involved parent. Believes she's earned their respect and notes that she treats them like &quot;regular teachers.&quot; Spoke to current principal regarding son's reading; say's principal has &quot;a great spirit.&quot; Mentions that principal wants her to join a committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shea</td>
<td>Yes, several occasions. Has discussed bullying with the principal. Has had several negative interactions with principal during I.E.P. meetings. Notes frequent frustration and difficulty remaining calm. Reports having “gone over the principal's head” to discuss issues with the Superintendent and school board when she wanted her daughter retained in third grade. Feels that principal disregards her opinion. Wanted daughter to be in regular ed classroom, but daughter was put in a self-contained classroom. Felt principal and staff were uncooperative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>Yes; frequently checks in with principal, frequently approaches principal with questions. Indicates that principal is a good listener, friendly to all, frequently smiles. Feels very welcomed by the principal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Yes. Met principal at back to school night and open house. Stood by the door with the principal and had a conversation. Felt the principal was very nice. Already had a positive impression before meeting the principal, which was reinforced after meeting the principal. Impressed with the principals’ level of involvement, that the principal knows her son personally, and that the principal drives around the neighborhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Not really. [Translator notes that principal knows her.] Has never needed to communicate with principal, although would probably find it easier if he spoke Spanish. More important to her that she communicates with the teachers and that they see that she's involved. Indicates that the principal is very polite with parents and that the principal always takes care of all the kids.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Yes; met principal when coming in to sign up to volunteer. Has a good feeling about the principal. Liked the principal.</td>
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Table 5.1
Experiences and Perspectives. Students and parents each have individual and unique experiences and perspectives. The principals desire to learn and understand the unique experiences and perspectives of students and parents. Additionally, principals want to expand upon and provide possibilities of new experiences and perspectives for students and parents to consider. The principals want to educate students and parents by providing experiences outside of their daily life such as field trips or other learning experiences that expand their thinking, knowledge, and perspectives. The principal participants believe parents care about their children.

Mr. Adams: You have to be positive, though. You don’t want to say that they don’t care about their children, they don’t care about their futures, so they trust that we’re going to get them to where they need to be – with or without them.

Mr. Adams: I think something else is good is being able to talk to your audience. You don’t want to send information home that’s written on a collegiate level. And you don’t want anyone to feel less about themselves, or you don’t want parents to be apprehensive about coming into the school for any of those reasons. So you have to make everyone feel important and special and welcome. I think that’s big.

Ms. Stream: Because once they [kids] understand that this [education] unlocks the door to everything else, once they get that, then there’s this little spark and flame that you see, and they get excited. Because there’s hope. Because there’s hope that I don’t have to live like this. I don’t have to have kids likes this. I don’t have to do the same thing, so you give hope. And it’s all about hope. Isn’t that the American dream? Hope? That we hope to be something different, or we hope to be our own individual person? Or we hope... It’s all about hope! And we give it

Ms. Stream: So it’s all about trust and how you build relationships with other people. And how, not everybody thinks like your mommy does. And so you open my eyes to how other people think and live, and that it’s real. And it’s not just in a book. And that you’re sharing your experiences with me so that I might learn, too.

Ms. Stream: I’m not afraid to tell them the tough stuff. So I’m able to also communicate with them on their level, but to also help them come up a level... it’s how.... I don’t want to say it that way; I don’t know how else to put it. But I might say it one way the first time, and then... add a little bit so that they get educator issues and acronyms and... “This is what they’re trying to say to you.” And I say it again, and then I say it the way an educator would say it. Because sometimes they get lost in all that educator mumbo-jumbo, and you just have to break it down to the nitty-gritty.
Ms. Dunlop: Well, you know, it’s just so apparent to me over and over and over again. It doesn’t matter who you are, you want your kid to be the shining star. You know? And it doesn’t matter how much money you have or where you live. You want to your kid to be special. And so I just really appreciate that from all families.

Ms. Dunlop: They grow up differently and what’s normal for us isn’t necessarily normal. And who are we to decide? I mean, we know, but… So I try very hard not to be judgmental.

Respect for persons is a concept that compels the principals to be authentic and open; to accept and value individuals and their contributions; and to believe the best in others. The principals seek ways to engage parents and students in activities or experiences that influence broader understandings and perceptions.

Parents Care About Their Children’s Success. All of the principal participants shared the belief that parents want what is in the best interest of their children. Ms. Dunlop stated, “It doesn’t matter who you are, you want your kid to be the shining star.” Mr. Adams stated, “You have to be positive, though. You don’t want to say that they don’t care about their children, they don’t care about their futures.” Ms. Stream commented about how school personnel acts towards all parents, “Because it doesn’t matter who you are, you deserve respect. These are your children and you care about them.” The principals show respect for persons by believing the best of parents’ intents and wanting the best for their children.

Parent participants were asked if they think it is important to participate in school events and why. The parent responses found on table 5.2 on the following page illustrate what parents’ believe about the importance of their participation. Principals and parents reported similar reasons why parental participation is important.
### Parents’ Perceptions of Parent Participation in School Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Do you think it is important for parents to participate in school events? Why?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Yes. Being involved shows you care; teaches kids importance of school; sets an example.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>Yes. You have to know what’s going on, to see what’s going on in their school environment, and to encourage your child to trust and communicate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>Yes. It’s important to know what your children are doing for the time that they are in school and not in your care. Wants to make sure her children are learning and participating. Also important to show that you’re an active participant in your child’s learning.</td>
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<td>Mandie</td>
<td>Yes, definitely. “When you spend your time and energy on something, it tells your kid that’s important.” Believes that teachers tend to expect more from students with involved parents. Teachers and children should see that you are and active participant in your child’s education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Yes. Parents participating in school events makes kids happy; makes teacher see that you are involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Yes; to see how your child interacts at school with teachers, other students. You get a “hands-on” idea of what they do at school by coming to school events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>Yes. It shows that you’re there for your children. It shows that you care about them being in school. It makes them happy and excited about school. Indicates that she feels lacking in the level of school participation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Yes. It makes the kids feel better if mom can take some time out [to participate in school events]. It shows that [education] is important. “My main concern is making sure they’re straight for [their] own future.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shea</td>
<td>Yes. It shows a child that education is important. Shows support. Feels that, by supporting her now, her child will feel like she can rely on her in the future. Notes that kids work hard on programs and their hard work should be acknowledge. It’s important to attend events that are both fun and beneficial to her daughter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>Yes. It shows support for children and reinforces the importance of education. Thinks that participating in school events encourages her children to participate in more activities. Stresses the importance of education being fun.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Yes. Feels like it supports her child. “It helps not only your kids, but all the other kids that are there that might not have... parents that can be involved.” Feels like her child is more confident and that their relationship is strengthened by being involved in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Yes. Feels that frequent communication with teachers makes the relationship more “comfortable” when difficult situations might arise. Feels it’s very important to attend school events, so that teachers “know” her children. Feels that by attending school events, her children will become more confident with teachers and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Yes. Thinks it give children a positive outlook. It’s a way of becoming familiar with teachers, staff at school.</td>
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Table 5.2
Observing Respect for Persons. Respect for persons is displayed in principal participants’ words and actions. During my observations of principal participants, I observed the principals’ respect for persons.

Ms. Dunlop stood at the front entrance during the Halloween Read and Treat event and said hello to each family in an excited and enthusiastic manner. Ms. Dunlop smiles, asks personal questions of students and parents, and appears to make as many personal connections as possible. Ms. Dunlop is dressed in a witches costume and speaks with a crackling voice. On the intercom, she welcomes the families and thanks them for attending. This event combines reading and the social event of dressing in costumes associated with Halloween. The students and parents move to different rooms to hear the teachers read stories and poems related to Halloween. During the event, Ms. Dunlop is fully engaged and interacting with students and families as she mingles with in the gymnasium as everyone is eating and enjoying treats.

I observed Ms. Dunlop during the parent-advisory meeting. Ms. Dunlop was inclusive of the parents’ opinions in discussion; smiled often; used comments such as “that is a good idea”, “great”, “thank you”; and genuinely appeared to be excited by the discussion and the parents recommendations.

Ms. Stream stood at the podium and welcomed the families to the school open house. Ms. Stream was energetic and smiled as she gave a brief overview of the event. As the families went to the classrooms to meet with the teachers, Ms. Stream moved around the building greeting and talking to as many families as possible. She had a happy, friendly and caring disposition as she held babies; asked how parents and other family members
were doing; asked students about what they had done over the summer; and engaged with as many families as possible in meaningful and authentic ways.

I observed Ms. Stream welcome parents to the holiday singing program which was the week following the Sandy Hook incident in which children in an elementary school were killed. Ms. Stream commented to the parents about how special their children are and how proud she is to work with them. At this point, Ms. Stream became emotional. I observed the audience respond in acknowledgement of Ms. Stream’s comments and sentiment. On three occasions as I observed or interviewed Ms. Stream, Ms. Stream became emotional as she spoke about her experiences, passions, or specific students.

I observed Ms. Stream get on each bus before it left at the end of the day. Eighty percent of her students ride a bus. This is a routine of hers to say goodbye to her students everyday. I have also witnessed the respect, care, concern, and compassion she shows for students who are struggling because of behavior and/or academics. I observed her addressing students by name as she walked through the building and stopping to ask some students specific questions about how they were doing.

Mr. Adams stood at the entrance of the building and welcomed each and every family with a handshake and a smile as the families entered for parent-teacher conferences. I observed Mr. Adams have substantial and personal conversations with student and parents. Mr. Adams speaks in a respectful, friendly, and quiet manner. I observed Mr. Adams engaging with students in ways that indicated that the students are very comfortable with him and that they enjoy having a relationship with him.

I observed Mr. Adams walking the hallways interacting with students and teachers as they lined up to leave for the day. Mr. Adams stopped on multiple occasions to ask
students specific questions about something related to academics, sports, or their families. More impactful were the students who sought him out as they stood in line to share something with him. The students initiated personal contacts. Mr. Adams got on a bus prior to the bus leaving for the day to check with the driver because a new student was riding the bus and Mr. Adams wanted to make sure the driver and the student knew where to take the student. I observed Mr. Adams interact with students and parents in ways that conveyed a message that the students and parents are important.

The principal participants displayed a respect for persons as I observed them in normal principal activities. The observations reinforced the emerging theme of respect for persons as a factor influencing principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority students in the school process.

Social Justice

The finding of social justice supports the principals’ strong presence of altruism. Social justice is a process that allows for what is in the best interest of the low-income and/or minority students and families’ welfare to occur. A definition developed by the Social Justice Symposium at Berkley states,

Social Justice is a process, not an outcome, which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action. (http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/sjs/)

The principals recognize and seek ways to reduce or remove social and cultural barriers present for most low-income and minority students and families. The specific
actions principals take to reduce barriers is discussed in the ontology frame as part of principal practice found in table 5.6.

The principals recognize the limited availability and access to resources for these students and families in most of society. These principals state the desire for their students to have successful futures; to have opportunities and choices; to have access to advanced education; to break the family cycle of poverty; and to be able to go to college.

The principal participants work to understand and challenge the historic patterns and paradigms associated with low-income and/or minority students and families. The sub-theme of social justice is found in principal quotes focused on the issues of equity, individual agency, and challenging paradigms.

**Equity.** The concept of equity is evident in the principals’ decisions and leadership actions. The principals create equity by providing resources to low-income and/or minority families in attempts to create a similar advantage for low-income and/or minority students.

Ms. Dunlop: *To be equitable, you know? The parents of our middle class or upper class are going to probably be here anyway, you know? They probably had good experiences they might have more education where they come in and they can interact and ask those questions. But the kids who come from low-income or minority may not necessarily have the same experiences and so their voice should be heard as well. And so I think it’s a matter of equity that we want them in here.*

Ms. Dunlop: *I’m currently trying to recruit parents for a parent engagement or family engagement committee and I really am looking for those parents that are low income and minority to be part of that and to reflect our demographics.*

Ms. Stream: *As a principal, I see every kid on an equal playing field. And so, if you put the work in, if you put your mind to it and you work hard, then it does change your life. It changes your thoughts.*

Ms. Stream: *And tears are running down her face, because she wants her kids to be normal. Even at the IEP meeting, when we were ready to qualify her, she wanted her to be in a normal classroom. She had to go into the cross-cat room. And she goes, “But she
gonna be around regular kids? ‘Cause I was excluded. I couldn’t be around other kids.” She didn’t want that for her daughter. The parents of these exceptional children have needs, too.

**Individual Agency.** The concept of *individual agency* describes principals’ actions to create space for parents and students to exercise power and voice. The principals seek to provide parents and students with agency and to participate in problem solving. Ms. Stream makes the following comment about students.

> Ms. Stream: *You know, sometimes when kids argue that’s just what it is. When you take it into your hands and not allow them to have any power, to me, is the only detriment to a child and a learning environment.*

The concept of *individual agency* is applied to students and parents. The principals’ desires for parents to have *individual agency* was apparent as I observed the parent advisory committee meetings at two schools. The principals structured the agendas and meetings to be a dialogue with parents and to allow for parental input and decision-making. The principal participants ask parents for input and for their opinions regarding their children and school related issues.

**Challenging Paradigms of Parents and Students.** The principals challenge paradigms held by individuals related to low-income and/or minority families and students’ potential for academic and social success. They challenge the paradigms low-income and/or minority families have about themselves and their children as well as the paradigms held by individuals in society. Ms. Stream challenges paradigms as part of her daily practice in an overt manner. The other two principals challenge paradigms in more subtle ways.

> Ms. Stream: *Everybody’s not that fortunate, and so they repeat the cycled. Not because they want to, but because they didn’t have the support. And so if I can be the support to somebody, isn’t it just fair that I give back? Isn’t it just fair that I inspire somebody else?*
Ms. Stream: *When I see families that have potential, to charge that parent to do even more, and say, “Come on. You know what? Okay, I know you see barriers, but I’m going to help you with the barriers!” I’ve had parents that I’ve helped go back to school. I’ve had parents that I’ve helped find jobs. Because once I fix that, the KID is going to come a much more rounded person.*

Ms. Stream: They [parents] don’t. This is normal. This is how mom lived, this is how grandma lived. Because it’s generational. They don’t, unless somebody opens them up and say, “You know what? You have something!”

**Challenging Paradigms of Teachers.** Ms. Stream strongly believes that teachers must experience some aspects of low-income and/or minority students and families lives to understand to some degree the circumstances and conditions facing this population. Ms. Stream seeks opportunities to challenge teachers’ thinking and educate them regarding low-income and/or minority populations.

*Ms. Stream: I think you have to see it, know it, recognize it. If you don’t recognize what low-income is, how do you help somebody? I’m not saying that you’ve had to be low-income, but you should be able to recognize it. People are good at hiding things.*

*Ms. Stream: And they don’t understand that because they don’t see it. And they’ve never seen it. So, you can’t understand something that you’ve never seen or you’ve never experienced. You don’t have empathy for that.*

*Ms. Stream: When a teacher comes in and they say, “Miss Stream, I just don’t get this kid, I just don’t, I don’t understand it, I don’t get it.” “Okay. Do a home visit with me. Let’s go, and let’s visit this...”“I can’t get the parent to come, she won’t come.” “Okay. What day are you available? And let’s go do a home visit.” If you truly care, then let’s go and let’s knock on her door and show her that we care. Let’s show her how much we care about the education of her child. That we’re willing to come to your house, and say, “Hey, this is important to us, and we want it to be important to you.” Even if we have to stand outside the door and have a conversation, there’s an impact that’s made -- that these people care. And even if you never go back a second time. Even if you just go that first time, so you can step foot and walk where they walk every day when they get off the bus, and see the things that they have to go through just to make it even from the bus stop to get into their home.*

*Ms. Stream: You know, when you’re also in public schools, I don’t know about other areas, but this area, we have teachers that come in from areas that don’t have the diversity. They don’t have (pause) they don’t have a lot of low income – there are some that are low income in the towns that they’re from, the surrounding, but not very
many. And so they don’t identify with those kids. And then they get frustrated, when those kids don’t perform to their very high expectations, when they’re not meeting them at the basic need level first. And they don’t understand that because they don’t see it. And they’ve never seen it. So, you can’t understand something that you’ve never seen or you’ve never experienced. You don’t have empathy for that.

The emerging theme of altruism with the subthemes of *meeting family and student needs, respect for persons,* and *social justice* describe the beliefs, values, ethics, and feelings associated with principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents. *Altruism* is an emerging theme that explains the reasons these principals seem to care so much to impact this population as well as all populations of students.

**Emerging Theme: Influence**

Influence is found to be a significant theme in principal reported factors to prioritize low income and/or minority parental involvement. In this study, influence is defined as “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command” (www.merriam-webster.com). As part of their leadership, principal participants principals give directives and state desired or expected behaviors and outcomes, but these principals utilize the power of influence more than they utilize the power of authority. The principals’ use of influence is found in the areas of *relationships; identification with others;* and *setting expectations and modeling behaviors.* The principals believe they impact others’ behaviors by influencing their behaviors more so than demanding their behaviors.

**Relationships**

*Relationships* are extremely important to these principals; *relationships* is a significant theme present in the principals commitments and leadership actions to engage
low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. These principals place a high value on developing and maintaining positive relationships in their practice due to the influence the principal attains through positive relationships. Mr. Adams explains the importance of building relationships because of how the relationship affects all interactions between the school personnel with students and parents.

Mr. Adams: If you’re having a problem with a student, and if I call home and say, “Johnny’s in trouble” or “Johnny hasn’t been doing his work” or “He’s being suspended. Sometimes that parent’s going to come and they’re going to be upset, because the first time you’re speaking to this parent you’re giving them bad news about their child... Now, if you met them at an open house, you called two weeks ago because Johnny got an A on his report, and then you call and say, “He hasn’t done his homework in the last three days, it’s going to be an in school suspension tomorrow.” So you get a much different reaction most of the time if you start with building a positive relationship before anything else happens. ...So you start to build a relationship before anything else, then they’re working with you instead of against you. So relationship building is big.

Mr. Adams: Also, when it comes to any problems that you might have at school, if the teachers already have a good relationship and rapport with the students and with the families, that makes a world of difference. If you say, “Well, I’m just going to call your mom and talk about this,” or “I’m going to call your mom and congratulate her about this,” or if you talk to little Johnny, “Hey, has your mom had the baby yet?” The more positive, personal interaction you can have with the students and the parents, that just makes the relationship stronger.

Mr. Adams: And we’re trying to give them more things than they need. Like, we have a computer lab now, our liaison is working on a workshop where they can work on their resumes or do job searches. I mean, we’re trying to do things just to help the families and communities. It’s just one more way to get them in the building, which will have somewhat of an impact on students, just if there’s communication and relationships being built.

Mr. Adams: I like to have parents in the school no matter what. No matter how I can get them in, I want them in the building, so if we have to start by having a few more social events, then we can, but that’s all part of the relationship building experience, so it’s still positive and productive.

Another principal, Ms. Dunlop, focuses on reaching out to parents and students to build meaningful relationships. Ms. Dunlop stresses she wants to be herself and act in ways
she would want someone to act towards her when talking to her about her child. One way
Ms. Dunlop builds relationships is by finding ways to help parents with their needs.

Ms. Dunlop: And so, reaching out to them gave us a relationship in those, you know, reaching out to them in those areas would bring about a relationship where they were more likely to come in and participate in the education of their child.

Ms. Dunlop: I feel like, you know, that’s another way I can help them and maybe develop a relationship, which would bring them into the school, too. I didn’t do it [help the family] with that in mind, but I think it would benefit.

Ms. Dunlop: And then you try to build relationships. And you know, I try very hard to be… who I am – Carol, not the principal, you know? But somebody who cares about your kid and wants everybody to have a good experience at this school. And that’s how I talk.

The third principal, Ms. Stream, builds relationships with students and parents so she can communicate with them and build trust. Building trust and relationship enables Ms. Stream to influence the parents’ behaviors.

Ms. Stream: But now I’ve developed a relationship with her [the parent], so now I can talk to her about how when she talks that way, he thinks it’s normal. I couldn’t have that conversation that first day at that door. She would have resented me forever!

Ms. Stream: But just because I’ve established the relationship, so now, parents that use to never come to parent teacher conferences. You know I had some parents that I’d never seen them come. And they’re coming, because they see me out there. You know? They see me knocking on their door.

Ms. Stream: I build relationships with kids. And I try to get all 396, at least, to say “good morning” in the morning. So I’m out meeting buses in the morning. I’m hugging kids. You know, I’m telling them how proud of them I am for even the littlest things. And just trying to keep a positive environment.

Ms. Stream stated multiple times the ways she tries to use relationships to influence individuals and to intentionally work through chosen individuals to influence other individuals. The strategy to influence other people in this manner is similar to “using the grapevine” or gossip to spread a message.
Influencing Others through Relationship. A finding associated with relationship is influencing others through relationship. This finding strongly appears in Ms. Stream’s principal practice, but is also found in Ms. Dunlop’s and Mr. Adam’s practice. This finding details the intentional use of others as conduits to influence others. Ms. Stream describes only needing to influence one parent, or one teacher, or one student with the belief that those chosen “one” individuals will influence others to change behaviors and/or perspectives.

Ms. Stream: So the thing that makes me go from looking at this as a whole school to looking at the individual child is, I know that if I don’t touch individual lives... I know that. If I don’t make connections with individual students, those individual students impact the rest of the classroom. So if I have a leader that’s a low-income student – leader – if I can touch that student, and they talk to their friends, then it becomes the whole thing.

Ms. Stream: [Ms. Stream reporting what a parents say] “Oh, that’s Miss Stream, honey. Miss Stream, she gonna take care and she won’t....” You know. And so, because they’re tight knit in their environment, then they will either... they can raise you up, or they can kill ya’! One of the two. So I want to have that good rapport with them so that when they talk to another person, they’ll say, “Oh, you can trust that lady. She’s helped me a lot.”

Ms. Stream: When the parent’s invested, then the kid says, “Okay, that’s important to my Mommy.” First of all, those parents are the first people. If I’m going to do anything, if I’m going to be motivated as a kid, my parent is the first person I’m going to work for and do something for. That’s the first person. My teacher might be able to motivate me a little bit, but my parent is going to have the ultimate say on how I feel about school and if I think it’s important. They are the ultimate motivator. They motivate kids more than anything a teacher could do, anything a teacher could say, a parent can motivate a kid to do anything. I truly, honestly believe that. Parents that love their children can motivate them to do anything they want them to do.

Ms. Stream: So, it is a process of... every year, if I gain two, then the pressure becomes on the one who doesn’t comply.

Ms. Stream: And so, I know, in that piece, that’s been successful. So, then, when the conversation starts between them and the low-income family, then they’re like, “oh, it works!” And so, they’ll tell another teacher, “You know, Miss Stream will go on a home visit with you, if you want her to. That’s how we got this person and this person involved.” So, I think that it’s been a success.
Ms. Dunlop: Well, I think that parents always can be the best advocates for your school, so they can, you know, in their connections, speak on behalf of our needs. So they can be ambassadors, they can be people knowing other people that might come, you know, we might get some kind of resources from.

Ms. Dunlop: Our STEM days, that all came about by... It came about when I had grandparents’ day in September, where kids could invite their grandparents to lunch, or a special friend – a grand friend. Turned out, a first grade boy brought his grandparents, whose grandma works at U of I and I’m not sure what grandpa does, but they’re very interested in bringing STEM to primary. And so they wanted to know if I would be interested... And then, it turned out their daughter works for NASA, and is a PhD student in forestry and also does this NASA work, so when we did our STEM days, we Skyped with her... And kids were teaching kids, and all because of grandparents. A set of grandparents.

Mr. Adams: Well, we have a woman, a parent who is new to our building this year. She’s been involved in everything, so she’s going to be a great resource.

Mr. Adams: But a lot of it, too, is getting those key parents who are reliable, they’re involved, they’re stable, and they can make the contacts to get more people here. So once we find those people, we need to hang on to them, and make sure they’re involved.

The principal participants use relationships as a way to influence others. Relationships are discussed related to the emerging theme of influence, but the significance and importance of relationships is an element found in all aspects of the principal participants’ practice. The emerging theme of relationships directly or indirectly permeates all behaviors and actions of principal participants’ practice.

**Identification**

Identification is a finding detailing ways in which principals seek to identify with students and parents concerning their lives and life circumstances. Identification is important to the principals in order to develop an understanding, and in some cases empathy, for what the students and families are experiencing. The principals attempt to put themselves in the place of others and try to understand the world as they experience it. The
Identification with others affords principals the ability to connect and influence behaviors and actions.

These principals provided examples of identifying with students and families related to socio-economic status, minority status, parenting, and barriers to participation. A term used by Mark Johnson (1993) that captures the manner in which these principals seek to identify with others is called empathetic imagination which is “imaginative empathetic projections into the experience of other people” (p. 199). Empathetic imagination allows a person to ‘participate’ in the other person’s experience by imagining oneself in that position; imagining what it is to truly like to inhabit that person’s place (Johnson, 1993). In this study, the principals expressed a strong degree of identification and empathetic imagination with the lived contexts and desires of low-income and/or minority parents.

The following quotes illustrate the principals’ identification with others.

Ms. Dunlop: My youngest daughter certainly struggled in school. Not only with academics but just with friendship and those things, and so, all parents want their kids to succeed, so… I can’t imagine any parent who would feel otherwise.

Ms. Dunlop: I mean, I feel very fortunate. I mean I haven’t always been middle class, you know? My mom was a single mom, and so I feel very fortunate about where I am now and what I’m doing. I think that you know, you wonder sometimes why some people can’t get a break, and people get themselves in some really hard deep holes and it just seems like, despite all we talk about, community agencies and people that can help, it’s a hole that I don’t know I could get out if I was in it.

Ms. Dunlop: I’m sure that behind what I just said about trying to treat them like I would want to be treated as a parent…

Mr. Adams: Sometimes that parent’s going to come and they’re going to be upset, because the first time you’re speaking to this parent you’re giving them bad news about their child. Many different reasons. Maybe they feel like a bad parent, they fell like they failed. Maybe their upset because they have to take a day off. All the different reasons, they’re going to be more likely to be upset with you.
Mr. Adams: Just from what I see or what I experience, I really don’t know if there’s much more that I need. Or information I need. Talking to them daily, talking to the students, listening to their stories, I mean, it’s more than I can get from an article.

Mr. Adams: But with low-income minorities, sometimes you have to be a little more understanding and you might have to go that extra mile. So sometimes just sending the email out might be enough, or you might have to do a home visit, you might have to call, you might have to call them again, just to keep reminding or give them that information to get results. And you can’t give up. You call that same parent five times. Maybe if they’re not tired of you, they might show up. So we’ve done that, too, where we’re kind of the squeaky wheel. Where some parents don’t show up for a meeting, call them again, call them again, do a home visit. They might come.

Mr. Adams: And these students can’t always be expected to be responsible enough to do this work on their own. But there are also a lot of factors like they’re going home to an empty house, or they’re going home and it’s their responsibility to be the caregiver of the house, or if they have to do the laundry or if they have to make dinner, there’s just not enough time.

Mr. Adams: It’s hard; it’s hard when you actually think about what their lives are like. We know what we see during the school day and we do our best to keep our expectations high, and make sure they have their homework, and there are consequences if they don’t have their homework, but you don’t know what they go home to. If no one’s home or if no one’s there to check their homework, if as soon as they get home if they have to start watching younger siblings, or cooking dinner, or doing laundry. It’s hard.

Ms. Stream: It was me, so I know. I’m not saying I know it all. Because I haven’t seen all aspects. You know what I’m saying. I haven’t had five kids and tried to do it. But I certainly have an empathy level. Because it was me. I was that kid. My mom was that person. My aunts were those... you know? I have uncles that served in the military, and when he got out, he lived in Fair Oaks, one of our housing complexes. That’s who we were. I grew up in Carver Park, a housing complex. That’s where... it’s me! I just happened to be one of those people that had my father and mother’s say, “You’re going to be better than what I was. And they wanted to break the cycle.

Ms. Stream: Because that’s me. [laughs] You just described me! I was low-income! Me and my daughter, I worked two jobs. You know, I was on public aid. I had... They give me two dollars in food stamps. What was I going to do with two dollars in food stamps? It was me!

Ms. Stream: Um... yeah, because I can tell you because I actually sat in this position that I used to feel guilty about not being able to go into the school with my daughter. And that people treated you differently when you were a parent that was involved at home and not so much in the school activities of it all. And that teachers talked to your
students differently when you couldn’t attend the functions. And it pained me to think that I couldn’t be at some of those things for my child, not that I didn’t want to.

These principals seek to understand and relate to the lives of students and families. Personal experiences as well as imagination are utilized to try to intimately identify with these students and families.

**Home Visits.** All three principals mention the importance of making home visits. Mr. Adams and Ms. Stream make home visits regularly as a part of their standard principal practice to meet the needs of students and engage parents in the school process. Principals identified home visits and first hand witnessing students’ and families’ lives as a significant factor influencing their commitments and leadership. The following quotes illustrate the significance of home visits to the principal participants’ practice.

Mr. Adams: *I did a home visit yesterday. A student has missed 26% of the days so far this year. The last fifteen days she’s been excused one day, unexcused four days, and tardy five days, in the last fifteen days. I went to the house, around 1:30. Mom was still in her pajamas, said that she was with her dad, it wasn’t her fault. So, sometimes it can be discouraging, but there might be some schools where, okay, if Beverly doesn’t show up then it’s just one more student in my class.*

Mr. Adams: *I went to the bank and then I did a home visit after that. Five minutes at the most, but it has a big impact. So there’s not a lot of time involved, but I think it’s very worthwhile time.*

Mr. Adams: *I go on my own home visits. It’s not rare for me to … track down some people in their house.*

Mr. Adams: *But, when you do those home visits, sometimes that really puts it in perspective. I did one day before last, and you would swear that the house was vacant: trash, no blinds, no nothing, no furniture, so it’s hard. You wonder how they can make it to school every day.*

Ms. Stream: *You have to do a home visit, and you have to go and knock on somebody’s door. And I’m a true believer in home visits. I can’t stress ENOUGH how important I think that is. So, I really can’t. I can’t stress enough how IMPORTANT I believe that is.*

Ms. Stream: *The home visits... although I came from a family of 4 and a single mother, I never knew we were poor, so that wasn’t something – you know, I never thought I*
was poor, you know, I didn’t know I was poor. Upon doing home visits for head start It opened my eyes to what kids actually go through and what their home life is like.

Ms. Stream: You know when you walk into an apartment, and there’s nothing in there. You know, not a bed, not a chair, not a table, not a desk, not appropriate lighting. You know, all they have is a music box to keep them, you know, and whatever else is going on in the house.

The principal participants report home visits are a way to communicate with parents; to learn about the home context; to show parents that their children are important; and to show that the principal cares about their child’s success. The home visits enable principals to better identify and build relationships with the students and their parents.

**Expectations and Modeling**

These principals influence others by setting expectations and modeling desired behaviors. As school leaders, principals are in positions to influence the behavior of all individuals related to the school. Members in the school community look to the principal to establish standard ways of operating and interacting with each other. The three principals in this study set expectations for faculty and staff regarding the ways in which school personnel interact with students and families. The way the principals influence the school personnel most is by modeling the expected behaviors. The principals’ leadership behaviors are discussed in the emerging theme of *ownership*.

Ms. Dunlop stressed she sets the tone for the whole staff. “*Well, I think I set the tone for the whole school and for the whole staff. And so, we want our climate to be inviting and welcoming and so I’m out there doing that. And modeling for my teachers that every parent is important.*” When I met with Mr. Adams, Ms. Stream, and Ms. Dunlop to conduct member
checking and share initial findings, all of these principals strongly agreed that they do lead by example and model for teachers, parents, and students expected behaviors and actions.

**Summary Influence**

The emerging theme of *influence* captures the beliefs, behaviors and actions utilized by the principal participants to influence individuals. The principals believe in influencing others through *relationships, identification, and setting expectations and modeling.*

**Emerging Theme: Ownership**

Ownership is an emerging theme that appears as principals describe their commitments and why it is important to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The definition of ownership applied to this study is more accurately defined as *relational ownership.* *Relational ownership* is “the relation of an owner to the thing possessed; possession with the right to transfer possession to others” ([www.memidexdictionary.com](http://www.memidexdictionary.com)). The principal participants take ownership of the academic success of students. The principals take responsibility and accountability of academic student success as evidenced by standardized test scores.

Additionally, the principal participants take ownership for the various members of the school community. The principals talk about students, parents, teachers, and the community in a manner that claims them as personal and belonging to them. These principals used the words “my” and “our” when discussing various stakeholders and the community. The principals not only take ownership and claim individuals, but these principals take ownership and claim what defines them personally as an individual. The principal describe their personal character traits, passions, missions, and other dispositions associated with their position as a principal.
The emerging theme of ownership is a behavior influencing principal commitment and leadership actions to engage low-income and or minority parents in the school process. Principal ownership is discussed in the areas of student success, individuals, and self.

**Student Success**

The principals in this study take full ownership of student success; these principals believe they are directly and personally responsible for the degree of student success. The ownership of student success is part of the principals’ axiology. All of the principals briefly mentioned the need for students to perform well on standardized tests due to the use of these tests as societal indicators of school success. Student academic success was mentioned, but these principals have a greater focus on overall student success and a holistic approach to learning. To these principals, overall student success relates to identifying the students’ strengths and talents in addition to students feeling good and being successful in school.

Ms. Stream expressed her desires to get kids to understand the importance of education and why education is important for their futures. Ms. Stream also discussed looking for students’ gifts and not judging students based solely on standardized test scores.

Ms. Stream: *You know, when you’re low-income you don’t see the world the same as a person who has gone on trips and been on vacations and, you know. Because my world is just in that block radius of where I participate every day. So, as a principal, I want to open the world up. I want them to see that it goes beyond just where they are right there, and that there’s a big place for them to experience. So, I have to bring some experiences to them, so field trips are important to me, getting them out and seeing that there is more to it than just right here. Having them be involved in plays might be something that they never thought that they’d like. But to find what their gift is and say, “You’re good at something. You are good at something. Now you take that something that you are good at and you can be whatever you want to be with that.” But to find what they’re good at... I have to find what they’re good at.*
Ms. Stream: *But to find what their gift is and say, “You’re good at something. You are
good at something. Now you take that something that you are good at and you can be
whatever you want to be with that.”* But to find what they’re good at... I have to find
what they’re good at.

Ms. Stream: *So when I talk to a parent, I have to get them to understand: that maybe
don’t judge your kid just based on this one test. There’s so much more to them than just
this test.*

Ms. Dunlop believes all kids can be successful; schools have the power and
responsibility to make this happen; and schools prepare children to be successful as
citizens in the world.

Ms. Dunlop: *We have power, and we have to be very, very careful not to abuse it and to
do exactly that – to be positive and create a love of learning, and a joy for coming to
school.*

Ms. Dunlop: *All kids should be successful. And if they can’t be successful in every area,
we should find them at least one area that can be successful and feel good about
school.*

Ms. Dunlop: *I think it just takes a whole team and so we need everyone on the team to
support that child to be successful.*

Ms. Dunlop: *But we talk about [in school mission] making sure that children are
successful in all their communities in the country and in the world.*

Mr. Adams believes all students can be successful; parental support is needed; and
students must perform well on standardized tests. Mr. Adams understands his school is
evaluated by the district and larger society by the test scores, but he believes students are
successful and excel in many areas not evaluated by standardized testing.

Mr. Adams: *You might have a very, very few students on rare occasions who have no
parental support and they excel but that is by far not the norm. So it’s just my job to
continue to work, continue to try until we do have that level of parent involvement
that we need for all of our students to be successful.*

Mr. Adams: *I believe that all students can be successful. I mean that’s number one
beliefs. Even more so, any student – every student – can learn. Every student can be
successful. Not every student is going to excel at the same thing, and not every student*
is going to be successful in the same way, but every student can and needs to feel some type of success. And we have to have parents involved to get that.

Mr. Adams: Professionally, I want them to make good grades, have high test scores, make the school look good, the teachers look good, make me look good, so I mean you want every student to have a good life and to be successful, but this states come a look at the test scores, and that’s a big part of it, too.

The principals in this study strongly believe all students can be successful and it is their responsibility as principals to ensure that all students are successful. Student success is viewed holistically by these principals and not only based on academic ratings. The belief in student success for all appears to be one of their deepest held convictions.

**Individuals and Community**

The principals in this study describe their students and families by using possessive pronouns such as “my” and “our”. The principals discussed students and families in a manner to suggest a personal importance and connection.

Ms. Stream: *I've always wanted to be the best, turn in the best, have the best. I always had that drive about myself. And so, when it comes to my parents I want to help them in any way I can because I want, when they look at my building, that I have the best parents, that I have the best volunteers.*

Ms. Stream: Nobody else better not say a word about my parents. I can talk about my parents, you better not. You know? Because I’m very protective of them.

Ms. Stream: *Because it’s my community! I’m there. You know, I’m at the kids’ football games in the summer. You know? I go to the swimming pools, just to say hello to people... I shop in the same grocery store.*

Mr. Adams: *These are my kids. That’s why I care.*

Mr. Adams: I spend a lot of time of an evening, just, when I leave work I drive up and down through the neighborhood. We have a very condensed school, so we’re pretty much in one neighborhood. So I drive up and down the streets, because I like to see the parents out. I stop and play with the kids. I play with them at the park. I just want to know who’s spending time with who, who’s walking the streets, who’s outside playing, who’s with their family...
Ownership of *individuals and community* is evident in the principals’ words and actions. These principals considered the individuals and the community as being a personal part of the principals’ lives.

**Self**

The principals commented on personal characteristics and beliefs they possess related to their commitments and leadership to engage the target population. These principals are self-aware, self-reflecting and take ownership of who they are as individuals. *Ownership of self* details principals articulating who they are as leaders and what their leadership beliefs are as well as what defines them as individuals. Table 5.3 provides principal reported leadership behaviors related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Described Leadership Behaviors</th>
<th>Stream</th>
<th>Adams</th>
<th>Dunlop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students can be successful</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at students individually</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want what is best for students in life</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student has unique gifts, strengths, talents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views students holistically</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of student successes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know your students personally</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet students and families needs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships with students and parents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give parents and students voice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to parental involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe parents care about their kids</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to and respect parents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate often with parents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate – welcoming and inviting</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Expected Behaviors for Staff</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence asset thinking and social justice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep trying – don’t give up</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the extra effort to help</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate ideas and outside the box thinking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be empathetic, sympathetic, compassionate, honest</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be visible in and/or a part of community</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim ownership of students, parents, staff</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job is personal – mission – passion - calling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3
These identified principal behaviors associate with the emerging themes found in the frames of axiology and ontology. These behaviors represent a framework of behaviors associated with principal participants commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Summary of Axiology**

The frame of axiology organizes the emerging themes associated with values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings identified related to principal commitments and leadership actions to engage the targeted population. The themes of altruism, influence, and ownership capture the principal participants’ axiology in practice.

**Ontology**

As described earlier, principal ontology as a frame includes findings related to principals’ realities, what is real in their context, and what is the nature of these principals’ realities. The frame of ontology is where the theory of sensemaking is most evident. The theory of sensemaking is utilized to analyze the process used by principals to engage low-income and/or minority students in the school process. Sensemaking is most identifiable in the frame of ontology, in the reality of the principals’ practice in schools. The discussion in this chapter focuses on principal practice, yet I do reference sensemaking when appropriate. The process of sensemaking was discussed in chapter four.

The frame of ontology organizes the emerging themes from principal practice that appear to significantly impact principal leadership to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process. The significant themes in ontology are found to be connate meanings of parental involvement, planning for parental involvement, and principal tenacity.
Emerging Theme: Connate Meaning of Parental Involvement

During interviews, I asked principals and parents to describe types of behaviors and activities they think constitutes parental involvement. During parent and principal interviews, I noticed a difference in the types of behaviors and activities parents and principals reported as being the most prominent types of parental involvement. For principals, the most predominate behaviors and activities are school based. Parents described both home based and school based behaviors and activities, but more prominent were home based behaviors and activities.

Principals and low-income and/or minority parents describe parental involvement differently. The difference comes from the differences in perspective. This difference in perspectives is found in how the parents and principals negotiate the meaning of the word in their context. In the English language, a word connate means “existing in a person or thing from birth; innate; of the same or similar nature; allied; congenial” (www.merriam-webster.com). Principals and parents are describing the same phenomenon of parental involvement, but describe predominate behaviors differently. The descriptions are similar in nature and innate, but the descriptions are not the same. The concept of connate meaning of parental involvement describes the similar yet different principals’ and parents’ perceptions of parental involvement.

Principals’ Perspectives of Parental Involvement

The principals describe the types of parental involvement valued by the school are behaviors and activities related to the parents being present in the school and communicating with school personnel. Principals described events outside of the normal school day such as reading and math nights; school musicals and plays; honors assemblies;
open houses and parent-teacher conferences; parent-teacher organization meetings; 
competitions between families and staff; movie nights; and types of science, art, and 
cultural events. Principals also described parental involvement in terms of activities such 
as parents volunteering during the school day; going on field trips; being a member of a 
committee; helping with special events during the school day; attending parent-teacher 
conferences; sending in snacks for classrooms; and coming up to school if the student is 
having a problem.

The following chart 5.3 illustrates the types of behaviors and activities the principals 
described as being parental involvement. Parent perspectives are presented in table 5.5.
Mr. Adams and his staff give out parental involvement awards at the end of the school year, which prompted a discussion among his staff as to what is considered parental involvement. This discussion broadened the school’s understanding of parental involvement.

Mr. Adams: We give out parent involvement rewards. And that’s what got us started, because some teachers were giving a lot of awards, some weren’t giving any. So that got the discussion going. Some people, I think, like the parents were saying in the interviews. The teachers say, if a teacher calls home, a parent answers the phone. Or if a message was sent home, they return a phone call. They sign permission slips. They do just those little things that we expect our parents to do, but so many parents don’t do. So if they’re actually doing that, if we can get a hold of them, or their child’s sick and they come and pick them up, they consider that parental involvement. Where some are thinking more along the lines of probably what we consider the norm in parental involvement. They’re on PTO committee, or they run copies, or they read with different
Parents’ Perspectives of Parental Involvement

Parents were asked questions about how they are involved in their child’s education; what do they consider parental involvement; how involved they think they are; and how important is parental involvement. I noticed parents in this study described parental involvement activities and actions in some of the same ways as the principals, but more prominent in the parents’ descriptions where home based activities. Significant to this study is that parents described parental involvement based on what they think and do as well as the types of activities parents believe to be “valued” type of parental involvement by the school. The parents tended to report the degree to which they are able to accomplish the “valued” types of behaviors and activities. The “valued” activities are those activities the principals predominately described as parental involvement in table 5.3 on the previous page.

All of the parents interviewed expressed they want to attend their child’s school events; these parents desire to be at the school for school events and realize this is important. These parents try to attend school events and parent-teacher conferences, but these are not the parental involvement activities and actions the parents describe as being most prominent with their children. These parent participants described activities and actions they do at home so that their children are ready for school and the different experiences they give their children outside of their home as being the most prominent type of parental involvement activities. The following table 5.5 lists each parent’s responses to the questions asking how they are involved in their child’s education and what type of activities they consider to be parental involvement. This is a two-paged chart.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How are you involved in your child’s education?</th>
<th>What type of activities do you consider parental involvement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Amelia      | • Helps with spelling words  
  • Listens to him Read; reads to him  
  • Checks math  
  • Makes sure homework is done  
  • Volunteers (was not specific)  
  • Attends school functions  
  • Maintain contact with school                                                                                                                                                                                   | • Parents as teachers; supporting teacher  
  • Take child places, new experiences  
  • Interact with child during activities rather than letting child work alone                                                                                                                                 |
| Ellie       | • Was involved in PTA before birth of second child  
  • Attended every school function  
  • Was at the school a lot  
  • Noted child was busy with many school activities  
  • Volunteers in classroom and lunchroom                                                                                                                                                                          | • Calling whenever you have a question, frequent communication  
  • Actively participate with homework, communicate with child Talking is involvement  
  • Being involved, active with child; give example of playing tennis with her daughter and how it led to conversation;                                                                                                                                 |
| Angie       | • Helps with homework  
  • Attends conferences  
  • Listens to advice from teachers  
  • Trips to library (when they lived in Chicago)                                                                                                                                                                  | • Being “hands on” – being involved in school activities  
  • Maintain good relationship with teacher  
  • "Get to know everybody and get involved"  
  • Feels PTA is important, although she can't participate right now.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Mandie      | • Homework every night  
  • Feels comfortable contacting teacher  
  • Attends parent teacher conferences  
  • Volunteers on occasion  
  • Lunches with son every Thursday  
  • Attends school events                                                                                                                                                                                        | • Home activities that add depth to what he's studying at school. Recognizes that if she doesn’t reinforce learning at home then the burden of teaching is on the school and son probably won't retain as much.  
  • Important to know what's going on, establish relationships with school staff.                                                                                                                                 |
| Shelly      | • Parent teacher conferences  
  • Receives phone calls  
  • Talks to son about his day                                                                                                                                                                                         | • Discussing with teacher about different things, how they can help the child  
  • PTA meetings, volunteering                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Carissa     | • Takes daughter to school, helps her begin her day.  
  • Helps with homework  
  • Reads books  
  • Attends school events, book fairs  
  • PTA                                                                                                                                                                                                             | • Reinforcing the work children do at school at home with reading, math, etc.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Mara        | • Helps with homework  
  • Reading with children  
  • Talking with teachers, making sure everything is going okay at school  
  • Attends conferences  
  • Indicates that if she's needed at the school, she'll be there.                                                                                                                                            | • PTA  
  • Being in contact with the teachers  
  • Helping with homework  
  • Possibly volunteering  
  • Visiting school to observe classrooms                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
**Parent Participants Description of Their Parental Involvement (cont.) (p. 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How are you involved in your child’s education?</th>
<th>What type of activities do you consider parental involvement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tracy     | • Works around children’s schedule so that she can be there before and after school  
                      • Attends teacher conferences  
                      • Volunteers for field trips when possible  
                      • Makes sure they do their homework  
                      • Maintains communication with teachers | • Being involved, making yourself accessible to your children “You have to remember, they didn’t have us, I had them, so I have to channel my life around them”  
                      • Helping with homework, making sure they behave at school  
                      • Making sure you “keep a roof over your head,” keeping them fed, making sure they go to bed at night. Getting them where they need to go. |
| Shea      | • Is “always” at the school, visits frequently to see what they are doing at the school, up to two hours at a time. Helps with other children, too.  
                      • Sends money as needed  
                      • Is a very strict, structured parent | • PTA members |
| Sameena   | • Helps with homework and extra work at home  
                      • Communicates with teachers to see where children need to improve  
                      • Talks to children about what they did at school  
                      • Makes herself available to her children | • How they can help their children to improve or some activity they can share.  
                      • Make a strong relationship between parents and children |
| Nicole    | • Talks with the parent liaison  
                      • Talks about day with child, looks at papers  
                      • Studies flash cards  
                      • Volunteers for field trips | • Volunteering in the classroom  
                      • Was personally invited to volunteer at the school |
| Francis   | • Helps with homework  
                      • Before children were school-aged, worked with reading and writing with them. | • Always tries to see where kids need more help, and always tries to see what the teachers are doing with them. |
| Natalie   | • Interacting with children, asking how they did [at school]  
                      • Make sure they do their homework, making herself available to them. | • Knowing how your child is doing at school  
                      • Anything that you can do to help your child perform better in school |

Chart 5.5 (cont.)

The table illustrates parents’ perspectives about *parental involvement*. The emerging theme of *connate meaning of parental involvement* is a significant factor for principals to understand as they work to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process.
Emerging Theme: Planning for Parental Involvement

Principals think about multiple factors as they plan for parental involvement. The emerging theme of planning for parental involvement captures the actions taken by the principal to increase the involvement of low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The principals in this study plan for parental involvement by considering the lives, interests, and needs of these families; what parents’ value; and the barriers to parent participation.

Principals in this study know the requirements established by NCLB regarding the use of Title I funding for school events. Title I funding can be used for activities and events that have an educational component and/or directly impact the learning of students. Examples of academic events are math nights, reading nights, science fairs, and parent workshops about the curriculum and/or standardized testing requirements. The Title I guidelines do not allow for funds to be utilized for some of the activities that focus on parent interests or building relationships with families and staff members. Unfortunately, Title I funding may not to be utilized for events not associated in some way with student academics and improving student achievement. The principals in this study are creative with figuring out how to fund certain events to promote parental involvement that are not considered academic in nature. The following quote from Mr. Adams is similar to the sentiments of the other two principals concerning the ways principal attempt to get parents to attend events. The principals know more parents will show up if there is food and the event is fun and social.

Mr. Adams: If you have food, that’s a good start. If there’s food involved, chances are you might get them. Our parents like the social aspects, too. Our biggest turnout is our fall Halloween party. We always have a huge turnout, but that’s just a fun time...But then when we have an I-Read 3 workshop [academic reading], where notices have
gone home that if your child doesn’t pass this test, they’re going to be retained in third grade, we only had maybe a third of our families show up. So that’s... it’s... somewhat discouraging at time. I like to have parents in the school no matter what. No matter how I can get them in, I want them in the building, so if we have to start by having a few more social events, then we can, but that’s all part of the relationship building experience, so it’s still positive and productive. But I wish we could get more in when it comes time for the I-STEP preps or review for the test or going over assessments. And we just haven’t had the attendance like I would like.

This quote from Mr. Adams highlights the types of considerations principals must make in order to attract parents to events. Initially, the principals’ main desire is just to get parents through the door to start building relationships with school personnel.

Parents’ Needs, Interests, Values

As discussed in the altruism section, these principals want to meet the students and families’ needs. Principals try to attract parents by providing food and activities of interest. All three principals expressed the importance of having food or meals to feed families and attract them to school events. Principals also think about what is of value and interest to parents and families.

Examples of needs principals identified and attempted to meet through planned school based activities are English tutoring for parents and students and using computers to help parents apply for jobs and/or create resumes. Some of the interests the principals identified focused on activities to have fun and to build relationships such as families versus school volleyball games; family movie nights; family bingo, fun nights or carnivals; back to school picnics; and cultural food nights. All three principals understand parents value seeing their children perform and to be recognized for accomplishments; therefore, the principals schedule activities such as musical performances, athletic teams, plays, science fairs, and awards ceremonies.
Ms. Stream: And so, I said, “You know, a lot of low-income people play bingo.” I said, “So let’s just have a family bingo night. I don’t want it to cost anything. We’re not trying to raise money. We’re going to give away some small stuff. Let’s call some businesses to donate, you know, like free chicken or... You know, stuff that they can GET to.” I didn’t want it to be a free car wash, because half of them don’t have cars. So, we had to think about prizes that they would actually use for the family, like free pizzas, or those types of things. And so, we have this bingo night – the first one. And it clearly said, on our little flyer, it’s family bingo night. We had FLOODS of low-income families coming in! But they didn’t bring their kids! They didn’t bring their kids! They had their daubers, and they were ready! They had their daubers... they didn’t bring their kids! So then when they seen what kind of prizes we were giving, they’re like, “I was supposed to bring my kids? Usually when you have bingo, you don’t have your kids!” I mean – although they found a babysitter for that – it was something that interested them.

Principals plan for increased parental involvement by planning events catering to parents’ needs, interest, and values. See table 5.3 for additional types of activities principal enact to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Scheduling and Reducing Barriers**

The principal participants plan to reduce barriers hindering parental involvement in school events. The principals schedule events at multiple times during the day and take into consideration issues such as transportation; weather; daycare needs; and parents’ work schedules. These principals listed multiple barriers to parents participating in school events. Principals reported they believe the greatest barriers for families seemed to be finances; transportation; multiple jobs; and babysitting. The identified barriers are found on table 5.6 on the following page.

Ms. Stream’s school must work around the scheduling and routes of the city transportation. It takes parents who live five minutes away by car over an hour to get to the school by bus.

Ms. Stream: *When they take the bus, they have to go all the way downtown, get a transfer to come all the way uptown. It takes them an hour. They are less likely to*
come in, if I’m going to spend an hour on the bus getting here and an hour on the bus getting back.

Ms. Stream stated she knows her parents want to be here, but the transportation issue and day care can prevent that from happening. Ms. Stream attempted to take school activities to the parents in the housing area where many of them live, but an additional barrier arrived due to child care needs.

Ms. Stream: You know, they want to be here, and I know that. I can sense that in the conversations that we have. So, it’s either that they can’t be at the meeting because of that, or transportation is huge! That’s probably the biggest thing! So I did try to take a program to where I knew a lot of our low-income families were located, and then the issue became, “Well I have all these kids. What am I going to do with them while I’m sitting in this meeting?” “Miss Stream, I would have come to your meeting, but I didn’t have a babysitter.”

Mr. Adams also mentioned transportation as a barrier even though many of his families live within walking distance; “You might have some parents who don’t have transportation, even though it’s a fairly short walk, if they don’t have transportation, that’s one reason or excuse for them not to come.” Ms. Dunlop sited jobs and transportation as top barriers; “The fact that, you know, if they’re working at least one job, maybe two? You know? Or they don’t have transportation.” Principal identified behaviors are found on table 5.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Identified Barriers to Parental Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINANCIAL RELATED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited or No Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two jobs, shift work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No health/dental care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL RELATED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/Cultural Barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal bad experience with school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed by standard of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age parent/grandparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOME/FAMILY RELATED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Sitting Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, Domestic Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCHOOL RELATED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to get it all done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough energy or people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher contracts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6
Mr. Adams discussed various barriers related to low-income and/or minority populations, but a specific barrier for him is the language barrier due the large Hispanic population and his inability to speak Spanish. This situation has become more difficult due to the district cutting school level translators from the budget.

Mr. Adams: *But a lot of the parents don’t speak any English. So that’s a challenge just when parents are walking in, I can smile, I can shake their hands, I can say hi, but I can’t really talk about any major issues beyond that...I don’t always have a translator by my side...Language has been a real challenge for me.*

Mr. Adams has surveyed parents to find out interests and times that worked best for them, but even asking parents does not guarantee that parents will show up. Mr. Adams works with his parent liaison to identify times and events that will attract parents and families.

Mr. Adams: *Schedules. Some people will like the workshops in the morning some like it in the afternoon some like it in the evening. It’s hard to find one time and one system that works for everybody. And it’s hard to have six different workshops, especially when you might only have four people attending. If we knew that I could reach every parent if I had six workshops, I’d have six workshops. But it’s hard to schedule that time and maybe have no one show up. It’s a challenge.*

Mr. Adams also stressed the impact of mobility related to parent involvement and officers on the parent–teacher organization. He commented that he goes to the bank often to change the signature card of the Parent-Teacher Organization treasurer. “*And part of that is the student turnover. When we have so many students coming in and out and so many families coming in and out, it’s hard to have the consistency.*” Mr. Adams works with a population where families may move in and out of the country and not notify the school they are leaving. “*And it’s hard when, sometimes when the parents leave, they go out of the country, they go out of the state, they go to a place where I don’t even know where they are.*”
Ms. Dunlop identified various barriers to participation stemming from the attitudes and action of parents and/or school personnel. Some barriers to participation are difficult to identify because they are psychological barriers.

Ms. Dunlop: *I think that sometimes we have parents of any economic status or background that might have their own school issue, baggage, from their own experiences. You know, that they would bring to school with their child. And I think that would be a bridge that teachers would have to cross.*

Ms. Dunlop: *Well, it’s going to be their own experience in school, right? That’s going to be their number one. So if they’ve not had a good experience when they were in school, then that’s like, you really got to go through the ice to get there. And it’s hard. And I haven’t always been successful.*

Ms. Dunlop’s discussed lack of time and energy as barriers. She reported being pleased that the district recently allocated each school substitute teachers for two days a week. Ms. Dunlop uses the substitute teachers to cover classes so principals and teachers can meet with parents during the school day and to have other curricular type meetings.

Ms. Dunlop: *Time and energy. More than anything. We don’t have assistant principals, which is another reason I’m glad I’ve got a sub. So time. And Then just with everything else and the cuts, you know, now I have to do the attendance, because we don’t have an outreach worker.*

The three principal participants work to get the parents in the school door. Ms. Stream realized a parent’s comfort level with academics might affect participation in academic focused events. The academic focused components are the ones schools must have related to Title I regulations and funding.

Ms. Stream: *So, you never know how, you know, if it’s educational they might not feel that they’re smart enough to do the educational stuff, but they can come to the bingo night and once I get them here – and that’s the hardest thing, just to get them here. But you have to give them something that they’re comfortable with to make them come in.*

All three principals gave examples of school structured barriers such as school funding and budget cuts; the use of Title I funding; utilizing parent-teacher organization
monies; curriculum demands; time and energy; teacher contracts; and difficulty of coordinating meeting times. Mr. Adams stated the reality is that school personnel could do more related to engaging parents, but that the primary focus is on what needs to get done during the school day.

Mr. Adams: Not really, I mean, everyone, including myself could do more. Everyone could do more home visits, everyone could stay later in the day. Everyone could do more, but people have a lot on their plates right now. And especially with teacher their most immediate need is the students in their classroom during the school day. So, I mean, they don’t have enough planning time, they don’t have enough anything. So when it comes to trying to track down one parent, that’s not the top of their priority list. And I understand that.

As these principals work to get parents involved, the principals must analyze what behaviors and actions actually impacts the degree of parental involvement. Sensemaking requires principals to reflect on experiences and understand various inputs, connections, associations, influences, barriers, etc. to develop possible or plausible solutions.

**Parent Reported Barriers.** Parents were asked a series of questions about what would make it easier to communicate with school personnel and attend school events, or what makes it more difficult? The parents’ responses almost parallel the barriers principals identified.

The following table 5.7 describes the barriers to parental involvement as viewed by parents. In this emerging theme of planning for parental involvement, principals focus on the parents and families lives to figure out how to achieve increased involvement of low-income and/or minority parents.
### Parents’ Responses: Interferes with Communication

*What interferes with parents’ ability to communicate frequently with school personnel and to attend school events?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Interferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Amelia  |  - Time; work schedule;  
  - Notes that most if the planned school activities are after work hours  
  - Indicates that teacher has phone in classroom, making it easier to communicate. |
| Ellie   |  - Teacher's attitude.                                                                                   |
| Angie   |  - Transportation; does not have a car, but expressed willingness to come to school with enough advanced notice.  
  - Public transportation is difficult  
  - Schools could provide transportation and childcare for events and meetings.  
  - Transportation; Possibility of not having phone available for being reached by school |
| Mandie  |  - Time constraints.                                                                                      |
|         |  - Not having to work. Job is in Indianapolis, long commute.                                              |
|         |  - For others, school should initiate personal contact more frequently. Feels some parents might not realize how important it is to participate. Suggest teachers use an hour a week to make personal phone calls. |
| Shelly  |  - Phone conferences instead of face to face meetings.                                                    |
|         |  - Not being able to get off work  
  - Transportation, no vehicle  
  - Weather (indicates that she has to walk to visit school) |
| Carissa |  - Personally be more organized with schedule  
  - Money  
  - Gas, transportation  
  - Not having to work so much.                                                                 |
| Mara    |  - Fewer work hours                                                                                       |
|         |  - Having three children, one with special needs.  
  - If there were helpers [presumably meaning childcare for events]  
  - More advance notice about events  
  - Cameras in the classrooms so that you can go online to see how things are going. |
| Tracy   |  - Youngest son has Sickle Cell; must be cautious with his health, which prevents her getting to the school more frequently.  
  - Supposes transportation must be the main reason that low-income and minority parents aren’t as involved in schools. |
| Sameena |  - To be sitting in the classroom  
  - Know the classroom schedule  
  - Has younger son and doesn’t like leaving him with a sitter |
| Nicole  |  - Would like to be emailed more  
  - Being able to afford a babysitter.                                          |
| Francis |  - Language barrier  
  - Transportation, sometimes.                                              |
| Natalie|  - Stress; dealing with finances; “everyday life”  
  - When prompted, transportation is "kind of" an issue  
  - When prompted, work schedule has been an issue in the past |

Table 5.7
Summary

As principal participants plan for parental involvement, the principals consider the values, interests, and needs of the parents and the barriers to participation. The principal participants work to plan parental involvement activities that might motivate parents to attend. Some strategies principals employ are selecting a time or multiple times that would allow for maximum participation; providing meals and/or substantial snacks during the event; having students perform or receiving recognition; or other such activities that meet needs, values, and/or interests of the parents and/or is social and fun.
Emerging Theme: Principal Tenacity

During the analysis of principals’ actions and evaluation of practice, the theme of tenacity emerged to describe principals’ efforts to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Merriam-Webster defines tenacity the act of being tenacious; tenacious is being “persistent in maintaining, adhering to, or seeking something valued or desired” (www.meriamwebster.com). In this study, the principal participants report that they keep trying something new and different. Ms. Stream stated, “You try this, if it doesn’t work, you try something else. You just got to keep trying! I don’t think there is a “I know what to do.” Mr. Adams stated similar thoughts related to knowing what to do.

Mr. Adams: I mean, I’m always thinking about it. And we’re always trying something new. And it seems like, I mean, little by little, that we’re making progress. It’s going to take a long time, especially with mobility rates, to get it. But a lot of it, too, is getting those key parents who are reliable, they’re involved, they’re stable, and they can make the contacts to get more people here. So once we find those people, we need to hang on to them, and make sure they’re involved.

A descriptor that emerged under tenacity to explain principals’ decisions is the behavior of trial and error. The behavior of trial and error also relates to the sensemaking concept of plausibility discussed in chapter four. All three principals use the phrase or idea of trial and error to describe how they make decisions regarding how to engage low-income and/or minority parents to greater degrees. Ms. Dunlop expressed that schools operate on the philosophy of trial and error.

Ms. Dunlop: Again, I think right now, schools are kind of doing trial and error. You know we go through and say we have food, everybody will come. Or if students perform, they’re more likely to come. And so, I’ve tried to do lunch with the principal, or coffee with the principal, and have mixed results. I think you just keep trying until you find something that works, or you try a whole bunch of things.

Mr. Adams used the concepts of tenacity and trial and error multiple times during his interviews to explain his actions.
Mr. Adams: *Trial and error. And it seems like a lot of times there’s more error than our trials. We try to accommodate the parents as much as possible and we try to do the little things that we know draws in families.*

Mr. Adams: *It’s trial and error. So if you try something and you have very low turnout, low feedback, then you just try something new until you find something that’s successful.*

Principals’ behavior of *trial and error* is part of the process of sensemaking and relates to the concept of plausibility discussed in the previous chapter as part of the sensemaking process. When I asked principals how they evaluated the effectiveness of their actions, the principals were in the retrospective phase of sensemaking. The principals’ answers to my questions resulted in a form of evaluation of their practices.

The emerging theme of *tenacity* describes the continued effort and energy the principal participants expend to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The principals keep trying to have an impact and are not discouraged by initiated actions that seemed to have been relatively unsuccessful. The principal participants believe it is possible to engage low-income and/or minority families and this belief fuels their continued practice.

**Summary Ontology**

The frame of *ontology* organizes principals’ realities, which in this study is considered *principal practice*. The themes to emerge related to ontology were the themes of *connate meanings for parental involvement, planning for parental involvement*, and *tenacity*. The emerging themes describe factors influencing principals’ leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
Principal Evaluation of Practice

Initially, this study sought to understand the resulting effects of principal commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. I asked principals to describe how they evaluate effectiveness of their actions to increase the level of parental involvement. All three of these principals described the use of visual clues of seeing more people; comments made by parents or students; and by their own intuition. Each principal feels the school is doing a better job than when they started as principal, but each also feels they are still not doing a very good job.

When I asked Ms. Stream how she evaluates the school’s effectiveness to engage low-income and minority parents, she commented, “I really can’t, you know, I really can’t say besides the call volumes increasing. Just them calling in to even check.” When I delved further, she commented, “Because I’m seeing them come in. I see them sign in. I see them.”

Mr. Adams’ responded to the same question with the following comments.

Mr. Adams: One of the biggest things is attendance. Attendance and parent feedback. I mean, the parents are excited. They come up to us after the meetings or word-of-mouth. Or we hear students talking about what we did the next day. Those are how we gauge success. But the easiest thing initially is just how many parents we can get to walk through the door.

When I delved further, Mr. Adams’ reported, “It depends.” He stated the parents sign in for parent workshops, but for some events “it’s just, when I walk in, I see that the cafeteria’s full”. Ms. Dunlop responded to the question in a similar way.

Ms. Dunlop: I don’t have any quantitative data, but, again, conversations that I’ve had. I think eventually it will be quantitative data that will provide that information for us. So, right now, we’re just kind of, um, it’s a feeling.

Evaluation of practice occurs in the principal participants’ practice, but the evaluation is intuitive and subjective, and informed by the principals’ tacit knowledge.
principal participants’ plan for parental involvement based on what they know about their students and parents. The evaluation is situated in the context of each individual school and associated families.

**Degree of Effectiveness.** Principals were asked during the second interview and a follow-up, member checking interview questions about degree to which they think the school has effectively engaged low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Mr. Adams stated, “I don’t think I’ve been very successful, and we really don’t have a formal assessment.” When I asked a follow-up question, he responded with the following statements.

Mr. Adams: *I really don’t have anything set. It’s just the way I feel personally. I mean, you always want more people to show up, but there’s no rubric no guidance of whose here whose not, how successful it is. When I see that we had a workshop with two parents that attend, that’s not a success. If I see that we’re at 98% in PIT [parent-teacher conferences] day, then that is a success. Talking to parents. A lot of the ones I talk to I get feedback, and for the most part, it’s normally positive. But those are probably the same parents that you see all the time, whose kids are doing well. So it’s hard, I mean, there’s... no real set way to put a score on the successfulness of our parent involvement.*

Ms. Dunlop is the only principal to report family engagement as being a part of the district strategic planning and receiving some district support. When asked about evaluation of effectiveness, Ms. Dunlop stated the following:

Ms. Dunlop: *We’re making process. It’s not as good as I wish it would be. We’ve probably improved by 25%, maybe, over the six years. And now it’s a district – part of our strategic plan is family engagement, so we’re getting more support in terms of some data based opportunities that have data connected with it.*

Ms. Stream again used seeing one new parent as a valid way to evaluate effectiveness. Ms. Stream has a standard practice of having her teachers evaluate her on different aspects of her job performance and includes parental involvement in the surveys to teachers.
Ms. Stream: *Like I told you if I can reach one and if I get one parent involved that wasn’t involved, that wasn’t involved, then I think it’s a success. Then that one parent will say, “Hey, I know Miss Brooks!”* And I’m telling you, the word gets out.

The concept of plausibility in sensemaking and the principals’ behavior of *trial and error* appear to disrupt systematic evaluation of practice. Principal participants appear content with evaluating practice based on visual cues and observation; intuition; and informal feedback from parents and other school personnel. Principals plan different events if it seems plausible it will attract parents.

**Parents’ Perceptions of School and Principal Practice**

Parents were included in this study to provide a parent perspective related to how schools and principals influence parental involvement. The parent perspective is important for principals to understand as principals engage in sensemaking. Parents were asked questions about parental involvement behaviors and activities; the importance of parental involvement; barriers to participation in school events; communication with teachers; schools feeling welcoming or unwelcoming; and interactions with principals. Additionally, parents were asked what principals could do to make it easier for parents to be a part of school activities, communicate with teachers, and/or get more parents involved in their child’s education. Parents’ perspectives are important to determine if the principals’ actions actually influence the parental involvement of low-income and/or minority parents. Parent perspectives provide data to principals and policy makers related to effective practices to engage the targeted population.

**Parents’ Perceptions of What Principals Can Do.** The following table 5.8 provides parent responses related to what parents think principals could do to make it easier for parents to communicate and be involved in school activities. The global type responses
given are based on parents’ experiences with all elementary school principals and not just
the principal participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Parent Perceptions of How Principals Could Make It Easier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>How they act toward you makes you want to come into the building, participate more. Principals who are “standoffish” are not approachable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>Feels that principal makes it easy to communicate, but that parents just don’t want to take advantage of all the ways they can communicate (in person, by phone, or email.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>More open houses, meaning more opportunities to meet face to face. To create opportunities to work together, encourage team effort between teachers and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandie</td>
<td>Principals should encourage teachers to make more personal contact with parents on a more frequent basis. Schedule events twice so that parents can choose a daytime event or an evening one. Feels principal is already making it easier for the parents that are there, but stresses that teachers must play a role in encouraging parents to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Letters, phone calls. Feels some people respond to letters, and some don’t. Suggests that not all families have phones. Suggests talking to kids to encourage them to encourage parents to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Appreciates how schools hold events at two different times of day. Schools should make sure that they give plenty of advance notice for event so parents can plan to take time off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Doesn’t think anything can be done. Feels like there are many opportunities to be involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shea</td>
<td>Principals should be out in hallways or on school grounds. Principal should set an example for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>Thinks involvement depends on the parent. Some parents like to be involved but she believes that other parents feel that school is free time away from their children. Believes nothing can be done about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Doesn’t feel principals can do anything to make it easier for parents to be more involved. The parents have to want to participate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.8

The parent responses include contacting parents in multiple ways; principals need to encourage teachers to contact parents more; encourage students to encourage parents; have more school events; have events at multiple times; give advanced notice; be more visible in the hallways and outside; already making it easy; and do nothing. Four of the ten parents who responded to this question indicated that principals already are making it easy for parents to be involved or that principals can do nothing more than what they are
Parents’ Perceptions of School Environment. As previously presented, the school’s culture and how individuals feel in the school environment affects parental involvement. The parents were asked questions about elementary schools in which the parent felt welcomed or unwelcomed and why they felt that way. Parents were also asked if they felt they could come up to the school at any time and ask questions about their child. All of the parents reported they felt they could come up to the school at any time and ask questions about their child.

The responses from parents on the following tables 5.9 and 5.10 include responses related to all elementary principals with whom the parent had experiences. Table 5.9 reports parents’ perceptions of elementary schools in which they felt welcomed and invited to be a part of the school. Table 5.10 reports parents’ perceptions of elementary schools in which they felt unwelcomed and not invited to be a part of the school.
## Parents’ Perceptions of Feeling Welcomed at Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Feels welcomed at current school. Teachers and principal are nice. Not always negative. Recalls being surprised first week when teacher called to say that grandson had had a good week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>The current school. Offers many things to be involved with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>School that younger child attended in Chicago felt welcoming; attributed it to the teachers rather than the principal. Also says that current school has a “good vibe.” Principal seems like a “beam of light.” Inspires her to be more active in school activities, PTA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Current school feels welcoming. Indicates staff keeps saying that she’s always welcome to call or visit, and that makes her feel welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Feels welcomed at this school. Feels they are supportive of families. Recalls an instance where principal invited her to join her daughter for breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>Current school feels welcoming. The staff is happy at events, very welcoming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Both schools felt welcoming. Cites secretary for creating a helpful atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shea</td>
<td>Yes, because of the open door policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>All three schools gave her the feeling of being welcomed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Very welcomed. Was very surprised by the amount of opportunities made available to participate, volunteer at the school. The school actively recruited people to volunteer. Feels like the teachers and staff are very friendly, that they know her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Very welcomed. Secretary always seems friendly and helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Current school and school in Arizona were welcoming. Current school has a good relationship with the parent liaison who frequently personally invites her to participate, volunteer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9

**Words used to describe positive behaviors and actions:** friendly, nice, smile, good vibe, inspirational, praise student, greeted by name, wanted, appreciated, welcomed, supportive, invited, happy, helpful, open door policy, opportunities, recruited, personal, and good relationships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amelia</strong></td>
<td>Previous school was always negative about grandson's behavior. Recalls feeling like principal sided with teacher and wouldn't listen to her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ellie</strong></td>
<td>Rules were established about entering the building, building security that scared the kids. School was closed to parents. There were no opportunities to volunteer, no students work up in hallways. Considered staff &quot;rude.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Angie</strong></td>
<td>Felt like the first principal did not work with parents, would not listen to them, was inflexible, uncooperative. Felt that rather than working on ways to improve relationships with students, they sabotaged the students by encouraging other teachers to dislike them. School had very limited times parents could communicate with staff before and after school. Was unable to “pop up” and see her child. Felt like schools had to follow strict reporting system rather than directly communicate with parents. Felt that there was some racism involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shelly</strong></td>
<td>Only one school left her feeling unwelcomed. Indicates she didn’t feel good about the building. Son was getting in trouble, suspended, frequently. He was in kindergarten at the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carissa</strong></td>
<td>Recalls preschool experience. School was very structured. There were times when parents were asked not to visit (lunch, nap). School was very rigid about attendance. Felt staff was not warm, welcoming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mara</strong></td>
<td>No, but indicates that some staff members at other schools appeared rude, but that the principals were very nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shea</strong></td>
<td>Gives example of visiting school and finding something unacceptable and returning to check up on it two days later, staff was clearly upset at seeing her again. Knows that they are irritated by her phone calls. Feels like school tries to get people to participate, but says they’re “putting on a front.” Feels like she’s “okay” with half of the staff, but that the other half is condescending.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Natalie** | Cites “negative attitudes” at schools where she felt unwelcomed.  
- Recalls past school, saying she could always come to the school but that they “didn’t want to see her face,” because her son was acting up. Notes that secretary was always nice.  
- Another school made her feel like she couldn’t visit at any time. Blames secretary for unwelcoming environment. Recalls incident with secretary regarding bus transportation that brought her to tears. Pulled two sons out of school to homeschool. Did not meet principal but the school felt like a “prison.”  
- Disliked another principal. Feels like principal misused authority, was unprofessional. |

Table 5.10

**Words used to describe negative behaviors and actions:** wouldn’t listen, took teacher’s side, scared, closed, rude, no student-work displayed, no opportunities to volunteer, inflexible, uncooperative, sabotaged students, disliked students, limited
times to communicate with teachers, strict reporting system, racism, felt bad, too
structured, rigid, not warm, not welcoming, irritated, condescending, negative
attitudes, felt like prison, misused authority, and unprofessional.

The parents’ perceptions of welcoming and unwelcoming schools captures different policies and practice of secretaries, teachers and principals that impacts how parents feel about the school. Parent participants described positive and negative behaviors and actions impacting their perceptions of feeling welcomed or unwelcomed.

The descriptions found in the parents’ perceptions are significant for principals to understand in order to effectively engage low-income and or minority parents in the school process. Currently, the principal participants report not having a systematic way to assess effectiveness related to engaging the targeted population. Parents’ perceptions are one method to evaluate school and principal practices.

Only one of the thirteen parents, Shea, indicated she does not feel welcome in her current school building. From the data collected and my perceptions during the interview, Shea liked the principal as a person, but did not like how the principal or teachers have handled her daughter’s learning needs. Shea reported contacting the superintendent about the school not taking care of her child’s needs. Additionally, Shea stated she does not check into the office when she arrives, which is school policy, because she feel like they know who she is. The importance of Shea’s perceptions relate to the existence of parents similar to Shea in every school and these parents’ involvement is important to the students academic and social success. All parents influence their children’s academic and social success in school.
Summary Evaluating Principal Practice

The principal participants report not having systematic ways to evaluate their effectiveness related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The current practices of evaluation include trial and error, intuition, observations, comments, and limited surveying of parents. Twelve out of the thirteen parents feel welcome at the principal participants’ schools. This is an indication that the principals are establishing an organizational culture in which parents feel they can come to the school to ask questions and feel welcomed by the school personnel.

Chapter Conclusion

The findings chapter discussed the emerging themes found in this study. The major themes to emerge answer the study’s research questions as illustrated in the findings framework, table 4.3. The findings of this study are situated in the principal participants’ epistemology, axiology, and ontology. The emerging themes are not isolated factors influencing principal commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The emerging themes work collaboratively to inform and influence in the principals’ sensemaking in practice and principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This research study investigated the commitments, leadership actions, and sensemaking of three Title I elementary principals who prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process. This study specifically sought to understand the motivation, influences and/or factors compelling these principals to prioritize the involvement of this targeted population as well as the leadership actions principals took in attempts to increase parental involvement.

In chapter one, I shared my views about the importance of engaging low-income and/or minority parents to a greater degree as a strategy to increase student academic and social success. The research on the connection of parental involvement and student success is robust, yet only four percent of principals report using parental involvement as a strategy to increase student achievement (Waxman, et al., 2008). Even though parental involvement findings are well established, there is an absence of literature focused on principal leadership and/or practices to effectively engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.

In chapter one, I presented the study’s purpose to research the factors affecting Title I elementary principals’ commitments and leadership actions of to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process, and to fill an existing void in literature. This study asserted that Title I elementary principals, as building leaders, must make sense out of their personal experiences, academic training, professional preparation and other information in order to inform their practice and effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
The following two central research questions frame the broad areas of the study's inquiry.

1. *What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement in principal practice?*

2. *What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents; a) what are the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and b) what are the resulting effects as perceived by school parents?*

In chapter one, I shared my personal positioning as a former Title I elementary school principal and the study’s conceptual framework. The conceptual framework includes research and theory related to parental involvement; low-income and/or minority populations; and sensemaking theory.

In chapter two, I presented a review of literature focused on low-income and/or minority parental involvement and sensemaking theory. As I analyzed data, some of the study’s findings replicated the findings in the literature review related to types of parental involvement; barriers to low-income and minority parental involvement; and leadership actions to effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

In chapter three, I presented the study methodology as qualitative. For this heuristic phenomenological qualitative study, I asserted a social constructivist worldview and postmodern perspective. I studied principal participants using semi-structured interview formats, concept mapping, observations, and member checking. Additionally, I studied parent participants using semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I explained the recruiting of principal and parent participants and the methods of data analysis used. I
nested myself in the study through my positioning and description of my actions as a heuristic researcher.

In chapter four, I presented an introduction to the philosophical frames and the newly developed findings framework to organize emerging themes. The philosophical frames of epistemology, axiology, and ontology were used to organize emerging themes and findings from data analysis. Additionally, chapter four presented an analysis of the process of sensemaking applied to principal participants’ practice to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

In chapter five, I presented the emerging themes from data analysis. The themes were organized in philosophical frames. The study’s first question is answered in the findings related to principal epistemology and axiology: 1) What are the influencing factors, as identified by principals, to prioritize low income and/or minority parent involvement in principal practice?

The study’s second question is answered in the findings related to principal ontology: 2) What policies and practice are principals initiating to engage low income and/or minority parents in schools; and what are the resulting effects as perceived by principals and parents? The frame of ontology includes findings related to principals’ realities, what is real in their context, and what is the nature of reality as they work to influence low-income and minority parental involvement in the school process.

Chapter five discusses the emerging themes in detail and provides quotes from principals and parents to support emerging themes. The significant themes to emerge were family experiences; influential people; altruism; influence; ownership; connate meaning of parental involvement; planning for parental involvement; and tenacity.
In this final chapter six, I provide an overview of the study and then offer interpretations of the findings as related to literature; the conceptual framework; and the findings framework. The chapter concludes with policy recommendations and future areas of study as well as the researcher’s final reflections.

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to understand the factors influencing the commitments and leadership actions of principals who have a strong commitment and take actions to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. As previously described in chapter four, the philosophical frames of epistemology, axiology, and ontology are used to organize the findings. Similarly, the philosophical frames structure the following discussion.

It is important to note the emerging themes found in this study do not occur in isolation from other emerging themes. A majority of the emerging themes inform other themes and occur simultaneously in practice. For the purpose of analysis and discussion, I made clear distinctions among the organizing philosophical frames and associated emerging themes.

Epistemology: Knowledge and Experiences

During the principal interviews, I asked principals questions about factors influencing their commitments and leadership to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement. The questions targeted the areas of personal experiences, academic experiences, and professional experiences. I was surprised during initial interviews to find principals identified few factors related to academic or professional experiences. At a later date, principals created and discussed concept maps identifying factors related to personal,
academic, and professional experiences. In the principal created concept maps, the factors identified from academic and professional experiences were still limited.

As presented in chapter two, the Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development for Administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 18) asserted that the tri-dimensions of academic preparation; field-base learning; and professional formation define the equal supports and preparation needed to prepare for principal leadership roles. The findings of this study found limited factors in academic preparation and field-based learning that influence principals to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement. The emerging themes that I did find in this study related to academic and professional experiences, though limited, appear connected to the area of professional formation. The principal participants in this study did identify factors associated with professional formation such as reflection, style analysis, and personal development as influencing their leadership actions. As earlier mentioned, the limited findings associated with academic preparation, field-based learning, and principal professional development was unanticipated. All three principals reported limited, if any, significant academic coursework or professional development training offered by the school district or at conferences as factors influencing their commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Family Experiences and Influential Individuals.** The two themes to emerge in the area of epistemology were *family experiences* and *influential individuals*. For two principals, the significant factors of *family experiences* occurred as children associated with experiences of low-income and/or minority contexts. For all three principals, significant *family experiences* occurred related to being an actual parent of a child in school.
The emerging theme of family experiences suggests that experiencing the context of low-income and/or minority families as a child influences future commitments and leadership actions as an elementary principal. The emerging theme also suggests the sole act of being a parent influences the depth of principals understanding about the importance of the parental involvement related to school success. All three principals identified experiences with their own children as having an influence on their current practice.

The second emerging theme identified in epistemology was influential individuals as a factor influencing principal commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Two principals specifically mentioned individuals in their lives that impacted or influenced their thinking in ways to affect their current commitments and practice.

The theme of influencing individuals suggests that individuals with compelling stories and/or organizations using compelling experiences have a greater potential to alter a person’s thinking and future actions. Having current and future educators engage in intentional, real and impactful learning experiences to understand the reality of low-income and/or minority students’ lives could foster a greater depth of commitments and actions to engage the parents of these students.

As previously stated, the limited number of academic experiences identified by principals was unexpected. I anticipated some of the significant factors identified by principals would relate to academic coursework in teacher education programs, student teaching, and/or in administrative coursework. I also anticipated the identification of some
influencing factors related to professional development. Overall, the data did not show significant factors related to academic and professional experiences.

The limited factors from academic and professional development identified by principals suggests the current design of higher education teacher preparation programs; higher education administrator preparation programs; and professional development trainings in practice have a minimal influence on principals’ commitments, sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority populations.

**Axiology: Values, Beliefs, Ethics, Feelings**

Interview questions asked principals to identify factors influencing their commitments and leadership actions to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement and the importance for principals to engage this population. Themes emerged related to principals’ values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings. The emerging themes of *altruism, influence,* and *ownership* describe concepts that capture specific behaviors grounded in these principals’ axiology. The principal participants did not identify or use the terminology of *altruism, influence,* or *ownership* specifically to describe factors; however, upon analysis I identified these concepts as emerging themes.

Prior to undertaking this study, I did not anticipate the degree to which personally held commitments and beliefs (axiology) were significant to the principal participants’ leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. As presented in the literature review, Sanders and Shelton (2009) assert that principals affect the schools’ purpose, goals, structure, social networks, people in the school and organizational culture. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) uses the term “recultured schools” to describe the change needed in schools to engage low-income and/or minority parents and
that the responsibility for “reculturing schools” rests with the principal. These areas identified by Sanders and Sheldon (2009) to “reculture” schools are actions to be taken by principals to address and minimize barriers, open up communication, and build relationships.

The actions of minimizing barriers, opening up communications, and building relationships associated with “reculturing schools” are behaviors or actions found in the principal participants’ practice. The emerging themes of altruism, influence, and ownership capture the principals’ axiology and significantly influence principals’ commitments, leadership actions, and sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

During the follow-up interview and member checking, I presented the initial study findings in the findings framework. I asked the principals to share their thoughts regarding the emerging themes and the degree to which the themes represented their practice. All three principals stated he/she strongly identified with the themes in the axiology and felt these to be accurate descriptions of their practice. These emerging themes and subthemes establish the importance of principals’ axiology frame related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

The following table 6.1 compares the literature review findings related to principals’ behaviors and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process to the behaviors and leadership actions found in the data from principal participants. Table 6.1 illustrates that the majority of the behaviors and actions found in literature are found in the actual practice of the principal participants. The presence of these behaviors and actions in principal participants practice validates my selection of the
three principals as having strong commitments and taking leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

A second validation of the selection of these principals is the presence of more subtle types of parental involvement, as discussed in the literature review, in the principal participants’ practice. Jeynes (2005a), Mapp et al. (2010) and Sheldon (2003, 2009; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) assert that the major factors contributing to fostering parental involvement may be a more subtle action than previous research suggested. Jeynes (2010b) asserts subtle school actions of teachers, principals, and school staff are “loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents” (p. 748). The principal participants seem to understand the impact of the subtle school actions and work to influence a school culture that is loving, encouraging, and supportive of parents.
Table 6.1

A third validation of the selection of the principal participants, based on the data, is that these principals have *relational views of parental involvement*. I created the concept of *relational views of parental involvement* for this study to distinguish differences found in earlier studies of parental involvement that focused on overt parent actions to the more
recent studies of parental involvement focusing on the more-subtle parent actions and family-school-community partnerships and communication (Jeynes, 2005b, 2007, 2011; Mapp, et al., 2010). *Relational views of parental involvement* provides greater focus on what actually influences parents’ to be involved in schools; addresses issues related to socio-cultural factors; and includes school actions to include engaging in two-way communication related to student academics and school activities. This study asserted that *relational views of parental involvement* incorporated both direct and indirect influences of parental involvement related to student outcomes in holistic, systems-thinking, partnership approaches.

In addition to *relational views of parental involvement*, the principal participants display similar commitments and leadership actions as those found in the case studies present in the literature review. The case studies researched principals that effectively engaged low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Additionally, the principal participants appear to accept the responsibility of “reculturing schools” as identified by Sanders and Sheldon (2009). Based on the data collected, the principal participants appear to understand that principal support has a significant and positive effect on the quality of parental involvement programs or initiatives and that “principals hold the key to initiating programs and processes” (Sheldon and Van Voorhis, p. 66). The data collected reflects the principal participants high degree of commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Applying Axiology Findings to Principal Practice.** When I apply the findings framed in *axiology* to principal practice, I wonder how districts could assess the degree to which a principal utilizes the concepts of *altruism, influence* and *ownership* in principal
practice. A principal’s axiology is not easily identified based on principals’ prior work experiences or credentials. Understanding a principals’ axiology requires specific questions to be asked or specific behaviors to be observed. A question for the field of education to consider is to what degree a principal’s concepts of altruism, influence, and ownership can be influenced or shaped during the academic coursework and the process of professional development. In this study, the concepts of altruism, influence, and ownership are significant factors compelling the principal participants to continue to work towards increased parental involvement.

**Ontology: Practice and Sensemaking**

The frame of ontology organizes the emerging themes related to principal practices and sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The frame of ontology analyzed policy, practice, and principal sensemaking.

I asked principals questions about factors influencing their commitments and leadership to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement. I asked both principals and parents to define their perceptions of parental involvement so I could understand how each participant defines parental involvement. I sought to understand the behaviors and actions each participant associated with parental involvement.

I also asked principals questions about the types of efforts principals make to increase the levels of parental involvement. Other questions asked principals about how they know what to do to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement. Principals were asked specifically about policies and practices they have initiated in their practice. These questions sought to understand the principals’ process of sensemaking to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement. The process of principal
sensemaking is embedded in principal practice; therefore, the process of principal sensemaking was analyzed in practice.

During data analysis themes emerged related to principals’ ontology. The emerging themes were *connate meanings of parental involvement*, *planning for parental involvement*, and *principal tenacity*.

**Connate Meaning of Parental Involvement.** The theme of *connate meanings of parental involvement* articulates that differences exist between the behaviors and activities described by principals and parents to define parental involvement. As described in chapter five, the principal participants mostly described traditional types of parental involvement related to school-based activities. Ms. Stream described parental involvement as including the types of activities and behaviors parents engage in at home such as helping with homework and reading, and other parenting activities that impact getting children ready for and arriving at school.

Parents described parental involvement as home-based and school-based behaviors and activities. The parents appeared to understand the types of parental involvement “valued” by schools. The parents interviewed were apologetic for their lack of time and inability to attend school activities. Some parents commented on not being able to be “PTA moms” or classroom volunteers. These parents described their parental involvement activities by comparing them against their perceptions of “valued” parental involvement. These parents appeared to understand the school has expectations that parents attend school-related events, and the parent participants report trying to attend these events. Beyond school-based activities, the parents’ meanings of parental involvement include activities and behaviors associated with taking care of their children, getting them ready
for school, taking them to the library, and other types of activities more generally referred to by society as “good parenting”.

As stated in the literature review, two recent meta-analyses challenge the normative thinking that parental involvement actions are external, overt, home-based, school-based actions. The result of these meta-analyses, both conducted by Jeynes (2005a, 2007), “indicate that the most puissant aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle, such as maintaining high expectations of one’s children, communicating with children, and parental style” (2007, p. 748). The emerging theme of connotate meanings of parental involvement reflects this difference in describing what constitutes parental involvement.

The emerging theme of connotate meanings of parental involvement is significant for public school administrators to understand because of the differences in how schools and parents understand parental involvement. Principals’ sensemaking and leadership actions are affected by their defined understanding of parental involvement. If principals and parents have different activities and behaviors defining parent involvement, it is difficult for principals and schools to assess if their efforts are impacting parental involvement.

Planning for Parental Involvement. Principal participants detailed how thoroughly they plan for parental involvement. The emerging theme of planning for parental involvement has additional findings related to parents’ needs, interests, and values and scheduling and reducing barriers.

As the principals plan for parental involvement, issues and factors that affect involvement are carefully considered. All three principals plan events for families and school personnel to build relationships and community. To get parents to attend, principals consider areas such as parents needs for transportation, babysitting, and feeding children
Parents’ interests are considered based on what they like to do for fun and what they feel comfortable doing. Parents’ values are considered related to their child’s future desires and family culture. The principals in this study sought to attract parents by making it easier for them to come to school events and by planning events parents would feel comfortable with, enjoy, or value.

Each principal mentioned the mandated need associated with Title I funding restrictions and district policy to have school events focused on teaching parents about curriculum, testing, and/or providing parents with resources to work with their children. Each principal stated he/she intentionally planned other events, food, and/or raffles with the academic events to attract more parents to come. The principals want the event focus to seem less academic to attract parents who may feel intimidated due to personal or prior schooling experiences or language barriers. The principals work to incorporate the mandated requirements with what they believe works to reduce barriers to participation and engage the targeted parents at high degrees.

These principals do understand and identify with the targeted population. The principals identified multiple barriers hindering parental involvement in their schools. The barriers principals identified parallel the literature review findings. In the literature review, findings were divided by structural and psychological; however, the principals did not articulate the barriers as divided by these categories. All but one of the barriers found in literature was identified by at least one of the principals. Table 6.2 illustrates the barriers present in literature compared to the barriers identified by principal participants.
Structural and Psychological Barriers

to Low-Income and/or Minority Parental Involvement Found in Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Families Structural Barriers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ lack of information and knowledge about resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ time constraints for communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ child care needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ limited English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Schools Structural Barriers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ lack of funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ lack of programming and training on how to engage parents,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ limited knowledge of data-based approaches to engaging parents,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ time constraints for communication and relationship building,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ limited understanding of constraints faced by families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ absence of training provided for teachers on effective parental involvement interactions at the collegiate and professional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ a lack of coordination between school counselors, administrators, and teachers regarding specific information about students (<strong>not identified by principals</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ reluctance of teachers to want training targeted at effect parental interaction and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ school programs not allowing for personal interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Families and Schools Psychological Barriers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ For both groups, psychological barriers are about feelings of inadequacy, issues of distrust and doubt, resistance towards engaging with the other, blaming and labeling, and socio-cultural issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2

These principals actually identified more barriers than what was found in the literature review, but the barriers identified by principals and found in literature are similar in nature and content. See table 5.5 for the principal identified barriers. These principals appear to intimately know their families and the conditions of their lives.

**Tenacity.** The theme of tenacity describes the way the principal participants engage in practice related to their commitments and leadership to engage the targeted population of parents. These principals do not give up; they do not quit. These principals keep trying. When asked at each interview and in the follow up interview “How do you know what to do or what to try”, these principals’ answers were trial and error, intuition, and past
experiences. Similarly, when asked how they know if they are being successful, their reasons are related to intuition, observation, and communication with others.

As a researcher, I know that some of the research community is uncomfortable with justifications grounded in trial and error and intuition; however, heuristic research calls for the use of intuition. As presented in the literature review, Leithwood (2009) recently focused a chapter on policy questions about parent engagement. Leithwood asserted that “only a handful of studies provide information about principals’ skills, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors likely to foster parent engagement” (p. 11). For these principals, there is little if any research to guide behaviors as principals.

The principal participants reported an absence of professional development related to engaging parents, and that principals do not discuss issues related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents with other principals. Principals are relatively isolated concerning discussions or research about effective parental involvement strategies.

I stated in the introduction that I was interested to understand the limited use of parental involvement as a strategy by principals to close the achievement gap. A recent study conducted by Waxman, Lee, and Macneil (2008) studied the strategies used by principals to close the achievement gap. This study reported that only four percent of the three hundred and eleven principals’ identified using parental involvement as a strategy to close the achievement gap. Based on the data collected for this study, I hypothesize that the reason only four percent of the principals reported using parental involvement as a strategy to close the achievement gap is because there is an absence of research studies and findings to guide principal practice. Research studies and findings are needed to 1) articulate the dispositions of principals who effectively engage low-income and/or
minority parents in the school process; and 2) articulate the most effective behaviors and actions of principals to effectively engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

**Sensemaking in Practice**

The use of sensemaking theory to discuss educational or principal practice is novel. As discussed in chapter four, sensemaking is embedded in principal practice and is continuous and ongoing. As principals seek solutions to increase the degree to which low-income and/or minority parents are involved in the school process, the principals search for plausible answers instead of absolute ones. These principals reflect on past actions and desired levels of involvement. Once the principal identifies a plausible answer, the principal moves forward with trying it. This action reflects the principals’ actions of *trial and error* and intuition. Sensemaking as a theory and process was used to effectively analyze principal practice in this study.

I justified the use of this theory in the research proposal, and I was relieved to be able to apply the process of sensemaking to principals’ practice. The degree to which identity affects sensemaking provided a way to analyze the identity of the principal as influencing commitments and leadership actions. It may be that emerging themes in the frames of *epistemology* and *axiology* are what separate these principals’ commitments and leadership actions from other elementary principals in similar settings. Sensemaking does not happen outside of our identity and who we are. In general, in the field of education little discussion occurs in principal preparation and practice that focuses on who the principal is as an individual. Sensemaking theory asserts identity is central to individuals making sense.
Recommendations Related to Principal Practice

The emerging themes in this study provide possible areas of need in order to better prepare educators to successfully engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. The following recommendations are in the areas of higher education coursework; principals’ self-reflection and sensemaking; professional development; hiring practices; and co-constructed definition of parental involvement behaviors and activities.

**Recommendation One: Mechanism for Principal Collaboration**

Principals identified few, if any, sources of information or collaboration with other professionals related to strategies utilized to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process. A community of principals needs to be created, on-line and/or face-to-face, to support principals efforts to increase low-income and/or minority parental involvement in the school process. This professional community would provide principals with a venue to access research information, post questions and/or ideas, discuss strategies, and/or advise each related to effective strategies to engage low-income and/or minority parents. The principals in this study acknowledged a lack of structure and support to guide their efforts and practice.

**Recommendation Two: Higher Education Programs**

Teacher education programs and principal preparation programs need to include sufficient and meaningful courses and/or experiences related to low-income and/or minority populations and how to engage these parents in the school process. Important in this recommendation is a comprehensive and spirally approach to covering this topic.

As previously presented, the Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development for Administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 18) illustrates the tri-
dimensions of academic preparation (traditional university courses); field-base learning (internships, planned field experiences, practica, etc.); and professional formation (mentoring, reflection, platform development, style analysis, and personal and professional development) to define the equal supports and preparation needed to prepare for principal leadership roles. The findings of this study suggest limited factors are evident in academic preparation and field-based learning that influence principals to prioritize low-income and/or minority parental involvement.

The emerging themes in this study appear to be mostly connected to the third area of professional development, professional formation. Even professional formation as it currently happens in professional development seems to have limited influence. Teacher education programs and principal preparation programs at colleges and universities should develop programs with sufficient and meaningful coursework and experiences to impact thinking and practice focused on engaging low-income and/or minority parents at high levels.

**Recommendation Three: Professional Development Trainings**

In this study, principals identified limited factors from professional development influencing principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Professional national organizations, school districts, or principals should construct professional development trainings for teachers and administrators focused on low-income and/or minority student populations and effectively engaging these parents in the school process.

**Recommendation Four: Hiring Practices**
School districts should construct interview procedures and specific desired qualities concerning effective practices and dispositions associated with successfully educating and engaging low-income and/or minority families. School districts should hire principals who display dispositions, value, or beliefs that are found to enable principals to educate and build relationships with low-income and/or minority students and their parents. Principals should hire teachers using the same criteria. Through the type of interview questions, writing samples, and other commercial perceiver screeners, school districts and principal are able to get a sense if an individual possess the desired qualities that reflect the subtle actions of being “loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents” (Jeynes, p. 748).

**Recommendation Five: Co-constructed Definition of Parental Involvement**

Due to the connate meaning of parental involvement found between principals’ and schools’ perceptions mostly school focused and parents’ perceptions being dual focused between home and school with a greater stress on home, school districts and schools should work with parents to create a uniform meaning of parental involvement. This uniform meaning of parental involvement should include both what the school values and parents’ value as meaningful parental involvement behaviors and activities. This uniform co-constructed meaning should follow the definitions and guidance provided by Section 1118 of NCLB.

The creation of a uniform meaning of parental involvement allows for parents and school personnel to communicate more effectively regarding parental involvement and ways to help students do better in school. A uniform meaning also allows for schools to assess the degree to which parents are involved since there is a description of the activities and behaviors valued.
Recommendations for Future Research

The field of education would benefit from future research related to the topics of principal commitments, sensemaking, and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. As presented in the literature review, Leithwood (2009) analyzed fifty-six empirical studies and six literature reviews in order to summarize recent evidence concerning direct parent engagement in schools; the influencing factors of parents’ engagement; and how the teachers, principals, and school personnel foster parental engagement. From the analysis, Leithwood (2009) developed four key areas for researchers to investigate. The areas identified by Leithwood (2009) are strong areas for future research.

1) the abilities, dispositions, and behaviors needed of parents, teachers principals and school staff to foster parent engagement;

2) the factors contributing to poor communication and tense relationships between parents and teachers or principals;

3) the features of the context (e.g. school environment, socio-economic status, urban-rural characteristics, school-community relations, etc) enhancing different types of parent engagement; and

4) sources or types of assistance in the development of resources and training programs to foster parent engagement.

Based on the findings in this study, I made recommendations for future research in the areas of principal axiology; parents’ perceptions of parental involvement; and methods to educate parents about subtle aspects of parental involvement.

Recommendation One
An area for future research would be a larger study on principals’ axiology and the types of values, beliefs, and ethics are found in principals who have a high degree of commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority populations. This research has the potential to change the ways principals are recruited and trained.

**Recommendation Two**

Future research on parents’ perceptions of parental involvement and parents’ perceptions of school practices to engage parents in the school process would provide educators with parents’ voice. Section 1118 of NCLB state the parents’ voice is to have an equal role in the development of school parent involvement policy and other areas related to school management and governance, but in reality parent involvement in co-constructing school policy and practice is minimal. Research findings, though not always generalizable, could enable school districts and schools to develop policies with parents in a more expedient and effective manner by utilizing research findings related to parent perceptions.

**Recommendation Three**

A final recommendation for future research would be research on effective ways to educate parents to understand the importance of their involvement the subtle aspects of parental influence on student achievement and social success in school and how to enhance learning at home. Some parents are unaware of how they can help their children have the greatest degree of success possible in schools. Research findings related to the most effective ways to educate parents has the potential to change the types of programming and activities schools plan for parental involvement.
Conclusion of Research Study

The purpose of this study was to research the factors affecting Title I elementary principals commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process, and to fill an existing void in literature. This study asserted that Title I elementary principals, as building leaders, must make sense out of their personal experiences, academic training, professional preparation and other information related to effectively engaging low-income and minority parental involvement in order to inform their practice.

Validation of Research Findings

The most significant validation for this research project came from the principal participants at the conclusion of the follow-up interview and member checking. The principal participants were attentive, respectful, interested, and gave genuine consideration to me as I presented the study’s findings framework (chart 4.3). At the end of the follow-up interview, I asked the principals if they identified with any of the findings and/or if the findings reflected their practice. The following exchanges validated me as a researcher and the study’s findings.

Exchange Between Ms. Stream and Myself

Myself: So what do you think if I say these are things that I’m identifying with you and the other two principals related to.

Ms. Stream: And I think these are right on point. I was looking at that, and I was like that’s exactly right. People who influence and alter my thinking is exactly right. I’m kind of anxious to find out.

Myself: So this should... very much if I’ve done this well, this should represent you.

Ms. Stream: I’ll think about this and I’ll... But I mean, just the first part of it, I could sit and talk to you about each one of those and it would be right on key.
Exchange Between Ms. Dunlop and Myself

Myself: And so this is the framework of my findings for my study and I guess what I would ask you is, thinking about this, how much does it resonate with you?

Ms. Dunlop: It does. It makes me feel good that the other principals were comparable, you know, that we kind of have the same thinking, and... it makes me feel a little more confident [laughs] in what I'm doing.

Exchange Between Mr. Adams and Myself.

Myself: My chart will change a bit, but I just wanted to get your thoughts on what I have found as I’ve looked at... And it could just be general thoughts. Do you think that it seems like...

Mr. Adams: Very interesting, and I really agree with what you’re saying about, because, yeah, even though I didn’t mention it today, just having a daughter in elementary schools, that’s put things in a completely new perspective for me...But just being a parent myself has been the most immediate and largest piece that I can think of. I mean, just everything you said, is just who I am, and I know it's just a piece of the puzzle, and that's what I like to do. And I like to socialize. I mean, just everything you said is very accurate.

The experience of member checking with the principal participants was an effective way for me to assess the degree to which the principal participants agreed with the study's emerging themes as representing their principal practice to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.

A second significant validation of this research study comes from reflecting on my own experiences as a Title I elementary school principal trying to engage low-income and/or minority parents at higher degrees. I struggled to make sense of the various influences impacting parental involvement. As the themes emerged from the study, I analyzed my practice against these emerging themes.

Similar to the principal participants, I have factors associated with my epistemology that influence my commitments and leadership to engage low-income and/or minority parents in the school process. Unlike the principal participants, the theme of family
experiences and influential individuals is not present in factors affecting my commitments and leadership; however I do have more significant factors influencing me from personal, academic and professional experiences. The factors affecting my commitments and leadership relate to my personal and professional experiences associated with my first teaching position in a large Texas district. As previously stated, this district had approximately seventy percent minority students, sixty percent with low socio-economic status, and a mobility rate of sixty percent. I was placed in a professional context in which I was confronted with my personal biases and lack of understanding about low-income and/or minority populations. I believe the strong sense of altruism I do possess compelled me to challenge myself to learn and understand the daily lives and contexts of the students and parents I served.

My tenacity to understand and engage the targeted population of students and parents influenced my decision to earn a Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction and an Educational Doctorate in Educational Organization and Leadership. It also compelled me to work in Title I elementary schools. My graduate studies pushed my current thinking and understanding to new levels and depths related to marginalized populations.

When I look at the study’s findings, I realize I embody many of the emerging themes in similar and different ways as the principal participants. I assess these principals’ commitments and leadership experiences to be stronger and more developed than my own. In the frame of axiology, I do have a strong sense of altruism; I use influence in my leadership practices but not to the degree of effectiveness of the principal participants; I do have a strong sense of ownership. The students and families I serve as well as the school
personnel are very personal to me and I take responsibility for the success of failure of these individuals.

Related to the frame of ontology, when I was first an elementary assistant principal I initially thought of parental involvement predominately as school based. It was my own graduate studies that changed my perceptions prior to becoming an interim Title I elementary principal. As I planned for parental involvement as a principal, my understanding of the barriers to participation was not as advanced as the principal participants in this study. Additionally, I do assess my degree of tenacity to be similar to, if not even more intense, than that of the principal participants.

My reflection on sensemaking to engage the target population is similar to that of the principal participants. I used intuition, observations, visuals cues, and informal feedback to evaluate the degree to which my initiated leadership actions affected the degree to which low-income and/or minority parents were involved in the school process. I also utilized the practice of trial and error as I planned for events.

Based on my own assessment as a heuristic researcher in this study, my personal experiences validate the study’s findings. The factors influencing my commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and/or minority populations parallel that of the principal participants.

I am confident this research study makes a meaningful contribution to the field of education administration. The study successfully answered the main research questions and used the theory of sensemaking to investigate principals’ sensemaking to engage low-income and/or minority students in the school process.
Appendix A
Brenda Dervin Graphic of Sensemaking
Appendix B
Zhang Graphic of Sensemaking

The iterations proceed from task analysis, to exploratory, and to focused search and sense-making.

Figure 4a: An Extended Iterative Sense-making Model with Detail on Cognitive Mechanisms (see Figure 4b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive (data-driven, bottom-up) mechanisms</th>
<th>Structure-driven (logic-driven, top-down) mechanisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Key item extraction</td>
<td>• Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying key words/concepts (Kavale, 1980)</td>
<td>Defining different aspects of a concept, such as purpose,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparison</td>
<td>function, and use (Kavale, 1980).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing a concept to other concepts</td>
<td>• Specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kavale, 1980).</td>
<td>Specifying conditions or requirements of a problem or task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Similarity</td>
<td>(Vosniadou &amp; Ortony, 1989).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing common features or attributes</td>
<td>• Explanation-based mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared by concepts (Vosniadou &amp; Ortony,</td>
<td>Reasoning from cause: examining the causal connections of two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Differentiation or discrimination</td>
<td>• Elimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing different features of concepts</td>
<td>Eliminating structures or facts that do not meet certain criteria in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analogy and metaphor</td>
<td>• Semantic fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogical reasoning: concepts that share</td>
<td>Examining the reasonableness with which a concept appears to fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common features or belong to common</td>
<td>a certain schema slot as it relates to the meaning of the knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>categories may exhibit other common</td>
<td>structure as a whole (Kavale, 1980).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics (Toulmin et al., 1979;</td>
<td>• Socratic dialogues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vosniadou &amp; Ortony, 1989).</td>
<td>Critical dialogues to facilitate awareness of inconsistencies in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classification</td>
<td>current schema. Recognition of anomalies can play an important role in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating a concept to a broader conceptual</td>
<td>initiating schema restructuring (Vosniadou &amp; Brewer, 1987).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>category (Kavale, 1980) and grouping of</td>
<td>• Inference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sufficiently alike concepts.</td>
<td>Drawing a conclusion or making a logical judgment on the basis of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schema induction</td>
<td>circumstantial evidence and prior conclusions (Johnson-Laird, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering regularities in the co-occurrence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of certain phenomena (Rumelhart &amp; Norman,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Generalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making claims about groups based on a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sufficiently representative sample (Chi,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992; Toulmin et al., 1979).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zhang, et.al (2008,p. 6)
Appendix C
Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development for Administrators

![Diagram of Academic Preparation, Field-Based Learning, and Professional Formation]

**Figure 2: The Tridimensional Conceptualization of Professional Development for Administrators**

(Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 18)
Appendix D
Conceptual Framework

Examination of Sensemaking: Principals Engaging Parents

INPUTS
- Academic Preparation
- Field-Based Learning
- Professional Formation
- NCLB
- Low-Income & Minority Families
- Parental Involvement Beliefs
- Leadership Approach
- School Context

SENSEMAKING
- Weick
- Principal’s Lived Experiences
- Sense-Making
- Dervin

SITUATION
- History, experience, past & present horizons
- GAP
- Questions, confusions, muddles, riddles, angst

BRIDGE

OUTCOMES
- Helps, hindrances, functions, dysfunctions, consequences, impacts, effects
- Sense-Making
- Zhang

SENSEMAKING
- Organizes Flux
- Noticing & Bracketing
- Labeling
- Retrospective
- About Presumption
- Social and Systemic

? Practice
How to do it?

Two-Way
Communication

Policy
What to do?

Organizational Routines

Commitments
Why do it?

Outputs

(Dervin, 1983; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Zhang, Soergel, Klavans, & Oard, 2006)
created by J.S. Heinhorst. 5.3.2011
Appendix E
Principal Informed Consent Form

January 10, 2013

Dear Principal Participant;

Hello, my name is Jennifer Heinhorst and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. This research project is studying Title-One elementary school principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.

This project will be conducted by myself, Jennifer Heinhorst, doctoral candidate from the Department of Educational Organization and leadership; College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This study focuses on the leadership of Title-One elementary principals regarding principals’ personal, educational, and professional experiences affecting principals’ sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. The responsible project investigator will be Dr. Richard Hunter, full professor from the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In this project, I will engage in an initial 45-minute semi-structured phone interview with you. The questions asked during this interview will be questions about your broader experiences, commitments, and leadership related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process. Ms. Heinhorst will engage in a second, more in-depth 90-minute semi-structured interview with you at your school or other agreed upon place. Following the second interview, you will be asked to create a concept map to detail the significant experiences in your personal, educational, and professional life that influence/influenced your thinking, commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Then, I will engage in a third 60-minute semi-structured interview with you at your school or other agreed upon place. This third interview will focus on the principal created concept map, principal’s sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Other brief telephone conversations, no more than two fifteen-minute conversations, may occur in order to clarify information gathered during the three interviews. At the end of this form, you are asked for your personal contact information for correspondence and a phone number in order to call you if other brief telephone calls are necessary. This person contact information will be kept secure and confidential as described at the end of this letter.

On-site observations of principals will be made in person by the researcher of principals’ interactions with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities. The researcher will document principal actions, words and/or activities with written hand notes during these times related to questions and focus of this study. The observations will be of the principal in normal activities where issues of a principal’s, teacher’s, student’s, parent’s, or school personnel’s privacy are not infringed upon in any way.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for those principals interested, to gather more specific data after time has passed for reflection. If principals live within reasonable proximity to one another, a small focus group of 3-5 participants will be assembled in order to gather more
information through discussion and relating of experiences. Focus groups will be held at an agreed upon location.

Principals will be asked for grant permission for 4-7 parents of the school building to be recruited for participation in this study through the distribution of recruitment letters to parents at parent-teacher conferences and/or by me personally when attending a school activity. Principals will also be asked to grant permission to allow me to request an interview from the parent liaison, if the building has this position.

There are no foreseeable physical risks associated with this research; however, there are emotional and reputational risks because you will be discussing your personal, academic, and professional experiences with engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process and discussing the frustrations, challenges, and barriers preventing greater involvement of this population. You may benefit from articulating your experiences and leadership to engage this population and you will be contributing to the general knowledge on this topic that is underdeveloped in research literature. Upon completion of the interviews, you will be given a small gift of approximately fifteen dollars in value as a token of appreciation for your time and willingness to share your experiences as a school leader.

These interviews and observations will take place during this school year. The interviews described above, with your permission, will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Principal participants will be sent transcriptions to ask if you have anything they would like to add. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy including use of a pseudonym and removing and/or concealing identifying comments in my writing. Results of this research will be published in a dissertation thesis and maybe presented at conferences and in journal publications. After three years for project completion, all recordings, transcripts, personal contact information and school-based documents will be destroyed. You have the opportunity to withdraw at any point during this study or not answer any questions at any point in the process without any penalty.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Richard Hunter, professor and advisor at the University of Illinois at 217-333-2800 or by e-mail at rchunter@illinois.edu or Jennifer Heinhorst, doctoral candidate researcher at 217-778-9930 or jenhb@illinois.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Bureau of Educational Research at 217-333-3023 or via e-mail at info@education.illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via e-mail at irb@illinois.edu (collect calls are accepted by both eh BER and the IRB if you identify yourself as a research participant).

I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I agree to be digitally recorded: Yes: _____ No: _____
My requested method of written correspondence is: Mail:_____ Email: _____
At the following address: __________________________________________________________
Telephone Number for Phone Contact: ______________________
_______ (initial) I agree to create a concept map to detail the significant experiences in your personal, educational, and professional life that influence/influenced your thinking, commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.
_______ (initial) I agree to on-site observations by the researcher of my interactions with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities.
Participant’s Signature: ______________________________ date: _______
A copy of this consent form will be given to you.
Appendix F

Principal Participant First Interview Questions

Today you have agreed to be interviewed as a study participant. Do you give your approval for this interview to be audio-recorded? Can you please state your full name?

Thank you for participating in this initial interview, which should last no more than 45 minutes. You nominated yourself as a Title-One elementary principal who has commitments and taken leadership actions that reflect a desire to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. I am seeking participants who are willing to identify, discuss, and concept map various personal, educational, and professional experiences that influence their commitment and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. This study focuses on the influences and resulting decisions that created the commitment to and effect on principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. In no manner will this study serve as an evaluative instrument of your practices, nor will it have any bearing on your performance status or professional privileges at your school or district. All parts of this study are held in strict confidence.

Following this initial interview, there are two additional interviews, which I will to conducted in person at a time and place of your choosing.

Most of today's questions will focus on your initial thoughts of your personal, educational, and professional experiences that influence your commitment to and leadership actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents. There are no wrong or right answers. This initial interview is designed to help me understand your experiences and leadership actions related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process.

Before we begin, let’s take a moment to answer your questions or concerns. Please do not hesitate to interrupt our interview, if you have anything you wish to share at any point.

Today's Date
Candidate Information:
Name
Current Position

1. Provide a summary of your administrative experience.
2. Describe your current school to include number of students, number of teachers, student demographics, and grade configuration.
3. You nominated yourself for this study based on your commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Can you please explain when you remember first thinking about the importance of low-income and minority parents being involved in the school process and the circumstances surrounding that situation?
4. Why do you think it is important for low-income and minority parents to be involved in the school process? What are the benefits, if any? What are the detriments, if any?

5. How important do you think it is for you, as the principal, to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process?

6. How do you know “what you know” about engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process?

7. How do you know “what to do” in practice to get low-income and minority parents engaged in the school process?

8. How do you describe your overall leadership approach and/or leadership beliefs broadly, and then more specifically related to engaging low-income and minority parents?

9. Overall, how successful do you think your leadership has been regarding the engagement of low-income and minority parents in the school process? What are you using to evaluate your success?

10. If you had to choose among personal experiences, educational experiences, and professional experiences, which area do you think has influenced your thinking and actions most related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process? Please give a few examples to support your choice.

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. I greatly appreciate your contribution to my research. Do you have any questions or additional information you would like to add before you conclude this interview?

Prior to completing this interview, can we establish a time for the second interview, which will be conducted in person at a place of your choosing within a month from now?
Appendix G

Principal Participant Second Interview Questions

Today we are conducting the second interview in person. Prior to beginning, do you give your approval for this interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed? Can you please state your full name?

Thank you for participating in this second interview, which should last no more than 90 minutes. You nominated yourself as a Title-One elementary principal who has commitments and has taken leadership actions that reflect a desire to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Just a reminder that in no manner will this study serve as an evaluative instrument of your practices, nor will it have any bearing on your performance status or professional privileges at your school or district. All parts of this study are held in strict confidence. All information related to this study is held in strict confidence.

Following this second interview, you will be given directions for the creation of a concept map and we will schedule our third interview within six weeks of today.

Most of today’s questions will focus on more in-depth thoughts about your personal, educational, and professional experiences that influence your commitment to and leadership actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents. There are no wrong or right answers. This second interview is designed to help me understand your experiences and leadership actions related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process to a greater degree.

Before we begin, let’s take a moment to answer your questions or concerns. Please do not hesitate to interrupt our interview, if you have anything you wish to share at any point.

1. How important do you think it is for you as the principal to engage low-income and minority parents in communication with school personnel about the students’ academic success and school activities?
2. How do you know what efforts to make to engage low-income and minority parents? How do you know what to do and how to do it? What influences have come from academic preparation, field-base learning and professional development?
3. Why is it important to you personally and professionally to make efforts to engage low-income and minority parents? What type of personal lived experiences have you had that influence your efforts to engage low-income and
minority parents?

4. What impact, if any, has the NCLB requirements for parental involvement had on the policies and practices in your building?

5. What types of resistance or barriers have you identified as you make efforts to engage low-income and minority parents?

6. What do you know about the lived experiences and daily context of low income and minority families? How do you know this?

7. Describe the efforts you have made as the principal to engage low-income and minority parents.

8. Describe any philosophies, beliefs, or commitments held by you or your school related to efforts to engage low-income and minority parents.

9. Describe specific policies or guidelines created with the focus on engaging low-income and minority parents. Describe the congruence or incongruence between ostensive and performative organizational routines.

10. Describe how policies have impacted practice as reflected in actions and behaviors of school personnel and parents.

11. Describe how you evaluate the effect of your efforts to engage low-income and minority parents.

12. How successful do you feel the school has been to engage low-income and minority parents?

13. How do you describe your overall leadership approach and/or leadership beliefs broadly, and then more specifically related to engaging low-income and minority parents.
Appendix H

Principal Concept Mapping

Principal Concept Mapping:

Experiences in the following areas related to principal leadership or commitments to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process. Please provide enough detailed information to provide some understanding of the event and details to the interviewer, but this information is mostly used to prompt your thinking during the third interview. There are four places provided for experiences; please try to detail at least two to three experiences for each area if possible. Add additional experiences if needed.

I. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: Experiences in your personal life that influenced your thinking, actions, or commitments to influences related to your principal leadership or commitments to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process.

   Experience A:

   Experience B:

   Experience C:

   Experience D:
II. ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES: Experiences related to university coursework that influenced your thinking, actions, or commitments to influences related to your principal leadership or commitments to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process.

Experience A:

Experience B:

Experience C:

Experience D:
Appendix H

Principal Concept Mapping (cont.)

III. Professional Development: Trainings, book studies, conferences, programs offered associated with your job (does not include academic coursework) that influenced your thinking, actions, or commitments to influences related to your principal leadership or commitments to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process.

Experience A:

Experience B:

Experience C:

Experience D:
Appendix H

Principal Concept Mapping (cont.)

IV. On-the-Job Experiences: Influences, activities, or experiences that have happened on the job as a teacher or administrator that influenced your thinking, actions, or commitments to influences related to your principal leadership or commitments to engage low income and/or minority parents in the school process.

Experience A:

Experience B:

Experience C:

Experience D:
Appendix I

Principal Participant Third Interview Questions

Today we are conducting the third interview for this research study in person. Prior to beginning, do you give your approval for this interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed? Can you please state your full name?

Thank you again for creating the concept map and participating in this third interview, which should last no more than 60 minutes. Just a reminder that in no manner will this study serve as an evaluative instrument of your practices, nor will it have any bearing on your performance status or professional privileges at your school or district. All information related to this study is held in strict confidence.

Most of today’s questions will focus on experiences and influenced you identified in your concept map as well as questions about your decision-making and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents. This third interview is designed to help me understand your personal, educational, and professional experiences and leadership actions related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process to a greater degree.

Before we begin, let’s take a moment to answer your questions or concerns. Please do not hesitate to interrupt our interview, if you have anything you wish to share at any point.

Questions:

1. Please tell me your overall thoughts about this concept map activity and thinking about your personal, academic, and professional experiences you think influence your current commitments and actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.
2. Please look at your personal experiences concept map. Could you please describe the two most significant experiences you identified as influencing your current commitments and leadership and explain the significance of these three experiences.
3. Please look at your academic experiences concept map. Could you please describe the two most significant experiences you identified as influencing your current commitments and leadership and explain the significance of these three experiences.
4. Please look at your professional experiences concept map. Could you please describe the two most significant experiences you identified as influencing your current commitments and leadership and explain the significance of these three experiences.
5. How has this concept map activity influenced your current thinking and practice?
6. What barriers and obstacles are you working against to increase low-income and minority parent involvement?
7. What do you think are the most critical attributes a principal must posses in order to effectively influence the level of low-income and minority parent involvement?
8. What do you think are the most critical leadership actions a principal must take in order to effectively influence the level of low-income and minority parent involvement?

9. What do you think the profession can do to better prepare principals to be leaders for low-income and minority parent involvement?

10. Any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share?
Appendix J
Principal Participant Follow-Up Interview Questions

Today you have agreed to be interviewed as a study participant to discuss the transcripts sent to you and the research findings and emerging themes. Do you give your approval for this interview to be audio-recorded? Can you please state your full name?

Most of today’s discussion and questions will focus on the findings from this study and your thoughts related to the findings and the study.

Before we begin, let’s take a moment to answer your questions or concerns. Please do not hesitate to interrupt our interview, if you have anything you wish to share at any point.

- How do you know what efforts to make to engage low-income and minority parents?
- Describe how you evaluate the effect of your efforts to engage low-income and minority parents.
- How successful do you feel the school has been to engage low-income and minority parents?
- Meeting needs – ask about chart sent in email.
  - food
  - shelter
  - transportation
  - clothing
  - school supplies:
  - health and wellness:
  - finances:
  - employment:
  - education:

- Discussion of Findings Chart. Ask principal thoughts from each major themed area.

- Ask principal if this study has changed their actions or thoughts related to engaging low-income and/or minority parents in the school process.
Appendix K

Parent Recruitment Letter

April 24, 2012

Dear ----,

Hi there, I would really like to talk to you! My name is Jennifer Heinhorst and I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois. I would like to talk to you and invite you to participate in my research project studying how schools and principals try to get parents involved and what schools could do to increase parent involvement. I REALLY want to speak to parents and understand their thoughts and experiences with schools and principals related to parent involvement in the school process.

I would like to interview you for 30 to 45 minutes to learn about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences with principals and schools regarding parental involvement. This interview can take place at a location comfortable to you. This interview will NOT be asking specifically about your current child’s school or principal, but about any school and/or principal of which you have knowledge or experience. This study is to better understand how to get parents involved in communication with school regarding the student progress and needed student supports.

This interview will take place from late spring to early fall in 2012. If you would like to be considered for this study, please complete the information below and return to the school’s office. Not all that return this form will be selected to participate in the study. If selected, you will receive a $10 gift certificate to a local store for your participation. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Heinhorst

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND RETURN TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE. THANK YOU!

Parent’s First Name: __________________________________________
Parent’s Last Name: __________________________________________

Child’s Current Grade in School: ________________________________

What is your ethnicity/race? ________________________________

Does your child receive free or reduced school lunches? Yes No

Best way to contact you?

Phone: ____________________________
Email: ____________________________

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Richard Hunter, professor and advisor at the University of Illinois at 217-333-2800 or by e-mail at rchunter@illinois.edu or Jennifer Heinhorst, doctoral candidate researcher at 217-778-9930 or jenhb@illinois.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Bureau of Educational Research at 217-333-3023 or via e-mail at info@education.illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via e-mail at irb@illinois.edu (collect calls are accepted by both eh BER and the IRB if you identify yourself as a research participant).
Appendix L

Parent Informed Consent Form for Participation
January 10, 2013

Dear Principal Participant;

Hello, my name is Jennifer Heinhorst and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. This research project is studying Title-One elementary school principals’ commitments and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. This project will be conducted by myself, Jennifer Heinhorst, doctoral candidate from the Department of Educational Organization and leadership; College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This study focuses on the leadership of Title-One elementary principals regarding principals’ personal, educational, and professional experiences affecting principals’ sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. The responsible project investigator will be Dr. Richard Hunter, full professor from the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In this project, I will engage in an initial 45-minute semi-structured phone interview with you. The questions asked during this interview will be questions about your broader experiences, commitments, and leadership related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process. Ms. Heinhorst will engage in a second, more in-depth 90-minute semi-structured interview with you at your school or other agreed upon place. Following the second interview, you will be asked to create a concept map to detail the significant experiences in your personal, educational, and professional life that influence/influenced your thinking, commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Then, I will engage in a third 60-minute semi-structured interview with you at your school or other agreed upon place. This third interview will focus on the principal created concept map, principal’s sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. Other brief telephone conversations, no more than two fifteen-minute conversations, may occur in order to clarify information gathered during the three interviews. At the end of this form, you are asked for your personal contact information for correspondence and a phone number in order to call you if other brief telephone calls are necessary. This person contact information will be kept secure and confidential as described at the end of this letter.

On-site observations of principals will be made in person by the researcher of principals’ interactions with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities. The researcher will document principal actions, words and/or activities with written hand notes during these times related to questions and focus of this study. The observations will be of the principal in normal activities where issues of a principal’s, teacher’s, student’s, parent’s, or school personnel’s privacy are not infringed upon in any way.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for those principals interested, to gather more specific data after time has passed for reflection. If principals live within reasonable proximity to one another, a small focus group of 3-5 participants will be assembled in order to gather more information through discussion and relating of experiences. Focus groups will be held at an agreed upon location.

Principals will be asked for grant permission for 4-7 parents of the school building to be recruited for participation in this study through the distribution of recruitment letters to parents at parent-
teacher conferences and/or by me personally when attending a school activity. Principals will also be asked to grant permission to allow me to request an interview from the parent liaison, if the building has this position.

There are no foreseeable physical risks associated with this research; however, there are emotional and reputational risks because you will be discussing your personal, academic, and professional experiences with engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process and discussing the frustrations, challenges, and barriers preventing greater involvement of this population. You may benefit from articulating your experiences and leadership to engage this population and you will be contributing to the general knowledge on this topic that is underdeveloped in research literature. Upon completion of the interviews, you will be given a small gift of approximately fifteen dollars in value as a token of appreciation for your time and willingness to share your experiences as a school leader.

These interviews and observations will take place during this school year. The interviews described above, with your permission, will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Principal participants will be sent transcriptions to ask if you have anything they would like to add. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy including use of a pseudonym and removing and/or concealing identifying comments in my writing. Results of this research will be published in a dissertation thesis and maybe presented at conferences and in journal publications. After three years for project completion, all recordings, transcripts, personal contact information and school-based documents will be destroyed. You have the opportunity to withdraw at any point during this study or not answer any questions at any point in the process without any penalty.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Richard Hunter, professor and advisor at the University of Illinois at 217-333-2800 or by e-mail at rchunter@illinois.edu or Jennifer Heinhorst, doctoral candidate researcher at 217-778-9930 or jenhb@illinois.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Bureau of Educational Research at 217-333-3023 or via e-mail at info@education.illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via e-mail at irb@illinois.edu (collect calls are accepted by both eh BER and the IRB if you identify yourself as a research participant).

**I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.**

I agree to be digitally recorded: Yes: _____ No: ______

My requested method of written correspondence is: Mail:_______ Email: _______

At the following address: ____________________________________________________

Telephone Number for Phone Contact: ___________________________

_______ (initial) I agree to create a concept map to detail the significant experiences in your personal, educational, and professional life that influence/influenced your thinking, commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process.

_______ (initial) I agree to on-site observations by the researcher of my interactions with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities.

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________ date: _______

*A copy of this consent form will be given to you.*
Appendix M
Parent Interview Questions

The following questions will be used to interview parents:

1. Where did you grow up? Can you tell me about your experiences.
2. How many different elementary schools have you had experience with as a parent?
3. Please describe the ways in which you are involved in your child’s education?
4. What type of activities do you think of when you hear the term “parental involvement”?
5. Do you think it is important for parents to participate in school events? Why or why not?
6. Are you highly involved, average, what are your self-perceptions of their involvement?
7. Did you personally meet and talk to any of the building principals? If so, explain under what circumstances and how you felt at this time.
8. Did the teachers in the school communicate regularly with you concerning your student's progress. If so, how and what type of communication?
9. Did you feel that you could go to the school at any time and ask questions about your students progress?
10. Describe the reasons or events that led you to go into the school building.
11. How important do you think it is for your student's success that you communicate frequently with school personnel (teachers) about your students progress?
12. What makes or would make it easier for you to communicate with the teachers and go into the school building to events? What makes it more difficult?
13. What do you think principals could do to make it easier for parents to be a part of the school activities, communicate with teachers, and or get more parents involved in their students education?
14. How did you feel about school when you were in elementary school?
15. How many elementary schools do you have experience with as a parent with a child in attendance at the school?
a. Which of these schools, if any, gave you the feeling of being welcomed, accepted and invited to be a part of the school? What happened in particular that led you to feel welcomed, accepted, and invited to be a part of the school?

b. Which of these schools, if any, gave you the feeling of not being welcomed, accepted or invites to be a part of the school? What happened in particular that led you to not feel welcomed, accepted, and invited to be a part of the school?

16. What strengths, gifts, talents, or other type assets do you bring to this school as a parent?

17. Age, gender, ethnicity

18. Federal free and reduced lunch status

19. Number of children

20. Level of educational attainment

21. Marital status

22. Type of Employment
Appendix N

IRB-1 Amendment

University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

Research Amendment

For Submitting Changes to Previously Approved Human Subjects Research

All modifications to human subjects research must be reviewed and approved prior to implementation.

Minor modifications Minor modifications to previously approved projects include those that do not alter the risk–benefit assessment for the research. Examples include changes in the investigators; minor changes in the consent form(s), recruiting materials, measures, or procedures; minor changes in compensation, time of participation, or subject recruitment; or the use of a new site that is not materially different from a previously approved site. Minor modifications may also include changes to other parameters, whereby the investigator provides the subjects with more accurate information as a result of additional experience with the protocol.

Major modifications Major modifications include significant protocol changes that would cause subjects to engage in activities not previously approved; or that involve an increased level of risk to the physical, emotional, or psychological well-being of participants (including the loss of confidentiality); or that involve a decreased benefit; or that otherwise result in alteration of the risk–benefit assessment for the research. For example, adding a new subject population, adding new measures that significantly differ from those currently approved, changing inclusion or exclusion criteria, changing the informed consent process, and changing procedures affecting subject confidentiality are all potentially major modifications.

1. DATE THIS REPORT WAS COMPLETED: 11/8/12

2. RESPONSIBLE PROJECT INVESTIGATOR (RPI) AT UIUC

Last Name: Hunter
First Name: Richard
Academic Degree(s): PhD

Dept. or Unit: Education Policy Organization
Office Address: 337 Ed. Bldg.
Mail Code: 708

Street Address: 1310 South Sixth Street
City: Champaign
State: IL
Zip Code: 61820

Phone: (217) 333-1261
Fax: E-mail: rchunter@illinois.edu

UIUC Status: Non-visiting member of (Mark One) ☑ Faculty ☐ Staff

3. PROJECT TITLE

Principal Sensemaking and Leadership to Engage Low-Income and Minority Parents

IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: 5081

4. MAJOR OR MINOR MODIFICATION? In the RPI’s judgment, which category of modification is this?

☒ Minor ☐ Major ☐ Uncertain

5. REVISED MATERIALS: For revisions to currently approved procedures (including discontinuation of previously approved procedures, measures, etc.), or to add new procedures that were not previously approved, please resubmit the IRB-1 or Application for Exemption incorporating the revisions as appropriate throughout the form. Amendments often require modification of consent forms, assent forms, measures and other relevant attachments.

PLEASE SUPPLY THE FOLLOWING with this Research Amendment:

a) A marked up version of the IRB-1 Application or Application for Exemption and any modified attachments or consent documents. NOTE: If your computer does not allow "strike-throughs" or other editing on the IRB-1 or Application for Exemption, it is acceptable to cross off deleted sections with a pen and use a highlighter to emphasize changes.

b) The entire IRB-1 Application or Application for Exemption reflecting the revisions.

c) Revised consent documents and other relevant attachments that have changed as a result of the amendment

Mark One: Changes marked versions and final versions are: ☑ Attached ☐ Will Follow.

1 October 2007
6. DESCRIBE THE AMENDMENT. Describe the requested change(s) and clearly reference materials submitted with this form. Provide a clear rationale for the proposed change(s). Explain whether the risk–benefit assessment for the research is likely to change as a result of the proposed amendment(s). Justify changes that will affect risks, benefits, informed consent, inclusion or exclusion criteria, the subject population(s), research sites, or the confidentiality of private, identifiable subject information.

Adding parent liaisons as research participants if the elementary school has this position. I will engage in an initial 45-minute semi-structured interview with the parent liaison if the school has this position. The questions asked during this interview will be questions about the parent liaison experiences and training as a parent liaison related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process and discussing the frustrations, challenges, and barriers preventing greater involvement of this population. The parent liaison consent letter and questions are attached.

Additional Changes to the IRB-1:
- Changes made to sections 9c, 10A1, 11, 16, 20D, 22, and 23 of the IRB1 related to addition of parent liaison participants.
- Changes made to section 10A1, 12, 19B, 19C to include on-site observations of principals interacting with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities. Attached is a revised principal consent letter.
- Changes made to sections 9c, 9f, 11, and 17 related to changes in recruitment of districts and parents, number of principal and parent participants, and remuneration of participants.

See revised IRB-1 and revised IRB-1 attachments.

If additional Item 6 information is attached, check here: [XX]

7. INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCES The original, inked signature of the Responsible Project Investigator is required before this form can be processed. Other investigators are also responsible for these assurances and are encouraged to sign. Neither stamps nor proxy signatures are accepted in this section.

I certify that the information supplied in this form, with attachments, is complete and correct, that the modified protocol has not yet been used with any human subject, and that it will not be implemented until IRB approval has been obtained.

NOTE: The signature of the RPI must be submitted before IRB Review (scanned or faxed signatures are acceptable).

[Signatures and dates]

[Date: October 2007]
Appendix 0
IRB-1

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

IRB-1 Temp
Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

1. RESPONSIBLE PROJECT INVESTIGATOR (RPI) The RPI must be a nonvisiting member of UIUC faculty or staff who will serve as project supervisor at UIUC. Students, interns, post-doctoral researchers, and visiting faculty from other campuses may not served as RPI, but should be listed as investigators, if applicable (see Part 3 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Hunter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Degree(s)</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. or Unit</td>
<td>Education Policy Organization Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Address</td>
<td>337 Education Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Champaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zip Code</td>
<td>61820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>(217) 333-1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:rhunter@uiuc.edu">rhunter@uiuc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UIUC Status: Nonvisiting member of (Mark One) ☐ Faculty ☑ Academic Professional/Staff

2. PROJECT TITLE
Principal Sensemaking and Leadership to Engage Low-Income and Minority Parents

3. INVESTIGATORS List all investigators who are different from the RPI, including those from other institutions. Include all persons who will be 1) directly responsible for the project's design or implementation, 2) obtain informed consent, 3) involved in data collection, data analysis, or follow-up.

Collaborators, outside consultants, and graduate and undergraduate students should be listed if they will be responsible for these activities. Include all investigators named on grant proposals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Herzog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Degree(s)</td>
<td>M.Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. or Unit</td>
<td>Education Policy Organization Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Address</td>
<td>240 East Colfax Avenue</td>
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<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Champaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zip Code</td>
<td>61820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>(217) 333-9930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:jennifer@uiuc.edu">jennifer@uiuc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UIUC: ☐ Faculty ☑ Academic Professional/Staff ☐ Grad Student ☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Visiting Scholar, or ☐ Non-UIUC Affiliate of (Institution):
4. RESEARCH STAFF. List other research personnel who should be copied on IRB Office correspondence for this study:

- Last Name: 
- First Name: 
- Academic Degree(s): 
- Dept. or Unit: 
- Office Address: 
- Mail Code: 
- Street Address: 
- City: 
- State: 
- Zip Code: 
- Phone: 
- Fax: 
- E-mail: 
- Affiliation: 
  - UIUC Faculty 
  - Academic Professional/Staff 
  - Grad Student 
  - Undergrad Student 
  - Visiting Scholar, or 
  - Non-UIUC Affiliate of (institution): 
- List additional Research Staff on an attachment and check here: 

5. FUNDING Indicate whether this research is funded by, or application has been made for, a grant, contract, or gift.

5A. STATUS 
- Research is not funded and is not pending a funding decision (Proceed to Part 6). 
- Research is funded (funding decision has been made). 
- Funding decision is pending. Funding proposal submission date: ____________

5B. SOURCE(S) If the research is funded or pending a funding decision, mark and name all sources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Funding—check all that apply</th>
<th>Name of Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ UIUC Department, College, or Campus (includes Research Board and Campus Fellowship Training Grants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Federal (from federal agencies, offices, departments, centers)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Commercial Sponsorship (from corporations, partnerships, proprietorships)</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ State of Illinois Department or Agency (from any state office or entity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Gift or Foundation (Including UIF) (public or private foundations, not-for-profit corporations, private gifts)</td>
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</table>

Check here if the funding is through a Training Grant: ☐

5C. PROPOSAL Attach a complete copy of the funding proposal or contract. ☐ Attached

Sponsor-assigned grant number, if known: ______

Title of Funding Proposal or Contract, if different from Project Title in Part 2: __________________________

5D. FUNDING AGENCY OFFICIAL, IF ANY, TO BE NOTIFIED OF IRB APPROVAL

- Last Name: 
- First Name: 
- Salutation: 
- Agency: 
- Office Address: 
- Mail Code: 
- Street Address: 
- City: 
- State: 
- Zip Code: 
- Phone: 
- Fax: 
- E-mail: 

6. FINANCIAL INTERESTS: Indicate below if any investigators or any members of their immediate families have any relationships, commitments, or activities with the sponsor of this research that might present or appear to present a conflict of interest with regard to the outcome of the research. (If a financial conflict of interest exists, please submit the UIUC approved conflict management plan. If you have questions about conflict of interest contact the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at 217-333-0034.)

- Ownership, equity or stock options
- Has been disclosed to the UIUC campus OR ☐ has not been disclosed to the UIUC campus
- Personal compensation such as royalties, consulting fees etc
- Has been disclosed to the UIUC campus OR ☐ has not been disclosed to the UIUC campus
- Intellectual property such as patents, trademarks, copyright, licensing, etc.
- Has been disclosed to the UIUC campus OR ☐ has not been disclosed to the UIUC campus
- Other conflict of interest:
- Has been disclosed to the UIUC campus OR ☐ has not been disclosed to the UIUC campus
- ☐ No conflicts exist
7. SUMMARIZE THE RESEARCH. In **LAY LANGUAGE**, summarize the objectives and significance of the research.

This study seeks to understand the process of sensemaking Title One elementary principals traverse through to engage low-income and minority parents. Learning more about Title One elementary principals’ process of sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents will inform principal leadership for parental involvement and provide other principals with stories or frames of reference.

How do individual principals make sense of events, actions, thoughts or information to inform practice to engage low-income and minority parents? Making sense of information or current realities is known as the phenomenon of sensemaking. Sensemaking approaches capture the process and evolution of people making sense out of contradictions in their lives when the state of what is perceived to be is different from the state of what is expected to be or there is no obvious way to engage in the world. The conflict between the two states requires the individual to negotiate, or make sense of the incongruence and requires the individual to engage in the process of sensemaking/sense-making. There is an absence of research studies and findings related to school administrator sensemaking to engage of low-income and minority parents.

The study’s general objectives are: 1) to examine several Title One elementary principals stories or narratives about sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and minority parents; 2) to understand the process of sensemaking regarding the importance to engage low-income and minority parents (“why do it”); school policy to engage low-income and minority parents (“what to do”); and the practice to make it a reality (“how to do it”); 3) this study seeks to make applicable recommendations to districts and principals to influence the understanding the phenomenon of principal sensemaking and characteristics of principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents.

The following three questions frame the broad areas of my inquiry. (1) What are the motivations and influences, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and minority parental involvement? (2) What are the individual Title One elementary principals’ personal narratives explaining their processes of sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents? 3) What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents and the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and school parents?

8. PERFORMANCE SITES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Including UIUC sites, describe ALL the research sites for this protocol. For each non-UIUC site, describe: Whether the site has an IRB. Whether the site has granted permission for the research to be conducted. Contact information for the site. If the site has an IRB, whether the site’s IRB has approved the research or planned to defer review to a UIUC IRB.</th>
<th>For non-UIUC sites, documentation of IRB approval is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Danville School District 118</td>
<td>□ Attached □ Will Follow □ N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Urbana School District 118</td>
<td>□ Attached □ Will Follow □ N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Indianapolis School District</td>
<td>□ Attached □ Will Follow □ N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List and describe any additional Performance Sites information on an attachment and check here: □

9. DESCRIBE THE HUMAN SUBJECTS
9A. SECONDARY DATA ONLY? If this research only involves the analysis of data that has already been collected from human subjects and no new data collection will occur, check here: ☐

9B. MATERIALS OF HUMAN ORIGIN? Will this research involve the collection, analysis, or banking of human biological materials (e.g., cells, tissues, fluids, DNA)? ☐ Yes  ☐ No If yes attach Appendix C, the Biological Materials Form.

9C. ANTICIPATED NUMBERS How many subjects, including controls, will you study in order to get the data that you need? If you plan to study disproportionate numbers of a given sex, race, or minority group, provide scientific rationale in Part 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Site: Principal Participants</th>
<th># Male</th>
<th># Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Indiana: Indianapolis Public Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Illinois: Urbana Unit 116</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Illinois: Danville District 116</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List Anticipated Numbers for additional Performance Sites on an attachment and check here: ☐

9D. AGE RANGE Mark all that apply. Researchers planning to include children in research projects involving more than minimal risk must provide written documentation of the benefits that are likely to accrue to a child participating in the project. This should include information gathered on adults, if it exists, or an explanation about why it does not exist.

☐ 0–7 years  ☐ 8–17 years  ☒ 18–64 years  ☐ 65+ years

☐ If applicable, written documentation of benefits for including children in more than minimal risk research is attached.

9E. SPECIAL OR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS Mark groups that will be targeted by design. Also indicate groups likely to be involved in the research even though they are not targeted by design.

☐ None of the following special populations will be targeted

☐ Children (age < 18 years)
☐ Neonates
☐ Fetuses (in utero)
☐ In vitro fertilization subjects
☐ Pregnant or lactating women
☐ Specific racial or ethnic group(s)— describe: Minority: black and hispanic
☐ Inpatients
☐ Low income or economically disadvantaged persons
☒ Adults with legal guardians
☐ Persons with limited civil freedom (e.g., members of military)
☐ Outpatients
☐ UIUC Students—name subject pool, if applicable:
☐ Elderly (age > 65 years)
☐ Other College Students—name subject pool, if applicable:
☐ Other (describe here):

9F. If you checked any of the groups in question 9E, describe additional safeguards included in the protocol to protect the rights and welfare of special or vulnerable populations.

Parents identifying themselves as having a low-income and/or minority status with children in third and fourth grade in each participating school will be sought to interview about the parent’s views and experiences associated with principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents. The participants’ names, school names, and city names will be held in strict confidence and will not be utilized in the transcription. Each participant will be assigned a code number and no identifying characteristics will be used to identify a specific individual.

10. RECRUITMENT

4 of 16
10A-1 RECRUITING PROCEDURES. Specifically describe the systematic procedures for finding and recruiting subjects or requesting pre-existing data or materials. 1) State whether any of the researchers are associated with the subjects (e.g., subjects are students, employees, patients). 2) Name any specific agencies or institutions that will provide access to subjects or subject data. 3) Who will contact the prospective subjects? 4) Who gives approval if subjects are chosen from records? 5) Describe solicitation through the use of advertising (e.g., posters, flyers, announcements, newspaper, radio, television, Internet), face-to-face interaction, direct mail or phone contact, classrooms, subject pools, health care registries, patient referrals, and institutional “gatekeepers,” as applicable.

In order to acquire a perspective from 3-6 Title-one elementary principals on their sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents, I plan to interview and/or conduct focused groups with principals who 1) have led in their perspective elementary school for at least three years 2) have expressed a commitment to and/or belief in the importance of schools working to engaging low-income and minority parents; and 3) are able to detail the history of initiatives taken to engage low-income and minority parents. To gain a parent perspective, I plan to interview 4-7 parents in each participating school who self-disclose low-income and/or minority status. If the school has a parent liaison, I plan to interview the parent liaison.

Concerning principal participants, I plan to recruit a purposeful sample of 3 Title-One elementary school principals. To obtain principals, the school research form will be sent to the specified districts in section 8. In addition, a letter/email about the study and participant criteria will be sent to elementary Title-One principals in the specified urban and small-urban districts in Illinois and Indiana who have been principals at least three years in their respective buildings. The letter/email will ask interested principals to contact me via e-mail or phone. The principals who express interest and meet the established criteria will be considered for participation. Qualified principals selected from the pool of interested candidates will be asked for contact information, specifically a telephone number and email or regular address to correspond with the principal and conduct additional phone interviews, if needed. These principals will agree in the informed consent to conduct an initial interview, create a concept map of influences regarding sensemaking towards low-income and minority parent participation, and engage in a follow-up interview to discuss concept map. Additionally, on-site observations of principals interacting with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school-related activities. I will meet principals granting me an interview at a secure interview site of his or her choice. I may ask principals to engage in a follow-up interview and/or focus group to gather more specific data. I plan to provide principal participants with a small gift costing less than fifteen dollars as a token of my appreciation and I will send a letter to the principal thanking him/her for participation in this study.

Concerning parent liaison participants, I plan to conduct one forty-five minute interview with the parent liaison, if such a position exists in the building. If there is a parent liaison in the building and the principal grants permission for me to ask the parent liaison to be interview, I will contact the parent liaison to explain the study and ask his/her desire to participate in an interview. I will meet parent liaisons granting me an interview at a secure interview site of his or her choice. I plan to provide parent liaison participants with a small gift costing less than fifteen dollars as a token of my appreciation and I will send a letter to the principal thanking him/her for participation in this study.

To obtain parent participants, I plan to work with principal participants of three selected elementary schools to notify third and fourth grade parents in that building through a recruitment letter about the study that will be distributed during parent teacher conferences by the researcher or by the researcher personally approaching parents at school activities and seek active consent to participate from approximately 4 to 7 parents from each school. If interested in participation, the parents will be asked to return the letter to the school or to the researcher. From the parent participants, the parents identifying themselves as having a low-income and/or minority status with children in third and fourth grade in the participation school are the ones being sought to understand principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents. If a parent grants me an interview, I will meet him or her at a secure interview site of his or her choice, and following the interview I plan to offer participants a ten-dollar gift card to a local store as a small display of appreciation. This amount is less than the parent liaison and principal because of the lesser time commitment. The parents who express interest and meet the established criteria will be considered for participation. Parents who meet the criteria will be asked in order of receiving the letter of interest to participate in the study. Selected parents will be asked to conduct one interview and may be asked to engage in a follow-up interview and/or focus group to gather more specific data.

10 A-2 Attach final copies of recruiting materials including the final copy of printed advertisements and the final version of any audiotaped taped advertisements and check here: Attached ☐ Will Follow ☑

10B. WITHHELD INFORMATION Do you propose to withhold information from subjects prior to or during their participation? ☑ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe what will be withheld, justify the withholding (address risks, provide rationale), describe the debriefing plan, and attach a labeled copy of a written debriefing form, to be provided to subjects. ☐ Debriefing Attached ☐ Will Follow
10. SCHOOLS-BASED RESEARCH
If subjects will be recruited from Illinois public or private elementary or secondary schools, additional deadlines and procedures apply. Criminal background clearances might be required. Special consideration must be given to the exclusion of protected populations. Please contact the Office of School–University Research Relations (OSURR) (217.244.0615 or http://www.ed.usc.edu/OSURR.pdf) for more information. Mark one:

- Illinois schools will be used
- Illinois schools will not be used

11. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Address all four of the following items in explaining who will and will not qualify for participation and how that determination will be made: (1) Describe procedures to assure equitable selection of subjects. Justify the use of any special or vulnerable groups marked in Part 9E. Selection criteria that target one sex, race, or ethnic group require a clear scientific rationale. (2) List specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects in the study, including treatment groups and controls. (3) Name and attach copies of measures and protocols that will be used to screen applicants. (4) Explain how the inclusion/exclusion criteria will be assessed and by whom. If special expertise is required to evaluate screening responses or data, tell who will make this evaluation and describe their training and experience.

Principal Participants
1) For principal participants, I am not planning to target any specific gender or racial group for this study; however, if I am afforded a choice of participants that meet the established requirements, I will select as many different types of participants as possible based on a variety of ranges of years of experiences and schools that both meet or do not meet AYP. This information can be obtained from the School Report Card link on the school websites. I do plan on selecting about 2 or more principals from two or more different districts with principals who meet the established criteria. I will not be interviewing any special or vulnerable groups of people for the principal interviews.

2) The only requirements for possible participation are that the Title-One elementary school principals 1) have led in their perspective elementary school for at least three years 2) have expressed a commitment to and/or belief in the importance of schools working to engage low-income and minority parents, and 3) are willing to detail through interviews and concept mapping (see attached documents) the influences of and history of initiatives he/she has taken to engage low-income and minority parents.

3) Screening will only be determined based on the criteria of being a Title-One elementary school and the principal meeting the criteria established. If I have more than two principals in a district that meet these criteria, I will try to select as many different kinds of principals based on the discussion in the previous section such as gender, age, and ethnicity.

4) I will only contact principals who indicate an interest to me via email or phone call.

Parent Participants
1) For parent participants, I am planning on targeting low-income and minority individuals for this study for the same schools with principal participants. In order to obtain low-income and minority parent perspectives related to principal leadership for low-income and minority parent engagement, I must directly ask this population. This information about low-income and minority status will be obtained through a parents' self-discloser when responding to a recruitment letter seeking parent participation sent home to all third and fourth grade parents in two separate elementary schools.

2) The only requirements for possible participation is being a third- or fourth-grade parent in the selected school and self-discloser of low-income or minority status.

3) Screening will be determined based on the criteria established in the prior section. The first seven parents who meet criteria will be contacted based on the order in which the letters of interest were received. If more than 7 parents in a school expresses interest and meets criteria, I will select parents that represent a range of ages, genders, and ethnicities.

4) I will only contact parents who indicate an interest to me by returning the recruitment letter. Those not selected for the study will not be notified of non-selection.
Parent Liaison Participants:
1. If a school has a parent liaison, I am planning to ask the principal if I am able to interview the parent liaison if the parent liaison is agreeable to the interview.
2. The only requirement for possible participation is being a parent liaison in the building and agreeing to be interviewed for this study.

12. RESEARCH PROCEDURES: Using layman’s language, specifically describe what the participants (treatment groups and controls) will do and where the research activities will take place. Give approximate dates and durations for specific activities, including the total number of treatments, visits, or meetings required and the total time commitment.

(For schools-based research where class time is used, describe in detail the activities planned for nonparticipants and explain where (e.g., in a classroom, in a private area) both participants and nonparticipants will be located during the research activities. Include a concise description of procedures, locations, time commitments, and alternate activities on the relevant consent and assent forms.)

PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

Principal participants in the study will be interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview protocol at their respective school or other secure location (if participant chooses) at a time most convenient to them. I would like to conduct the interviews between March 2013 – March 2013. I plan on the first interview, a phone interview, to take approximately 45 minutes. The second interview will be approximately 90 minutes. Between the second and third interviews the principal will create a concept map identifying influences on the principal’s leadership for low-income and minority parent involvement. This concept map will take approximately 60 minutes for the principal to create. A third interview, taking approximately 60 minutes, will discuss the concept maps the principals were asked to produce. I will digitally record and transcribing all interviews and will send principal participants’ transcripts to ask if they have anything else they would like to add.

I will be asking principals to reflect on their experiences with and influencing factors related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents through concept mapping. I will use “sensemaking” theory to guide the interview questions and concept mapping. I will not be delving into sensemaking theory with the interviews, but rather use this theory as a means to interpret and understand data in my writing. Principals will be asked to identify elements from their personal life, academic life, and professional life that influenced their commitment to and actions towards principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in their practice.

The questions during the first interview will be questions about the principals’ broader experiences, commitments, and leadership related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process. The second interview is a more in-depth 90-minute semi-structured interview of the original topics from the first interview. Following the second interview, the principal will be asked to create a concept map to elaborate the significant experiences in their personal, educational, and professional life that influenced their thinking, commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. The third interview will focus on the principal created concept map, principal’s sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school process. The interviews will be conducted at a secure location at their school or other designated place selected by the principal participant. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by me. I will send participants a transcription of their interview via e-mail and ask if participants have anything else they would like to add to their interview statements. If additional interviews are conducted, these interviews will follow the same procedures as the initial interviews including recording, transcription, and dissemination.

On-site observations of principals will be made in person by the researcher of principals’ interactions with parents, students, and/or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities. The researcher will document with handwritten notes principal actions, words and/or activities during these times related to questions and focus of this study. The observations will be of the principal in normal activities where issues of a principal’s, teacher’s, student’s, parent’s, or school personnel’s privacy are not infringed upon in any way. The observations will be conducted without interference to normal school activities and routines. I will not be notifying other school personnel I am observing the principal unless I am asked. The principal is free to announce to whom ever he/she deems necessary the reason of my presence if he/she feels compelled.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for those principals interested, to gather more specific data after time has passed for reflection. If principals live within reasonable proximity to one another, I would try to gather a small focus group of 3-5 participants in order to gather more information through discussion and relating of experienced. Focus groups will be held at a secure location such as a school office or classroom and the discussion would be digitally recorded and transcribed by me. I will tell participants that they must keep the discussion confidential and that any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts through coding. I will send participants a transcription of the focus group via e-mail and ask if participants have anything else they would like to add to their focus group statements. I will digitally record and transcribe any follow up interviews and send participants transcripts to ask if they have anything else they would like to add. I will be asking principals to reflect on their commitment to and actions towards principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in their practice.

PARENT PARTICIPANTS

Parent participants in the study will be interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview protocol at their respective school or other secure location (if participant chooses) at a time most convenient to them. I will not be interviewing by phone. I plan on the interviews taking approximately 30 to 45 minutes each. I will digitally record and transcribing all interviews and will send parent participants transcripts.
to ask if they have anything else they would like to add.

I will be asking parents to reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to principal or school actions to engage the parents with the school and/or school personnel.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for parents interested, to gather more specific data after time has passed for reflection. If parents live within reasonable proximity to one another, I would try to gather a small focus group of 3-5 participants in order to gather more information through discussion and relating of experienced. Focus groups will be held at a secure location such as a school office or classroom and the discussion would be digitally recorded and transcribed by me. I will tell participants that they must keep the discussion confidential and that any identifying information will be removed the transcriptions through coding. I will send participants a transcription of the focus group via mail and ask if participants have anything else they would like to add to their focus group statements. I will digitally record and transcribe any follow up interviews and send participants transcripts to ask if they have anything else they would like to add. I will be asking parents to reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to principal or school actions to engage the parents with the school and/or school personnel.

PARENT LIAISON

Parent Liaison participants in the study will be interviewed in person, using one semi-structured interview protocol at their respective school or other secure location (if participant chooses) at a time most convenient to them. I will not be interviewing by phone. I plan on the interviews taking approximately forty-five minutes each. I will digitally record and transcribing all interviews and will send parent participants' transcripts to ask if there are areas needing revision or additional information added.

I will be asking the parent liaisons to reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to principal or school actions to engage the parents in the school process.

13. EQUIPMENT Will any physical stimulation or physiological data acquisition equipment be used with the subjects?
   □ Yes □ No
   If yes, attach Appendix A, the Research Equipment Form.

14. DEVICES Will any devices be used with the subjects?
   □ Yes □ No
   If yes, attach Appendix B-1.

15. DRUGS AND BIOLOGICS Will any drugs or chemical or biological agents be used with the subjects?
   □ Yes □ No
   If yes, attach Appendix B-2.

15. MRI AT BIC To use the Beckman Institute Biomedical Imaging Center (BIC) in human subject's research, you must obtain prior approval from the BIC (217.244.0800; bmrfl@brrri.bmrfl.uiuc.edu) and use BIC-approved screening and consent forms. Attach:
   □ BIC approval Attached
   □ BIC screening form Attached
   □ BIC consent form Attached

16. MEASURES If subjects will complete questionnaires, surveys, interviews, psychological measures, or other measures, however administered, the IRB must review and approve the measures. List all such measures here and attach complete, labeled copies (including translations, if applicable) to this application:

| Measure 1: Principal Semi-Structured Interview Questions | □ Attached □ Will Follow |
| Measure 2: Parent Semi-Structured Interview Questions | □ Attached □ Will Follow |
| Measure 3: Principal Focus Group Protocol | □ Attached □ Will Follow |
| Measure 4: Parent Focus Group Protocol | □ Attached □ Will Follow |

List additional Measures on an attachment and check here: □

17. SUBJECT REMUNERATION

Will subjects receive inducements or rewards before, during, or after participation? □ Yes □ No
   If yes, will payment be prorated for partial participation? □ Yes □ No

If remuneration will be given, for each subject group:
   (1) specify the form of remuneration, including $, course credit, lottery, gift certificate, or other;
   (2) state the $ amount or the approximate $US value, or the course credit and its percentage of the final grade;
   (3) explain the remuneration plan, including whether and how prorating will be made for partial participation;
   (4) for lotteries, include (a) the number of prizes, (b) the nature and value of each prize, (c) the approximate odds of winning, (d) the date(s) of the drawing(s), and (e) how winners will be notified, by who, and by when; and
   (5) include all this information on the relevant consent forms.

8 of 16

IRB-1 v5 0610rev

252
Once a principal completes an interview with me, I will offer him or her a small gift less than $15, in value as appreciation of their time. No other forms of remuneration are planned.

Once a parent liaison completes an interview with me, I will offer him or her a small gift less than $15 in value as appreciation of their time. No other forms of remuneration are planned.

Once a parent completes an interview with me, I will offer him or her a $10 gift card to a grocery store as a token of appreciation of their time. If a parent is asked to participate in a follow-up interview and/or focus group, I will also offer him or her a $10 gift card to a grocery store as a token of appreciation for their time. No other forms of remuneration are planned. The amount of remuneration for parents is less than principal and parent liaison because the time commitment is less.

18. SUBJECT OUTLAY Will subjects incur costs for research-related procedures (e.g., longer hospitalization, extra tests), use of equipment, lost compensation, or transportation (over 50 miles)?  □ Yes  □ No  If yes, describe here:

19. CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA Answer each of the following to describe methods that will ensure the confidentiality of individually identifiable data. Confidentiality is required unless subjects give express, written permission to have their identifiable information published, presented, or shared.

19A. CHECK IF USED IN DATA COLLECTION:  □ Audio tapes/ Digital voice  □ Video tapes  □ Still photos  □ Other imaging

19B. DATA COLLECTION Explain how the data will be collected. If anonymous data collection is proposed, provide details of how investigators will not have the ability to trace responses to subject identities. For multiple data collection or if multiple contacts will be made with subjects, specifically explain the subject tracking and coding systems.

Address the confidentiality of data collected via e-mail, databases, Web interfaces, computer servers, and other networked information, as applicable.

Data will be collected through interviews and/or focused groups, using a digital recording device (if participants approve), through school-based documents, through principal created concept map documents, and through on-site observations of principals interacting with parents, students, and or school personnel during regular school hours or school related activities. If participants do not approve to a digital recording, I will record interview with written notes. I will have the ability to identify the specific principal or parent as I transcribe the recordings and will then e-mail (with participant approval) or mail the transcriptions to participants so they may check with codes replacing any identifying information. Also, participants can clarify anything I might need a brief explanation about or they would like to explain differently. I will keep the recordings on my password protected computer with a secure server, in digital files for the duration of the research project, should I need to refer to them for participant infection and tone. The data will be coded for themes and experiences that relate or do not relate among participants and also to themes in sensemaking theory. This coding may be done using the Atlas computer program purchased by the researcher. The principal concept maps, other school documents, and on-site observation notes will be retained as data.

19C. DATA SECURITY Describe how and where the data be kept so that the data remain confidential.

Consent forms, digital recordings, school based documents, on-site observation notes and transcripts will be kept at the home of the researcher where I will back up the digital and transcribed data using a secured server internal backup system with my password protected computer. Only myself, my PI and the specific research participant will have access to the transcribed data, and after the research project has been completed (including publication), digital recordings, transcripts, and participant contact information (telephone numbers, email, and addresses) will be destroyed after three years. Principal concept maps and other school documents will be coded for purposes of confidentiality. A key will exist that links the school data, interviews, and focus groups together, and the key will be stored securely and in a separate location from the transcriptions, concept maps, and other school documents.

19D. STAFF TRAINING Describe the training and experience of all persons who will collect or have access to the data.
I have completed all of the required IRB education modules. The doctoral student and the PI are the only ones with access to the data.

19E. DATA RETENTION  How long will the data be kept?

Once the thesis has been completed and formally accepted, the digital recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after 3 years of project completion to allow for subsequent journal articles and conference presentations.

19F. DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS  What is(are) the proposed form(s) of dissemination (e.g., journal article, thesis or academic paper, conference presentation, sharing within industry or profession)?

At this time, I plan to disseminate the information in the form of a University of Illinois thesis and then in conference presentations and journal articles.

19G. PRIVACY  Describe provisions to protect the privacy interests of subjects.

No documents produced for dissemination will contain participant names or individual identifying characteristics. All the principal, parent liaison and parent interviews will be completed in a private space of the participant’s choosing, ensuring confidentiality of responses. Focus groups for parents and principals will begin with an explanation that all information that is shared in the focus group is confidential and should remain that way and all consents will inform the participants that they should be aware that focus groups will involve other people hearing their statements. Opportunities to review all transcripts will be provided in a manner chosen by the participant and warnings will be given about the lack of privacy of email conveyance of such transcripts. All participants, their schools, communities, school districts and corresponding contact information will be assigned pseudonyms and the key will be kept separate from the data and locked in a cabinet or on a password protected server to which only the investigators have access. No publication of the results of this study will include any identifying information about any of the participants.

19H. INDIVIDUALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION  Will any individually identifiable information, including images of subjects, be published, shared, or otherwise disseminated?  ☐ Yes  ☒ No

If yes, subjects must provide explicit consent or assent for such dissemination. Provide appropriate options on the relevant consent documents.

20. INFORMED CONSENT:  University policy requires the execution of a comprehensive, written document that is signed by the subject (or the subject’s authorized representative) as the principal method for obtaining consent from subjects. The language in the document must be understandable to the subject or the subject’s legally authorized representative.

An investigator may request a Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent or a Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent (e.g., online consent, oral consent). If requesting a waiver please complete the appropriate waiver form at: www.irb.illinois.edu and submit it with the IRB Application for review.

Children must assent (or, voluntarily agree) to participation and a parent must separately consent on behalf of their child (i.e., two different forms are generally required). Children under age 8 may assent either orally or passively, depending on their level of maturity. Children 8–17 years old should sign a written form unless the UIUC IRB approves a different process.
20A. TYPE OF CONSENT Check all that apply and attach one copy of each relevant form, letter, or script on university letterhead. Include translations, if consent will be obtained in a foreign language. Use headings, headers, or footers to uniquely identify each document and associate it with the subject group for which it will be used.

- [ ] Written informed consent (assent) with a document signed by
  - [ ] adult subjects
  - [ ] parent(s) or guardian(s)
  - [x] adolescents aged 8–17 years

- [ ] Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent (Attach waiver form.)
  - [ ] adult subjects
  - [ ] parent(s) or guardian(s)
  - [x] adolescents aged 8–17 years

- [ ] Waiver of Documentation (signature) of Informed Consent (Attach waiver form.)
  - [ ] adult subjects
  - [ ] parent(s) or guardian(s)
  - [x] adolescents aged 8–17 years

20B. USE OF PROXY Will others (e.g., next of kin, legal guardians, powers of attorney) act on behalf of adult subjects in giving consent to participate in this research? [ ] Yes [ ] No If yes, describe in Section 20D.

20C. USE OF PROXY OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES If a proxy is used in research conducted outside Illinois, provide justification (e.g., statement of an attorney or copy of applicable law) that the proxy is authorized under the laws of the jurisdiction in which the research will be conducted to consent to the procedures involved in this protocol.

20D. CONSENT PROCESS Describe when and where voluntary consent will be obtained, how often, by who, and from whom. If cognitive impaired subjects (including children under age 8) will be involved, explain how the subject's understanding will be assessed and how often; include the questions that will be asked or actions that will be taken to assess understanding.

Describe any waiting period between informing the prospective subject and obtaining the consent. Describe steps taken to minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence. Indicate the language used by those obtaining consent. Indicate the language understood by the prospective subject or the legally authorized representative.

If the research involves pregnant women, fetuses, or neonates, indicate whether consent will be obtained from the mother, father, or both. If the research involves children, indicate whether consent will be obtained from: Both parents unless one parent is deceased, unknown, incompetent, or not reasonably available, or when only one parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child, or from one parent regardless of the status of the other parent.

Principal Participants:
After principal participants agree to an interview, I will ask that they select a secure location and time most convenient to them. Before conducting the interview, two weeks prior to the first scheduled interview, I will email (if participant grants permission) or mail participants and explanation of the study and the consent form. I will inform the participant that I will bring another copy of the consent form for them to sign prior to the interview with me. The principal participant informed consent form will be used to give consent to the three interviews and concept mapping detailed in section 12. Another copy of the same consent letter will be presented and signed if the participant agrees to participate in a focus group.

Parent Participant:
After parent participants agree to an interview, I will ask that they select a secure location and time most convenient to them. Before conducting the interview, two weeks prior to the first scheduled interview, I will email (if participant grants permission) or mail participants and explanation of the study and the consent form. I will inform the participant that I will bring another copy of the consent form for them to sign prior to the interview with me. The parent participant informed consent form will be used to give consent to the one interview detailed in section 12. Another copy of the same consent letter will be presented and signed if the participant agrees to participate in a focus group.

Parent Liaison Participant:
After parent liaison participants agree to an interview, I will ask that they select a secure location and time most convenient to them. Before conducting the interview, two weeks prior to the first scheduled interview, I will email (if participant grants permission) or mail participants and explanation of the study and the consent form. I will inform the participant that I will bring another copy of the consent form for them to sign prior to the interview with me. The parent liaison participant
informed consent form will be used to give consent to the interview described in section 12. Another copy of the same consent letter will be presented and signed if the participant agrees to participate in a focus group.

21. RISKS
21A. DESCRIPTION Specifically describe all known risks to the subjects for the activities proposed and describe the steps that will be taken to minimize the risks. Include any risks to the subject’s physical well-being, privacy, dignity, self-respect, psyche, emotions, reputation, employability, and criminal and legal status. Risks must be described on consent forms.

Although there are no anticipated physical risks to participants in my study, there are potential risks to participants’ emotions as they reflect on their personal stories, experiences, and/or perceptions related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in school. Participants have the opportunity to withdraw at any point or not answer any questions at any point in the process without any penalty.

Principal Participants:
For the principal participants, prior to this interview, they may have not clearly identified the elements influencing their leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in schools and they may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of the obstacles to their current work. As principals disclose feeling about their specific actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools, they may feel a reputational risk. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and properly destroyed.

If principals participate in a focus group of 3-5 people, they may have a higher reputational risk than just an interview format due to the small group discussion. The principals may experience feelings of risk if they agree/disagree with district policies and/or actions of their supervisors. At the focus group, I will explain that all information is to be kept confidential and that through a confidential discussion, I hope to have a more open discussion about the questions being asked. When the participants sign the consent form to agree to participation in the focus group, the need for confidentiality will be reiterated.

Parents in this study will be parents of some of the same schools as principal participants. The parents are not being asked to evaluate the actions of the current principal, but to respond related to the parent’s overall experiences with principals and public schools. Since the parents are connected to the schools where principals are also included in the study, if parents indicate concerns it could reflect on the principal negatively and may increase the principal feelings of risk related to public perceptions of principal success. Therefore I will make sure the principals understand that during the parent interviews it will be reiterated that these questions are about experiences with all principals and that parents should not use principal’s names when relating experiences or answering questions.

Principal interviews/focus groups, parent liaison interviews, and parent interviews/focus groups will not be linked. The principal responses and parent responses are analyzed separately and no comparisons will be made between the parents’ responses of a particular school and the principal responses from the same school. The principals’ interviews, concept maps, and school documents supporting practice will be linked for comparisons; this linkage may increase the principal feelings of risk related to reality of level of success in practice versus anticipated success.

Parent Participants:
For parent participants, prior to this interview and/or focus group they may have not clearly identified their experiences or perspectives regarding principal and/or school actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. These parents may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of their personal experiences with public schools and feel uncomfortable having others hear their thoughts. As parents disclose feelings they may feel vulnerable and may worry their participation may have a negative effect on their child’s school experience or their relationship with school personnel. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and
properly destroyed.

Parent Liaison Participant:

For the parent liaison participants, prior to this interview, they may have not clearly identified the elements influencing their job responsibility to engage low-income and minority parents in schools and they may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of the obstacles to their current work. As parent liaisons disclose feeling about their specific actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools, they may feel a reputational risk. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and properly destroyed.

Parents in this study will be parents in some of the same schools as parent liaison participants. The parents are not being asked any questions specifically related to the actions of the current parent liaison, but asked to respond related to the parent’s overall experiences with principals and public schools. Since the parents are connected to the schools where parent liaisons are also included in the study, if parents indicate concerns it could reflect on the parent liaison negatively and may increase the parent liaison feelings of risk related to public perceptions of principal success. Therefore I will make sure the parent liaisons understand that during the parent interviews it will be reiterated that these questions are about experiences with all principals and schools.

21B. RISK LEVEL: ☑ No more than minimal risk
(the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated for participation in the proposed research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests).

☐ More than minimal risk

21C. Data Monitoring Plan: If you checked that the research is more than minimal risk, describe the provisions for monitoring the data to ensure the safety of subjects (Who will periodically monitor harms and benefits experienced by subjects to ensure that the relationship of risks to potential benefits remains unchanged? How often will monitoring occur? What analyses will be performed? If appropriate, what criteria will be used to stop the research based on monitoring of the results?)

22. BENEFITS Describe the expected benefits of the research to the subjects and/or to society.

There are no expected physical benefits to participants in their study.

The possible benefit to principal participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own leadership and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. Thinking about and mapping influences and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents could be revealing and enlightening.

The possible benefits to parent participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding principal and school actions to engage them in the school process and the feelings of being valued and given voice by their direct involvement in the study as participants.

The possible benefit to parent liaison participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own job responsibilities and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. Thinking about actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents could be revealing and enlightening and inform future practice.

For all groups of participants, there is a possible benefit of knowing that their research participation will be used to improve principal leadership to engage low-income and minority families at a time when student academic success is critical. The research will also contribute the literature concerning principal practice, parental involvement, and sensemaking theory.
23. RISK/BENEFIT ASSESSMENT  Weigh the risks with regard to the benefits. Provide evidence that benefits outweigh risks.

In my considered opinion, there are no anticipated physical risks to participants in my study. There are potential risks to participants' emotions as they reflect on their personal stories, experiences, and/or perceptions related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in school. Participants have the opportunity to withdraw at any point or not answer any questions at any point in the process without any penalty.

Principal Participants:

For the principal participants, prior to this interview, they may have not clearly identified the elements influencing their leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in schools and they may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of the obstacles to their current work. As principals disclose feeling about their specific actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools, they may feel a reputational risk. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and properly destroyed.

If principals participate in a focus group of 3-5 people, they may have a higher reputational risk than just an interview format due to the small group discussion. The principals may experience feelings of risk if they agree/discard with district policies and/or actions of their supervisors. At the focus group, I will explain that all information is to be kept confidential and that through a confidential discussion, I hope to have a more open discussion about the questions being asked. When the participants sign the consent form to agree to participation in the focus group, the need for confidentiality will be reiterated.

Parents in this study will be parents in some of the same schools as principal participants. The parents are not being asked to evaluate the actions of the current principal, but to respond related to the parent's overall experiences with principals and public schools. Since the parents are connected to the schools where principals are also included in the study, if parents indicate concerns it could reflect on the principal negatively and may increase the principal feelings of risk related to public perceptions of principal success. Therefore I will make sure the principals understand that during the parent interviews it will be reiterated that these questions are about experiences with all principals and that parents should not use principal's names when relating experiences or answering questions.

Principal interviews/focus groups and parent interviews/focus groups will not be linked. The principal responses and parent responses are analyzed separately and no comparisons will be made between the parents' responses of a particular school and the principal responses from the same school. The principals' interviews, concept maps, and school documents supporting practice will be linked for comparisons; this linkage may increase the principal feelings of risk related to reality of level of success in practice versus anticipated success.

Parent Participants:

For parent participants, prior to this interview and/or focus group they may have not clearly identified their experiences or perspectives regarding principal and/or school actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. These parents may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of their personal experiences with public schools and feel uncomfortable having others hear their thoughts. As parents disclose feelings they may feel vulnerable and may worry their participation may have a negative effect on their child's school experience or their relationship with school personnel. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and properly destroyed.

Parent Liaison Participant:

For the parent liaison participants, prior to this interview, they may have not clearly identified the elements influencing their job responsibility to engage low-income and minority parents in schools and they may experience frustration or distress by verbalizing some of the obstacles to their current work. As parent liaisons disclose feeling about their specific actions to engage low-income and minority parents in schools, they may feel a reputational risk. Therefore, I will make sure they understand how data will be kept confidential and secure, written anonymously, and properly destroyed.

Parents in this study will be parents in some of the same schools as parent liaison participants. The parents are not being asked any questions specifically related to the actions of the current parent liaison, but asked to respond related to the parent's overall experiences with principals and public schools. Since the parents are connected to the schools where parent liaisons are also included in the study, if parents indicate concerns it could reflect on the parent liaison negatively, and may increase the parent liaison feelings of risk related to public perceptions of principal success. Therefore I will make sure the parent liaisons understand that during the parent interviews it will be reiterated that these questions are about experiences with all principals and schools.

Possible Benefits:
The possible benefit to principal participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own leadership and actions.
taken to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. Thinking about and mapping influences and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents could be revealing and enlightening.

The possible benefits to parent participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding principal and school actions to engage them in the school process and the feelings of being valued and given voice by their direct involvement in the study as participants.

The possible benefit to parent liaison participants in this study may come from the articulation of their own job responsibilities and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents in schools. Thinking about actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents could be revealing and enlightening and inform future practice.

For all groups of participants, there is a possible benefit of knowing that their research participation will be used to improve principal leadership to engage low-income and minority families at a time when student academic success is critical. The research will also contribute the literature concerning principal practice, parental involvement, and sensemaking theory.

In my considered opinion, the benefits of this study outweigh the risks in that participants are sharing their ideas as a means to better understanding the critical phenomenon of low-income and minority parent engagement in schools as a predictor of increased student achievement.

If additional Risk/Benefit information is attached, check here: ☐

24. Is this a multi-center study in which the UIUC investigator is the lead investigator of a multicenter study, or the UIUC is the lead site in a multi-center study. Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, describe the management and communication of information obtained that might be relevant to the protection of subjects, such as: unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, interim results and protocol modifications.
25. INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCES. The signature of the Responsible Project Investigator is required (scanned or faxed signatures are acceptable). Other investigators are also responsible for these assurances and are encouraged to sign.

I certify that the information provided in this application, and in all attachments, is complete and correct.

I understand that I have ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, the conduct of this study, and the ethical performance of this project.

I agree to comply with all UIUC policies and procedures, the terms of its Federal Wide Assurance, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

I certify that

- the project will be performed by qualified personnel according to the UIUC IRB-approved protocol.
- the equipment, facilities, and procedures to be used in this research meet recognized standards for safety.
- no change will be made to the human subjects protocol or consent form(s) until approved by the UIUC IRB.
- legally effective informed consent or assent will be obtained from human subjects as required.
- Unanticipated problems, adverse events, and new information that may affect the risk–benefit assessment for this research will be reported to the UIUC IRB Office (217.333.2670; irb@illinois.edu) and to my Departmental Executive Officer.
- I am familiar with the latest edition of the UIUC Handbook for Investigators, available at www.irb.illinois.edu, and I will adhere to the policies and procedures explained therein.
- student and guest investigators on this project are knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing this research.
- I agree to meet with the investigator(s), if different from myself, on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
- if I will be unavailable, as when on sabbatical or other leave, including vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence. I will advise the UIUC IRB by letter of such arrangements.

I further certify that the proposed research has not yet been done, is not currently underway, and will not begin until IRB approval has been obtained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. (OPTIONAL) DEPARTMENTAL ASSURANCE To be completed by the RPI's Departmental Executive Officer or their designee.

The activity described herein is in conformity with the standards set by our department and I assure that the principal investigator has met all departmental requirements for review and approval of this research.

| Departmental Executive Officer (or designee) | Date |

* For units that conduct scientific merit review, the signature above documents the following:

- [ ] 1. The research uses procedures consistent with sound research design.
- [ ] 2. The research design is sound enough to yield the expected knowledge.
Appendix P
IRB-1 Attachment

9c. continued

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<th>Performance Site: Parents</th>
<th># Male</th>
<th># Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Indiana: Indianapolis Public Schools</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Illinois: Urbana, Danville, and Decatur Public Schools</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Killeen, Texas</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>15-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. MEASURES

Measure 5: Principal Concept Mapping  ☑ Attached  ☐ Will Follow
Appendix Q

SCHOOL RESEARCH FORM

1. Complete and file a School Research Form with:

   Anne S. Robertson
   Office of School-University Research Relations (OSURR)
   236C Education Building
   University of Illinois
   1310 S. Sixth St.
   Champaign, Illinois 61820
   Telephone: 217-244-0515
   Fax: 217-244-0538,
   E-mail: arobrtsn@uiuc.edu

   a. **MOST IMPORTANT TO NOTE:** The **FALL 2007** deadline for submitting completed School Research Forms to the OSURR for projects in the Champaign or Urbana public schools is **Monday, September 10, 2007.** The **SPRING 2008** deadline is **Monday, January 28, 2008.**
   b. Your form **must** be typed with a computer. This form can be downloaded from the following url: [http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ber](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ber) and please send electronically to Anne Robertson.
   b. Be as specific as possible about the aims of your project, the value of the research results, and your plans for providing a benefit to the participating schools including a summary of your research activity.
   d. **Attach a copy of your IRB-1 along with any consent letters and questionnaires you plan to use in your research to your completed School Research Form.**

2. Please note that this form is used only to place research projects in schools. All submitted projects must have obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through the standard procedures. Please see link noted below for more information. [http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ber/webpages/HumanSubjects.html](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ber/webpages/HumanSubjects.html)

3. Please indicate below any school or district where you would like to conduct your research and the name and title of any contact person you know there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School or District</th>
<th>Name and Title of Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danville Public Schools #118</td>
<td>Dianne Kirk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbana Public Schools</td>
<td>Don Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis Public Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decatur Public Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killen Independent School District</td>
<td>Diana Miller - Chief Academic Officer (254) 336-0202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researcher’s name, college affiliation, and contact information:

Jennifer Heinhorst  
College of Education  
Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership  
217-778-9930  
jenhb@illinois.edu  
Advisor – Dr. Richard Hunter: rchunter@illinois.edu

Title of project:

Principal Sensemaking and Leadership to Engage low-income and Minority Parents

Brief summary of project and abstract of procedure:

This study seeks to understand the process of sensemaking Title One elementary principals traverse through to engage low-income and minority parents. Learning more about Title One elementary principals’ process of sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents will inform principal leadership for parental involvement and provide other principals with stories or frames of reference.

How do individual principals make sense of events, actions, thoughts or information to inform practice to engage low-income and minority parents? Making sense of information or current realities is known as the phenomenon of sensemaking. Sensemaking approaches capture the process and evolution of people making sense out of contradictions in their lives when the state of what is perceived to be is different from the state of what is expected to be or there is no obvious way to engage in the world. The conflict between the two states requires the individual to negotiate, or make sense of the incongruence and requires the individual to engage in the process of sensemaking/sense-making. There is an absence of research studies and findings related to school administrator sensemaking to engage of low-income and minority parents.

The study’s general objectives are 1) to examine several Title One elementary principals stories or narratives about sensemaking and leadership to engage low-income and minority parents; 2) to understand the process of sensemaking regarding the importance to engage low-income and minority parents (“why do it”); school policy to engage low-income and minority parents (“what to do”); and the practice to make it a reality (“how to do it”); 3) this study seeks to make applicable recommendations to districts and principals to influence the understanding the phenomenon of principal sensemaking and characteristics of principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents.

The following three questions frame the broad areas of my inquiry. (1) What are the motivations and influences, as identified by principals, to prioritize low-income and minority parental involvement? (2) What are the individual Title One elementary principals’ personal narratives explaining their processes of sensemaking to engage low-income and minority parents? 3) What policies and practices have principals initiated to engage low-income and minority parents and the resulting effects as perceived by principal participants and school parents?
Anticipated duration of school's involvement in project:

from: May 2012 to: May 2013

If research involves students: Not Applicable

grade levels needed:

total number of students needed at each grade level:

time needed (per subject/respondent):

If research involves teachers, administrators, parents, or other non-students:

number of subjects/respondents needed: Principals: 6-9 Parents 15-21 (5-7 per school)
time needed (per subject/respondent): Principals: 3-5 hours Parents: 45 – 90 minutes

Special considerations (kinds of students, classrooms, etc.):

-Title One Elementary School Administrators with three years experience in current school
-Title One Elementary School Low-income and/or Minority Parents

Information needed from the cooperating teacher, school, or district:

Principals:

Principal participants in the study will be interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview protocol at their respective school or other secure location (if participant chooses) at a time most convenient to them. I would like to conduct the interviews between March – August 2012. The first interview, a phone interview, will take approximately 45 minutes. The second interview will be approximately 90 minutes. Between the second and third interviews the principal will create a concept map identifying influences on the principals leadership for low-income and minority parent involvement. This concept map will take approximately 60 minutes for the principal to create. A third interview, taking approximately 60 minutes, will discuss the concept maps the principals were asked to produce. Interviews will be digitally record and transcribing all interviews and will send principal participants’ transcripts to ask if they have anything else they would like to add.

Principals will be asked to reflect on their experiences with and influencing factors related to principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents through concept mapping. Principals will be asked to identify elements from their personal life, academic life, and professional life that influenced their commitment to and actions towards principal leadership to engage low-income and minority parents in their practice.

The questions during the first interview will be questions about the principals’ broader experiences, commitments, and leadership related to engaging low-income and minority parents in the school process. The second interview is a more in-depth 90-minute semi-structured
interview of the original topics from the first interview. Following the second interview, the
principal will be asked to create a concept map to detail the significant experiences in their
personal, educational, and professional life that influence/influenced their thinking,
commitments, and leadership actions to engage low-income and minority parents in the school
process. The third 60-minute semi-structured interview will focus on the principal created
concept map, principal’s sensemaking and leadership actions to engage low-income and
minority parents in the school process. The interviews will be conducted at a secure location at
their school or other designated place selected by the principal participant. Interviews will be
digitally recorded and transcribed. Principals will be sent a transcription of their interview via e-
mail and ask if participants have anything else they would like to add to their interview
statements. If additional interviews are conducted, these interviews will follow the same
procedures as the initial interviews including recording, transcription, and dissemination.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for those principals interested, to gather
more specific data after time has passed for reflection.

Parents:

Parent participants in the study will be interviewed in person, using a semi-structured interview
protocol at their respective school or other secure location (if participant chooses) at a time most
convenient to them. The interviews will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes each. The
interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed; transcriptions of interviews will be sent to
parent participants and parents will be asked if they have anything else they would like to add.

Parents will be asked to reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to principal or
school actions to engage the parents with the school and/or school personnel. The questions are
about ALL principals the parents have experiences with and this is NOT a parent’s evaluation of
the current principal.

A semi-structured focus group may also be conducted for parents interested, to gather more
specific data after time has passed for reflection.

Potential benefits to participating school(s):

The possible benefit to principal participants in this study may come from the articulation of
their own leadership and actions taken to engage low-income and minority parents in schools.
Thinking about and mapping influences and actions taken to engage low-income and minority
parents could be revealing and enlightening.

The possible benefits to parent participants in this study may come from the articulation of their
own feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding principal and school actions to engage
them in the school process and the feelings of being valued and given voice by their direct
involvement in the study as participants.

For both groups of participants, there is a possible benefit of knowing that their research
participation will be used to improve principal leadership to engage low-income and minority
families at a time when student academic success is critical. The research will also contribute
the literature concerning principal practice, parental involvement, and sensemaking theory.

Questions? Contact OSURR at 217-333-3023 or Anne S. Robertson at arobrtsn@uiuc.edu
Appendix R

IRB Approval #5081

University of Illinois
At Urbana-Champaign

Bureau of Educational Research
College of Education
38 Education Building
1310 South Sixth St.
Champaign, IL  61820

March 11, 2013

Jennifer Heinhorst
Education Policy, Organization and Leadership Department
College of Education
MC-708

Dear Jennifer,

On behalf of the College of Education Human Subjects Committee, I have reviewed and approved your research project entitled “Parental Involvement: An Examination of Principal Sensemaking to Engage Low Income and/or Minority Parents”. This project continues to meet the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)1 for research involving normal educational issues within an educational environment and where the identity of the participant is protected. It also meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)2 for research involving normal interviews where the identity of the participant is being protected.

No changes may be made to your procedures without prior Committee review and approval. You are also required to promptly notify the Committee of any problems that arise during the course of the research. Your project number is 5081. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Best regards,

Susan A. Fowler, Ph.D.
College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Dr. Richard Hunter
REFERENCES


281


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Vogel, L. (2012). Leading with hearts and minds: Ethical orientations of educational leadership doctoral students. *Centre for the study of leadership and ethics: Values and ethics in educational administration, 10*(1), 1-12.


